

# THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



## Integrating ecosystems, agriculture, renewable energy development in southern Alberta and beyond

The renewable energy transition will revolutionize energy use and alter society immensely by 2050. Renewable energy is so much cleaner and more cost effective than fossil fuel. But renewable energy is not without mining, manufacture, development, operations, and recycling challenges. Our best plan is to use renewable energy in symbiotic developments that protect, restore, improve, agriculture and ecosystem management and operation. A wide range of topics will be discussed around the renewable energy transition with some emphasis on how and why regional municipal and rural communities can best integrate substantial renewable energy developments to protect and enhance environments and agricultural production.



James Byrne is Professor Emeritus and Past Chair of Geography at the University of Lethbridge. His expertise is global environmental change and water resources. Dr. Byrne has an extensive refereed publication list, and has given expert testimony to environmental hearings and legal proceedings on climate change, water and environmental issues. He is the lead scientist and producer of the 2002 award winning Global Change three-part Television series; the 2004 seven-part TV series Water under Fire, Choking Lake Winnipeg (2011) and co-produced a series of videos on climate change science and solutions in 2014. He is a founding member of the Canadian Water Network (CWN), serving as National Theme Leader in Water Resources Management and a member of the CWN Research Management Committee from 2001-04. In the last decade Dr. Byrne has focused much of his research and publication on the renewable energy transition in Canada.

### **Tuesday, October 25: At the Nature Centre:**

**7:00 to 7:50 PM: Business Meeting; 8:00 to 9:00 PM Presentation by James Byrne.**

*For this meeting GN will return to in-person general meetings to be held at the Nature Centre in Police Point Park. All up to date Alberta Health guidelines will be followed. We urge members attending in person meetings to also follow all up to date Alberta Health guidelines. The air ventilation system inside the theatre is poor. Please feel comfortable wearing an appropriate mask. Should the situation change between now and the meeting requiring a Zoom or hybrid meeting, members will be notified by email regarding these changes and details will be given on how to join the meeting.*

## Executive and Board Members

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**Vice-President** Martha Munz Gue, Pro Tem.

**Secretary** Martha Maudsley

**Treasurer** Angela Turner  
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## MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grasslands Naturalists)  
Based in Police Point Park

[www.natureline.info](http://www.natureline.info)

**Nature Line: (403) 529-6225**

Facebook and Instagram: @policepointpark

The Nature Centre is open year round from:  
9:00AM to 5:00PM Tuesday through Sunday

### **Oct 15 (Evening) - City-wide Haunted Scavenger Hunt**

An evening of spookiness for ages 18+. Tickets are \$15 per person and can be purchased in advance from the Nature Centre. Call for more information.

**October 8 to 31: "The Deep Dark"** an art exhibit will be up in the park.

**Oct. 29: 6:30 to 9:30 PM: "The Disappearance"** Haunted forest event. Tickets are \$15. Call the Nature Centre for tickets and details.

**November 13: 1:00 to 4:00 PM. "Burrowing Owl Paint Party."** This program will be conducted by local artist Cindy Shropshire. To register visit Cindy's Facebook Page (Cindy's Art).

**Note: Volunteers are needed to help with these events particularly for "The Disappearance" as there may be up to 500 participants. Call the Nature Centre to volunteer.**

The Sagebrush Chronicle is published ten times a year by Grasslands Naturalists. **Submissions of writing and artwork are welcomed but may be edited for publication. Deadline: the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month.** If you would like to advertise in the Chronicle, more information is available from the editor. Submissions are to be sent to: [milton.spitzer@gmail.com](mailto:milton.spitzer@gmail.com) (403-528-3120). Do not imbed photos in articles but **do send** them separately.

The Society of Grasslands Naturalists encourages the study, conservation and protection of all components of the natural world. The Society provides educational opportunities, assists in the collection and provision of species data, acts as stewards of the environment, discusses environmental topics and organizes member activities. The Society also manages the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program.

**General Meetings:** 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, Sept. to May **Board Meetings:** 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday Sept. to June.

