

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



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December 18: Annual Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count and Potluck Dinner

If you have not signed up and are interested in participating in the count please contact Ian Langill at: ian.l@natureline.info or call (403) 529-6225.

The Potluck Dinner is back! It starts at 5:30 PM at the Nature Centre but you are welcome any time after 5:00 PM. Please bring a dish for sharing be it a main course, a salad or a dessert. Also bring your own plate and cutlery, Coffee will be provided but otherwise also bring your own beverage. **You need not participate in the count** to partake of the potluck and fellowship. Also please notify Ian if attending the potluck so they have an indication of numbers participating. **See YOU there!**

Executive and Board Members

President Phil Horch 403-529-5918
phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org

Vice-President Martha Munz Gue, Pro Tem.

Secretary Martha Maudsley

Treasurer Angela Turner
angela.turner@grasslands-naturalists.org

Past-President Hugh Armstrong
hugh.armstrong@grasslands-naturalists.org

Directors at

Large Ian Turner
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Linda Fisher
linda.fisher@grasslands-naturalists.org
Corlaine Gardner
corlainegardner@gmail.com

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

December 6 to 16: Christmas Cards for

Seniors: Drop into the Nature Centre anytime during open hours to make a card!

Sunday, December 18: Christmas Bird

Count! Potluck dinner at 5:30 PM. RSVP by calling the nature centre at (403) 529-6225. All are welcome (see the front page).

Friday, December 23: Tinsel the Elf is

coming to the Nature Centre! Story time at 11:00 AM; Photos from 12:00 to 3:00 PM.

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 Christmas stocking stuffer. Also browse the latest display(s) (presently an excellent display on owls).

Member's Corner

The Holiday Season is nearly upon us and we wish for you a great season filled with family, friends and nature events. Also our best wishes for a New Year that treats you with kindness and happiness!

It is also that time again to renew your 2023 GN Membership (Membership form is at the end of this Chronicle). Also any donations to GN would be happily accepted (Income Tax receipts are issued for all donations over \$10). You might also consider a gift membership for a good friend or relative who appreciates nature and is unaware of our Society.

A link to a winter poem has been submitted by Rachel Elliott. This poem can be found at:
<https://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2015/12/patricia-fagnoli-winter-grace.html>

To all field trip leaders and walk leaders this is a reminder that a waiver form is required from members who have not signed the membership form and also for **ALL** non members participating on the trip or walk. The waiver form can be found on the GN Website on the "Field Trips" top menu selection and also with the extended website address as follows:

<http://grasslands-naturalists.org/field-trips/>

<http://grasslands-naturalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-Field-Trip-Consent-Form-R6.pdf>

Upcoming Events, Walks and Announcements

Christmas Bird Counts

Sunday, December 18: Medicine Hat Count: See title page for details.

Monday January 2, 2023: Manyberries Count: For more information or to sign up, contact Rob Gardner at (403 527-2052 or email him at gardner@telusplanet.net . The count usually ends by mid afternoon. If you need encouragement to explore these wide open spaces, last year's highlight was standing in a midst of a swirling flock of thousands of snow buntings. Oh, not to mention the golden eagles.

Wednesday Morning Activities: All activities will begin by meeting at the Nature Centre at 10:00 AM

December 14: Bird identification instruction led by Phil Horch; initially at the feeders. With suitable weather and ground conditions, we will drive to the Harlow area parking lot at the west end of Red Deer Drive (east side of Trans Canada Highway Bridge) and walk to the river to identify waterfowl. Bring binoculars, birds books and notebook. Dress warmly and wear boots suitable for the conditions. We will finish by noon.

Wednesday 21: An information session on cross-country ski equipment and clothing by Bob Townsend. With suitable weather and snow conditions, we may venture outdoors for a few tips on skiing and/or snowshoeing. Bring your cross-country skis and/or snowshoes as well as your favourite refreshment. Dress for the activity. We will finish by noon. Rental equipment are available at the Nature Centre.

January and February Activities: Following introductions and warm up exercises, we will decide on what activity we may do depending on weather and ground conditions. Check the GN Facebook page (link for this site is given on page 2) for these activities.

Cross-country skis, boots and poles as well as snowshoes are available at the Nature Centre (\$4 hourly and \$15 daily rental). Beginners and new comers are encouraged to the call the Nature Centre (403-529-6225) as they are collecting information from people who are interested in cross-country ski lessons. If there is enough interest, future group lessons may be planned and coordinated by either GN or the Interpretive Program. **Embrace and Enjoy the Season!**

Interpretive Program Events: See page 2 of this issue.

President's Report to Members, December 2022

As we approach the end of our calendar year, your Grasslands Naturalists Board has been dealing with important but oft-considered mundane matters like preparing a new operating budget for 2023. We have also reviewed GN's bylaws and you will be asked to vote on a few changes to these early in the new year. One of the most notable changes will be a bylaw that permits member voting electronically as well as in person. Now that we are holding hybrid general members meetings, this change has become a necessity. The recommended bylaws changes will be posted on our website shortly for you to review them. We will also have hard copies of them available at our January indoor program. Because we are a registered charity any bylaw changes must also be approved by the Canada Revenue Agency after the members give approval. Your participation is important.

