

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Sand Dune Restoration and Recovery of Ord's Kangaroo Rat

Speaker Sandi Robertson

This talk covers the Ord's kangaroo rat, an endangered species, and recovery efforts to restore its habitat. Population monitoring indicated significant population decline in Alberta. A reduction in habitat quality is a contributing factor to the population decline. Habitat improvement methods and subsequent results, as well as 3 years of translocation efforts will be described and discussed.

Sandi is a Wildlife Biologist with Alberta Environment and Parks, based in Medicine Hat. She has a BSc from the University of Alberta, and a MSc. from the University of Calgary.

Her work focuses on Species at Risk and she is the recovery lead for several at risk species. She has spent time following grizzlies, worked in NW Alberta as a caribou biologist, but she is where she belongs in Alberta's "desert" working with kangaroo rats, lizards and rattlesnakes.



Tuesday, November 22 at Nature Centre

7:00 to 7:50 PM: Business Meeting; 8:00 to 9:00 PM Presentation by Sandi Robertson.

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. It is intended that this meeting be a hybrid between and in-person and Zoom meeting. For those who wish to attend on line an email will be sent to all members a few days in advance of the meeting giving details on how to attend via Zoom.

Executive and Board Members

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MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grasslands Naturalists)

Based in Police Point Park

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

Saturday, November 19: Pinecone Bird Feeder Building; Call to book a time slot. Cost for feeder building by donation.

Saturday, December 3: Holiday Market at the Nature Centre: 10:00 AM to 3:30 PM. Free Admission.

Starting on December 6: Come make a letter for a local senior.

Cross-country skis, boots and poles as well as snowshoes are available at the Nature Centre by hourly or daily rental. Beginners and new comers are encouraged to call the Nature Centre (403-529-6225) as they are collecting contact information from people who are interested in cross-country ski lessons. If there is enough interest, future group ski lessons may be planned and coordinated by either GN or the Interpretive Program.

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 10th 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 (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: 4th Tuesday, Sept. to May **Board Meetings:** 1st 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

GN Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/GrasslandsNaturalists/>

You must be a Facebook member to view most of it.

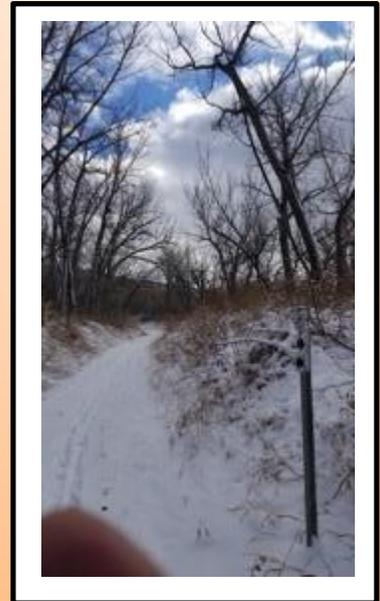
Come and visit the Nature Centre and browse the Gift Shop for Nature Related Items. Not too soon for a xmas stocking stuffer. Also browse the latest display(s).

Member's Corner

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

For upcoming GN Outdoor Program Activities, we hold Wednesday Walks at 10:00 AM when the weather and ground conditions are suitable. With sufficient snow we will likely cross-country ski in Police Point Park and /or in Elkwater on the Spring Creek Cross-country ski trail. We look forward to seeing you on every Wednesday morning at 10:00 AM in the Nature Centre to organize our walk, XC ski outing or other activity. Check the GN Facebook Page (details for this site on page 2) for upcoming activities.

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President's Report To GN Members November 2022

After a spectacularly mild and prolonged fall season, the inevitable happened. Winter arrived with force! Unfortunately the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program's Snow Goose Extravaganza had to be cancelled, partly because the geese were smart enough to leave on the same scheduled day as a snowstorm brought poor birding conditions. We can't complain though. Many people remarked that this was one of the most beautiful fall seasons ever!

Another highlight in the past month was holding our first in person indoor program at the Nature Centre for the first time in over 2 years. And not only that, but it was the Grasslands Naturalists first ever hybrid meeting where, you, our members, could attend in person or online. We were so pleased to see so many faces show up in person (about 20) and another 8 or 9 online. Our guest speaker, Dr. Jim Byrne, from the University of Lethbridge gave a tremendous presentation on some of the many issues facing southern Alberta when it comes to water, irrigation, sustainable energy projects and the future of grasslands. The technical aspects of our first hybrid meeting worked surprisingly well for our first crack at it. It is our plan to keep offering hybrid meetings in the future so look forward to having a choice on how you wish to attend on November 22. Many thanks must go to David Gue, Linda Fisher, Ian Turner and Angela Turner who spent hours of their time rehearsing and setting up the technology to properly conduct a hybrid meeting. We learned a lot on this first attempt so hopefully it will keep getting better with practice.