To join Grasslands Naturalists and/or send a tax-deductible donation, write:

**Grasslands Naturalists**  
**Box 2491**  
**Medicine Hat, AB T1A 8G8**

**Contact info: Nature Centre 403-529-6225**

### **Annual Membership Dues: Angela Turner**

Individuals	\$20
Families	\$25
Organizations	\$25

Donations to Grassland Naturalists and Interpretive Program are another great way to support local nature and nature education. Tax receipts are issued for all donations over \$10. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

### EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

**The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor and the Grasslands Naturalists. The editor reserves the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles submitted. While due care will be taken of all manuscripts, photos or artwork submitted, GN cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to such articles.**

GN Website:

[www.grasslands-naturalists.org](http://www.grasslands-naturalists.org)

GN Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/GrasslandsNaturalists/>  
**You must be a Facebook member to view most of it.**

**Visit the Nature Centre for nature related gifts.**

**A birdseed order will be placed in mid October so to ensure your supply of winter birdseed give the Nature Centre a call.**

## **Member's Corner**

GN extends a big welcome to our newest members, **Jessica Roberts, Dawn Dougan and Sharon Seitz**. We sincerely hope that our Society will meet your expectations and hopefully we can meet up at one or more of our events whether it be at our monthly meetings, during our weekly walks, or during our field trips.

### **Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements**

#### **Wednesday Walks all starting at 10:00 AM (finished before or by noon).**

**October 19:** Walk along Ranchlands Escarpment and Riparian Loop Trail starting at the far northeast end of Ranchlands Blvd. NE.

**October 26:** Walk at the Gas City Campground and along trail overlooking the river. Meet in the campground public parking area.

**November 2:** Walk along the Ross Glen Coulee Trail starting at the trailhead located at the 500 block of Ross Glen Drive SE.

**November 9:** Walk in Police Point Park starting at the Nature Centre to check late autumn colours and bird migration.

#### **Fall Field Trips**

**Saturday, October 15:** Phil Horch led trip to Sauder's Reservoir to observe late fall migrants. Meet at the A&W Gershaw Drive parking lot at **8:00 AM**. We will stop at Premium Sausage, Seven Persons for lunch and should be back to the A&W by **1:00 PM**.

#### **Medicine Hat Interpretive Program Events:**

**Oct 15 (Evening) - City-wide Haunted Scavenger Hunt** An evening of spookiness for ages 18+. Tickets are \$15 per person and can be purchased in advance from the Nature Centre. Call for more information.

**October 8 to 31: "The Deep Dark"** an art exhibit will be up in the park.

**Oct. 29: 6:30 to 9:30 PM: "The Disappearance"** Haunted forest event. Tickets are \$15. Call the Nature Centre for tickets and details.

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#### **Other Agency Events:**

**2022 Transboundary Grassland Partnership: November 15 and 16, Medicine Hat, Ab:** The workshop theme is: A New Chapter for Grassland Conservation. It will be held in the Fireside Room at the Medicine Hat Stampede and Exhibition Grounds. For more information and to register follow this link:

<https://www.albertapcf.org/2021-transboundary-grasslands-partnership-workshop>

## President's Report To GN Members October 2022

As I sit down to write this monthly report to our members, we have just emerged from Thanksgiving weekend. I trust that it was a special time for you and your family and friends. Living in a country as beautiful and prosperous as Canada, we can create a long list of things that we are thankful for. One person mentioned to me this past weekend that it's incredible that an accident of birth (being born in Canada) can make such a difference to the opportunities he grew up with. I guess we can all affirm that thought.

This fall season has been one very special time. When was the last time we virtually reached the middle of October and we're still waiting for our first night of frost? Some will say that this warm fall is a symptom of climate change and they may well be right. In the short term we can say this is the upside of climate change, especially for Canada, but we all know that the coming downsides will be grim indeed. The recent storms on our east coast and Florida are grim reminders.

**GN Hybrid Indoor Programs** - Prior to our September indoor program with guest speaker Hyland Armstrong we had hoped to offer you the option of attending the program in-person at the Nature Center or online via zoom. At the last minute we had to change to zoom only because those of us organizing the program and rehearsing the technology were potentially exposed to COVID, so in order to be safe, we had to cancel the indoor half. We are still committed to the idea of conducting hybrid meetings so we will try again for our October meeting happening on the 25th. I plan to be at the Nature Center in-person and hopefully many of you will feel safe enough to do so as well. However, if the COVID situation worsens, you will have the option of attending by zoom. Either way, I look forward to seeing you.