It's Time To Tell Our Story! For 30 years the Grasslands Naturalists have been the singular principle voice for the preservation, documentation and education of natural history in southeastern Alberta. While some of our founding members have passed away, there are still a few of us present. At our most recent board meeting it was decided that the history of our society's first thirty years needs to be written while we still have members who can relate first hand accounts of how our society started and what it has accomplished to date. You might be one of those people.

At this past board meeting we voted to strike a History Committee to undertake a mission to publish our society's proud and vital record of achievements. If this sounds like a project that would interest you, we would like to hear from you. The project will begin with research, gathering relevant records, interviewing members who had specific involvements, collecting photographs, and assessing the scope of the project. Remember, this project will be most successful if we can accomplish it while many of our founders are still with us. Many of the best stories to be told are in the heads and memories of our members. Let's get it done!

Plow-Up Continues to Destroy Grasslands. In its seventh year, the World Wildlife Fund's Plowprint Report which analyzes the rate of grasslands plow-up across the USA, Canadian and Mexican portions of the Great Plains, shows continuing declines happening to our most threatened habitats. This analysis is based on the USDA's annual Cropland Data Layer, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Annual Crop Inventory and Sentinel-2 satellite data using Google Earth's Engine for Mexico from 2 years prior to the release date. As a result the 2022 edition analyzes and reports on plow-up and conversion that occurred during 2020.

Some key points that are in this report:

- 1.8 million acres of grassland were plowed under in the Great Plains in 2020.
- 385,000 acres were plowed for cropland in the Great Plains.
- This is an increase over 2019 data but still lower than the 5-year average.
- Plow-up occurred primarily for row crop agriculture, with conversion to wheat as the #1 driver.
- This large-scale habitat destruction threatens pollinators, clean water, healthy air, plus songbird populations and other wildlife species throughout the Great Plains.
- Intact grasslands store vast amounts of carbon underground and like healthy forests, are vital to slowing climate change. When native grasslands are plowed, however, they release carbon, contributing to climate change.

It seems like no matter how much we know about the value of native grasslands, their destruction continues. Recently, I talked to a local SE Alberta farmer who told me that some local ranchers and farmers are plowing up their native grasslands in order to be eligible for the locating of wind turbines on their property! That particular farmer was disgusted with what his neighbor was doing. One wonders how many landowners are sacrificing their grassland properties to the almighty dollar. Hopefully, these are very isolated occurrences.

See you at the Christmas Bird Count and Potluck! One of our society's big annual events is the Christmas Bird Count on December 18 organized by the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program. If you have not registered yet, contact the Nature Centre and join us. At the end of the day, we all get together to turn in our count results and enjoy a delightful time at a potluck dinner where we can share all the exciting sightings seen during the day. Bring one of your favorite foods as well as your own cutlery and dishes and enjoy visiting with your naturalist friends.

In closing, Annalora and I would like to wish you all the best in the Christmas and holiday season. If you are travelling to be with family like we are, then we wish you safe travel and a blessed time with loved ones wherever you will be. Hopefully the weather will cooperate enough to grant some enjoyable experiences in nature.

Submitted by Phil Horch, President

Exciting Sightings by Bob Frew

During the first week of December frigid temperatures prompted extreme cold warnings for much of the province. With many of our local water bodies now frozen, overwintering Canada Geese and other waterfowl are concentrated in the remaining reaches of open water on the South Saskatchewan River. Early winter is a quiet time for birding and usually remains so until the arrival of “winter finch” species from their northern ranges. At this time there is also the chance of a rarity or vagrant showing up at bird feeders. Exciting sightings reported in November and early December include the following;

Northern Shrike- There have been several sightings of this uncommon winter visitor reported recently. Dan Schiebelbein observed and photographed a shrike devouring its prey, an unfortunate Bohemian Waxwing at the Nature Centre at Police Point Park on November 10th. Similar shrike sightings were reported by Rob Gardner in Ross Creek Coulee on November 27th, by Dan Schiebelbein in his NE Crescent Heights neighbourhood on November 24th, and by Barry Anderson in Kin Coulee on November 30th.

Snow Bunting- These arctic tundra breeders usually appear in large flocks, arriving in southern parts of the province along with the first snowfalls of winter. Dan Schiebelbein reported 7 Snow Buntings in the company of some Horned Larks along TWP Rd 120, west of the city.

Common Redpoll- Barry Anderson reported a single Redpoll in Kin Coulee Park on November 30th. This winter finch species is an irruptive migrant, and can be numerous in some years and absent in others. Redpolls are attracted to Niger seed feeders.

Snowy Owl- Dan Schiebelbein provided the first report this fall/winter of this large arctic owl, which was observed flying over the Seven Persons Grazing Reserve along TWP Rd. 120 on November 18th. This area west of the city between The Holsom Rd and HWY 3 has been a reliable location to observe this winter visitor in recent years. Male Snowy Owls may be much whiter than females and heavily barred younger birds. Fluctuations/plummets in the arctic tundra lemming population, the Snowy Owls main arctic prey can influence winter irruptions southward.