Calling Committee Chairpersons – Budgets Are Due By November 15 – The fiscal year for the Grasslands Naturalists operates on a different schedule than our club's annual year. We operate on a calendar year fiscally so that means the budget committee will be preparing the budget for 2023 which needs to be approved at the December Board meeting. I remind all committee chairpersons to submit their budget requests to Paul Thibault, Chairperson of the Budget Committee, by November 15. Hopefully, you have time to review your budget requirements with your committee members first.

Continued on Next Page

Are You A Filing Guru? – We have a project for someone who really enjoys setting up and organizing files. This is a short term project that involves creating a filing system for Grasslands Naturalists' archival material. It involves going through historical records of past important documents and getting them properly organized in a file cabinet at the Nature Center at Police Point Park. Contact me at phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org or phone me at 403-529-5918.

Bird And Birdsong Encounters Improve Mental Health Study Finds – As many of you know, one of my passions is birding so I was pleased to learn that birding is not only enjoyable it is also therapeutic. Research by academics from King's College, London, have found visits to places with birdlife could be prescribed by doctors to improve mental wellbeing. They found that everyday exposure to birds and birdsong boosted the mood of people with depression, as well as the wider population. The study tracked 1292 participants' everyday encounters with birds last year via a smartphone app called Urban Mind. The research found that a person's average mental wellbeing scores increased when they saw or heard birds, including those who were diagnosed with clinical depression. It was also discovered that this beneficial effect also lasted beyond the moment of encountering birds. Andrea Mitchell, professor of early intervention in mental health at King's College London said, "We need to create and support environments, particularly urban environments, where birdlife is a constant feature. To have a healthy population of birds, you also need plants, you also need trees. We need to nurture the whole ecosystem within our cities."

As someone who has birded all my adult life, I can personally vouch for this study. Spending time in bird environments always has a soothing and calming effect on my spirit. Even listening to Dan Gibson's recording of music with nature sounds has a similar soothing effect.

This brings me to your reminder that the Christmas Bird Count is coming up next month so make plans to participate and watch for all the details in next month's Chronicle. Ian Langill at the Nature Center is busy organizing the event and hopefully the covid situation will permit us to have our traditional after CBC potluck!

Submitted by Phil Horch

Exciting Sightings

Unfortunately the author of this monthly column is unable to provide his insightful and well crafted documentation of exciting sightings for this past month. So instead you will have to put up with the editor's pitiful attempt at preparing this portion of the Chronicle..

Late autumn sees the last of the pushes south of the larger migratory birds and also welcomes the arrival of winter finches and other far north arrivals such as Snowy Owl (none reported to date), Rough-legged Hawks (the Gardner's reported 4 along Hwy 1 between Suffield and Tilley), and Northern Shrike (two have been reported; the latest by Dan Schiebelbein at Police Point Park on November 10).

Snow Goose: On October 31 Dan Schiebelbein reported 15,000 at the west end of Sauder's Reservoir. While he was there they took off en masse creating a thunderous din. The next day a birder found 60 in a field east of the Highland Cemetery but there were none on the reservoir. Unfortunately the annual Snow Goose field trip, led by the Nature Centre staff planned for November 5, had to be cancelled because of inclement weather and because the great flocks of Snow Geese could not be located.



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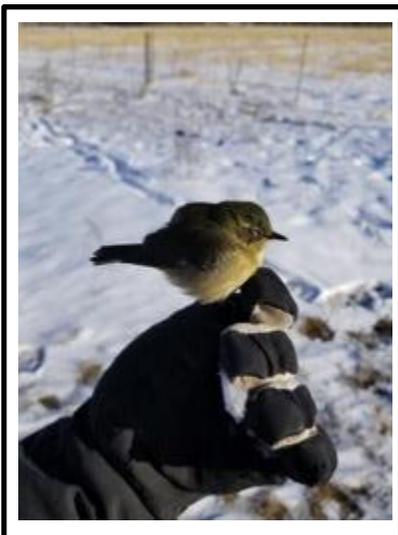
Hooded Merganser: On the same day that Dan saw all the snow geese he also saw and photographed Hooded Mergansers on Sauder's Reservoir. He had to wait patiently, using his vehicle as a blind, for over an hour until the ducks came back close enough to get several photographs (one is shown here). This species, considered by the editor to be the most beautiful duck species, shows up in late fall during its southern migration although they can also be seen in spring and early summer but in far fewer numbers.

(photo by Dan Schiebelbein)

dansnaturephotography.com

Bonaparte's Gull: While birding in Police Point Park on November 1 Dan Schiebelbein saw a smaller gull species amongst the Ring-billed Gulls. He took id photos and was delighted to find that this gull was a Bonaparte's Gull. This species is intermittently seen in late fall along the South Saskatchewan River. It is readily identified by its small size (compared to Ring-billed), by its black dot behind the eye (a fall plumage feature) and by its all black bill.