**What To Do About Russian Olives?** - As many of you are aware, our society has been deeply involved in the eradication of invasive plant species in the past few years. Some efforts have been taken against baby's breath, purple loosestrife, and most recently buckthorn. Some of these efforts have been quite successful locally. However, a much larger invasive issue is looming. Many people are not aware that the popular Russian Olive tree is an invasive species and has been taking over many riparian areas and beyond. This is a tree whose planting has been encouraged for years by local nurseries. I can remember planting a nursery-supplied Russian Olive in my Winnipeg backyard in the 1970's which I was really proud of. Many bird species are attracted to Russian Olives which seem to host food supplies that appeal to some bird species, especially warblers. These trees are hardy and grow well in our dry climate...too well it seems, as they proliferate along streams, dugouts, and near marshy areas. Apparently, birds are the culprits that contribute greatly to seed spread of this species. The pond at Strathcona Island Park is surrounded by them as are other ponds in our city. Along Echo Dale Road I counted over 200 Russian Olives growing around the edge of a wetland. Why is this a problem? Plant experts will tell us that they are displacing other native species such as willows. On the other hand many local people will say we need all the trees we can grow in our dry country as possible. The birds seem to like them, Russian Olives are attractive, and trees of any kind help to mitigate the effects of climate change. Southeastern Alberta is now populated with tens of thousands of Russian Olives. Just take a look around our city and drive throughout our countryside. What do we do about Russian Olives? We would like your feedback. The City of Medicine Hat is looking at this issue as well and they are wondering to what extent do we try to eradicate Russian Olives? At a time when we are encouraging tree planting to mitigate climate change, do we embark on a campaign to destroy thousands of trees? What a conundrum! On most environmental issues there are usually strong opinions on both sides and this looks like one of them. Would you like to see the Grasslands Naturalists take a strong stand on this issue? I know that there are members in our society on both sides of this issue.

**You Won't Want To Miss our October Speaker** - If, like me, you have been watching the spreading proliferation of sustainable energy projects all over southeastern Alberta in the form of wind turbines and solar farms, and wondering if there is going to be a major downside to this trend, then you will want to hear our speaker on October 25. Dr. James Byrne from the University of Lethbridge will have much to say on this subject and others related to climate change. He says that renewable energy is so much cleaner and more cost effective than fossil fuel. But renewable energy is not without mining, manufacturing, operational and recycling challenges. This is your opportunity to gain more understanding of the changes that are taking place in southeastern Alberta. I hope to see you there.

Submitted By Phil Horch, President

## Exciting Sightings

The autumn equinox in late September coincides with the peak of bird migration in Southeastern Alberta. At this time local songbird numbers and diversity decline as they migrate south to their winter range, and we await the arrival of the northern "winter finches" from their boreal or arctic habitats. Lingering Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Sparrows, and their accipiter predators continue to be moving through into October. A final local migration spectacle can be anticipated later this month with the possible staging of large numbers of Snow Geese at Sauder Reservoir and Murray Lake. Fall can also be a good time to encounter rare migrants. Exciting sightings recently reported include the following:

**Evening Grosbeak-** Sharon Seitz had male and female Evening Grosbeaks in her Medicine Hat yard on September 30<sup>th</sup>. This attractive finch nests in northern and central Alberta as far south as Edmonton, and also in the Rocky Mountain and Foothills regions, but is considered a vagrant in Southeastern Alberta. It is an irruptive migrant, and in winter its numbers and range limits vary greatly. Its appearance is sporadic. Local sightings have been at feeders stocked with sun flower seeds. The male Evening Grosbeak is brown and yellow, with yellow forehead and eyebrow, large bill, and large white patch in the black wing. Evening Grosbeaks are noisy when gathered in flocks, making it easy to detect their presence. A previous Evening Grosbeak sighting was reported by Renee Dowling at her feeder on the Holsom Road on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

**Black-throated Blue Warbler-** This wood warbler is one of a handful of eastern warbler species whose boreal breeding range extends into western Canada, as far as the Saskatchewan/Alberta border (Cold Lake), arriving in mixed warbler flocks from the east in late May. In fall migration some of these warblers (Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, and Black-throated Blue Warblers) migrate in a southerly direction passing through Southeastern Alberta where fall sightings have been reported previously. These scarcely-seen transients are considered rare and/ or vagrant south of their breeding range. Bob Frew observed a male Black-throated Blue Warbler at Police Point Park on September 14<sup>th</sup>. A previous Black-throated Blue Warbler sighting was reported around the Nature Centre at Police Point Park by the interpretive staff and other GN birders during the latter part of November, 2010, over a decade ago.



**Accipiters-** All three accipiter species have been reported by several GN birders during the latter part of September. The **Northern Goshawk** is the largest of these woodland predators. The **Cooper's Hawk** is similar to but larger than the **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, the smallest of the accipiters (the former has a rounded tail, whereas the latter has a squared tail). Accipiters are quick and agile, and are known for their dramatic aerial pursuits of passerine prey. Most birds have left the province by October, although there are overwintering records for all three species.