Varied Thrush- This robin-like thrush species breeds in our mountain parks and foothills regions, where it can be seen (or more likely heard) as a spring migrant and common summer resident, but is an uncommon fall migrant. In Southeastern Alberta it is rare in fall and a vagrant in winter. Barry and Judy Anderson reported a single Varied Thrush at a bird bath in their Ross Glen Garden on November 30th, late enough to be considered a vagrant. The thrush was still present on December 5th.



<Varied Thrush

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Exciting Sightings continued from previous page:

Rusty Blackbird-This species is the least conspicuous of our blackbirds, and in breeding plumage is often confused with the Brewers Blackbird. In southern Alberta it is usually seen during fall migration or as a winter vagrant. Fall and winter birds have a distinctive rusty wash, including rusty edges to flight feathers. Dan Schiebelbein observed 5 Rusty Blackbirds at Connaught Pond on November 9th.

Golden-crowned Kinglets- These small active birds join mixed flocks in fall and winter. The male has a distinctive orange crown strip, and a white supercilium. This species is the smallest songbird in Canada, and breeds in coniferous forests. Dan Schiebelbein observed 3 kinglets in the company of ~12 foraging Black-capped Chickadees and ~5 Red-breasted Nuthatches at the Hillside Cemetery on November 18th.



American Goldfinch- In the prairie region this finch is common in spring, summer, and fall, but is rare in winter. The duller brownish/grayish plumage of winter adults differs from the colourful breeding plumage one associates with late spring/summer sightings. Despite the rarity of overwintering, a few goldfinches do show up at local bird feeders in the days leading up to and including the CBC. Barry and Judy Anderson reported an American Goldfinch at a bird bath in their Ross Glen garden on December 4th.

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



Above are photos of winter visitors to Dan Schiebelbein's back yard. On the left a Mourning Dove and on the right a Merlin obviously looking for a snack. All photos on this page and in fact in this issue are reprinted by permission of the photographer, Dan Schiebelbein. dansnaturephotography.com



Society of Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8



Membership Form for 2023

Name* _____ Name of 2nd Family Member ** _____

Address* _____ Membership: Individual \$20/year _____

City / Province* _____ Family \$25/year _____

Postal Code* _____ Organization \$25/year _____

Telephone+ _____ Donation _____ Tax Receipt Available

Email++ _____ **Total Enclosed** _____

Preference for receiving Chronicle newsletter*:

Post or Email or Neither

Payments can be made by cheque, cash or using e-Transfer at memberships@grasslands-naturalists.org

*Current and recent Chronicles can be viewed and downloaded from the Grasslands Naturalists website www.grasslands-naturalists.org. **Regardless of payment option used, a signed membership form must be filled out and submitted.***

* Required information. ** Required information for family membership.

+ Optional Information. For phone number(s), please note whether it is a residence, cell phone or business number.

++ Information required if you wish to receive the Chronicle and announcements by email.

Informed Consent for Field Trips

I may wish to participate in field trips and events organized by the Society of Grasslands Naturalists.

I affirm that, as a participant, I and my child(ren)/ward(s) are prepared to stay with the group and follow the directions of the coordinator and activity leader. I affirm that, knowing my personal state of health, I feel that I am mentally and physically capable of participating in the trips and events that I choose to attend.

I acknowledge that I am aware of the inherent risks, hazards, and dangers associated with activities arising from my participation in trips, events, litter cleanups, invasive species removal or any other activity that may result in injury, sickness or death to me or my child(ren)/ward(s). Some of these risks may be specific to the area. These include, but are not limited to, animal attacks as well as poisonous snakes, insects and vegetation. Therefore, in consideration of my participation in these trips and events, for myself, my heirs, my executors, my administrators, and my successors, I voluntarily assume all risks and hereby waive all my rights against Grasslands Naturalists and unconditionally release and discharge the Grasslands Naturalists, its members, directors, officers, its affairs and its coordinators from all manner of activities, causes of action, suits, claims and demands for damages due to personal injury, sickness, death, loss or damage to property, expenses or otherwise which may or shall arise in any way as a result of my participation in the above trips and events.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____



Society of Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8



Consent Form

Consent to the Use and Distribution of Personal Information

Grasslands Naturalists (GN) collects personal information subject to the '*Personal Information Protection Act*' (PIPA). GN may, subject to your consent, wish to make some personal information public through, for example, its Chronicle, Website, Facebook page or newspaper article. Please indicate your consent to the following release of information and note any specific exclusion of a consent such as for children.

	Yes	No	Exclusion
Name	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Residence telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Cell phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Business phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Email address	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Residence address	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Pictures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

Beyond the above consents, GN will not distribute personal information to a third party without your consent unless such information is required, by law, to be released to a federal or provincial government agency in order, for example, to maintain GN's non-profit organization status.

Consent to Receive Emails Related to Commercial Activities

GN may wish to send you emails to promote some of its commercial activities including those provided by its *Club* and *Interpretive Program*. Please indicate your consent to receiving such information. Yes No

Modification of Consents

You may modify any of the above consents, at any time, through a written request to the member of the GN Executive responsible for Memberships.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____