Winter Wren: While birding Police Point Park on October 12 Dan observed and was able to photograph this very unusual species for this area. The former Winter Wren has been split into two species; one continues to be called a Winter Wren while the split is known as Pacific Wren. The two are almost unidentifiable by sight alone and one needs to hear their vocalizations to identify the species positively. Pacific Wren has been seen in the Cypress Hills but is ordinarily restricted to the foothills and mountains of Alberta and BC while the Winter Wren breeds in the boreal forest in eastern Alberta. Dan's observation is likely a Winter Wren which was heading straight south from the boreal forest area.



Orange-crowned Warbler: On November 3 Alicia found this species tentatively identified as an Orange-crowned Warbler in the snow at their acreage. After setting it out into the sun it warmed up sufficiently to fly off. Apparently there was a second of this species hanging around as well. While the Orange-crowned Warbler is a late fall migrator this is extremely late in the year and one has to be concerned as to whether they will make it to their winter habitat.

Other Late Passerines: Dan Schiebelbein's yard is a bird magnet what with its great shrubbery and flowing open water not to mention the bird seed which is generously fed to over wintering birds. Two bird species which should have migrated by now but have recently taken advantage of Dan's hospitality include a **Mourning Dove** and a **Spotted Towhee**.

Birder's Field Trip Immersed In Fall Migration

Even though southeastern Alberta is not on a major migratory flyway, there are still some amazing fall spectacles to be witnessed in our area every year. On October 15, ten Grasslands Naturalists led by President Phil Horch discovered some of them on a scheduled field trip.

Starting out from Medicine Hat at 8 a.m. they headed to Sauder Reservoir and Murray Lake but along the way their first stop was briefly at Echo Dale Park. Almost immediately they encountered massive flocks of migrating blackbirds and starlings which were observed frequently during the first part of the morning. By day's end it is estimated that more than 10,000 of these birds were seen in spectacular flocks often in a murmuration flight. Among the Starlings were also Brewer's Blackbirds, Red-Winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles.

At Echo Dale Park, which is drastically changed after the loss of over a hundred trees in July's windstorm, a couple good looks were had of migrating White-Throated Sparrows and several American Tree Sparrows. An attempt was made to locate possible late warblers but no luck here. Moving west along Holsom Road the group entered Golden Sheaf Park at Rattlesnake Reservoir where a small covey of Sharp-Tailed Grouse scurried away from us. This oasis of trees on the grassland can produce surprising species during migration. On this day there were many Robins, more White-Throated Sparrows, White-Crowned Sparrows, Dark-Eyed Juncos and a lone Yellow-Rumped Warbler, our only one for the day. On the reservoir was a Red-Necked Grebe and a couple Pied-Billed Grebes, the latter of which have been scarce in our area this year.

Just beyond Rattlesnake Reservoir is Sauder Reservoir where we saw our only Common Loon and Horned Grebe for the day. We hoped to see early flocks of Snow Geese and Tundra Swans here but none were visible. There were plenty of ducks on this lake with Redheads especially numerous along with Buffleheads and Mallards. By day's end we tallied a total of 10 duck species with Murray Lake having more species than Sauder Reservoir. The dike along Sauder Shore can be a productive area to see early migrating American Pipits and Snow Buntings along the rock rip-rap but on this day only a single America Pipit was sighted after considerable effort to get a good look at it. However, for some in our group it was a first of the year sighting! At the south side of Sauder Reservoir we finally observed the first of 5 Northern Harriers we would see that day.

Moving on to Murray Lake, while driving smack dab through Whitla's brand new wind turbine farm with spinning vanes, no doubt, knocking a few birds out of the sky between the two lakes. We paused for lunch at Premium Sausage in Seven Persons, an annual ritual for this particular field trip. It had become warm enough and windless enough that we could eat outside at their picnic tables.

Murray Lake would provide the climax sightings for the day offering considerably more duck species, a Golden Eagle sighting, a quick glimpse at a fleeing Sharp-Shinned Hawk, and finally a large flock of about 500 Snow Geese off in the distance. It's not the thousands that will come a little later but still impressive! As a bonus there were several late Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs still lingering in our mild fall weather. As an even bigger bonus we finally discovered about 100 Tundra Swans at the south end of Murray Lake...a great way to finish a field trip that produced a total of 49 species. On the way home Dan Schiebelbein showed us how to access the elusive Seven Persons Lake where we added Double-Crested Cormorants to our tally. It was a wonderful half day experiencing the wonders of fall migration and the great fellowship of friendly naturalists!