**Harris's Sparrow-** This large sparrow is a rare winter visitor and migrant. The winter adult's crown is blackish, with buffy cheeks and pink bill. The throat is black, sometimes with a white band. Judy and Barry Anderson reported a single Harris's Sparrow among White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos in their Ross Glen yard on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

**White-winged Scoter-** Waterfowl species observed by Phil Horch on October 6<sup>th</sup> at Sauder Reservoir while scouting for an upcoming field trip, included a female White-winged Scoter with her brood of seven young. There is a small but stable population of White-winged Scoters in the province, and breeding has been confirmed in the Cypress Hills. White wing patches are prominent in flight in both sexes. The male's crescent shaped marking below the eye is distinctive (the lack of white markings on its nape and forehead distinguish it from the similar but rarer Surf Scoter). The female and young are a sooty olive brown. This sea duck species leaves the province by late October and winters on the coast, with large concentration around Vancouver Island.

**Please report your exciting sightings to Bob Frew: phone 403-526-4573, or e-mail: [robert.frew@shaw.ca](mailto:robert.frew@shaw.ca)**

## September 24 GN outing to Sandy Point, the Great Sandhills and McLaren Lake

A total of 10 GN Members met at 07:00 at the Medalta Parking lot to set out on a full day of touring, nature observation and birding; returning to the lot at precisely 5:00 PM. We were able to car pool and thus we got our cavalcade down to 3 vehicles.

We travelled north on Highway 41 to our first stop which was at the Sandy Point campground at the South Saskatchewan River crossing. We hiked along the campground roads observing lingering fall warbler and sparrow migration. There were many lingering Yellow-rumped Warblers and among them was a single Palm Warbler. A shy Rusty Blackbird was sighted but unfortunately only seen by a few of the participants. Everyone availed themselves of the sit down biffies as these would be the last we would encounter on the trip.

From Sandy Point we headed east to Burstall and on to Liebenthal, eventually ending at the Great Sandhills. Along the way we encountered two flocks of Sandhill Cranes resting in the harvested fields along the highway. Along this east/west highway we would encounter a number of hawk species including: Ferruginous Hawk (1), Red-tailed Hawk (5), Swainson's Hawk (6), Northern Harrier (1), and Prairie Falcon (1). We also encountered a Sharp-shinned Hawk at the Great Sandhills, and a Merlin and an American Kestrel west of McLaren Lake. Great Horned Owls were seen at Sandy Point and at McLaren Lake.

We hiked the dunes of the Great Sandhills observing the flora and fauna of the area. The birding highlight of this area was encountering a small flock of migrating Mountain Bluebirds. Again we encountered a good number of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

After a considerable drive from the Hills to McLaren Lake we were not disappointed in that we encountered large flocks of Sandhill Cranes both in the fields and along the edge of the lake. We counted several thousand of this species. Mixed in were Canada and White-fronted Geese as well as several duck species. The brush and trees in the Regional Park hosted Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, a lingering Yellow Warbler and several Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Both White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows were present.



## **Adopt a Pond or Path Initiative by Martha Munz Gue**

Now in its second year, 35 sites have been adopted by individuals, couples, families, or groups. One pond that has not been adopted yet is the one behind Canadian Tire, on Somerside Road. Call Martha (403-526-2226) if you, or a group to which you belong, want to adopt that pond or any other pond or path or park, near where you live or work. The Canadian Shoreline Cleanup encourages care of our shorelines during September. Adopt-a-Pond has taken that to a year round level and is setting an example for the country.

### **Wednesday Nature Walks**

Members are invited to join us on our Nature Walks every Wednesday. Heat or cold doesn't stop this year-around activity. **On** September 7, the scorching heat did not prevent 5 Grasslands Naturalists from walking the Kipling Stretch of the creek together with a City Department that has adopted that stretch along the creek. They came with trash bags and picker uppers. The path was left clean as a whistle. They also have reported on the EDDMapS app all the invasive species their plant specialists found on the stretch of creek that they adopted. John Slater is happy to see the path well looked after; he has been cleaning that area routinely over many years on his frequent walks along the creek.

### **Southeast Watershed Alliance (SEAWA)**

SEAWA and Grasslands Naturalists share some common goals. If you would like to learn more go to the SEAWA website: [seawa.ca](http://seawa.ca).

### **Circular Economy Month/ Waste Reduction Week**

For 20 years Waste Reduction Week in Canada has focused on the concepts of waste reduction and recycling as a key component of our transition to a circular economy. However, educating Canadians on this new model of consumption involves more than just one week. That's why [Circular Innovation Council](#) is extending Waste Reduction Week in Canada beyond the third week of October into Circular Economy Month to educate and excite Canadians about the opportunities and benefits of the circular economy.



**A gorgeous panoramic photo of the fall colours of Police Point Park taken from the top of the cliffs across from the Park. Photo taken by Ian Turner.**