

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



**Monthly GN Meeting: Tuesday, September 26, 2023 at Nature Centre
or by Zoom (info will be sent prior to meeting)**

Note: A New Start Time and Evening Schedule

The Board is trying out some new ideas

6:30 to 7:00 PM: Refreshments and Socializing (lemonade, coffee and cookies)

7:00 to 7:30 PM: Presidents Announcements , MHIP Report

7:30 to 8:30 PM: Guest Speaker

8:30 to 9:00 PM: Exciting Sightings, Information/Reports, Timely discussions for members to participate in, etc.



Midnight Sun Safari

By Rob and Corlaine Gardner

The Gardners spent this past June exploring the landscapes and wildlife from Medicine Hat to Tuktoyaktuk, NWT. They learned about the mysterious pingos of the Mackenzie River delta, saw some of Canada's tallest mountains, and tried gold panning. Spoiler alert: no new gold rushes are anticipated.

Rob and Corlaine Gardner are founding members of the Society of Grasslands Naturalists. They have participated in most of Alberta's grassland conservation organizations, and have travelled the world in search of interesting wildlife.

Executive and Board Members

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

Vice-President Paul Thibault
paul.thibault@grasslands-naturalists.org

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
ian.turner@grasslands-naturalists.org

Linda Fisher
linda.fisher@grasslands-naturalists.org

Sheila McLeod
sheila.mcleod@grasslands-naturalists.org

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

September 15: 1:00 to 3:00 PM Metis Beading:

Call the Nature Line for more information and to register.

November 18: Holiday Market: More information in next Chronicle

For information concerning events and happenings at the Nature Centre contact the extremely helpful interpretive staff. Either visit the Nature Centre in Person or give them a call at 403-529-6225

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.

Members' Corner

Change is coming to the Grasslands Naturalists General Meetings.

This summer the board did strategic planning to focus the society on actions to better fulfill its purpose and work toward its vision. That may sound boring and dry but actually it was enjoyable and interesting. It gave the board opportunities to look at what the Grasslands Naturalist Society is doing and why.

One of the things that tinged the discussion was frustration at having many well-informed, enthusiastic members whose opinions about the direction and activities of the Grasslands Naturalist Society are not evident because the format of the general meetings has not always facilitated a broad exchange of ideas. Since the board is eager to receive the input of all members, what could be done?

It was decided to try modifying the general meeting agenda, making time for broad discussions of the members' environmental concerns and ideas. And that's why, beginning in September, socializing will begin at 6:30. Eat dinner quickly. Then after social time, at 7:00 PM business, and the presentation by the guest speaker and questions, at 8:30 discussion of the educational, activist, and/or conservationist directions or initiatives members bring forward will go on until adjournment at 9:00 p.m., perhaps with the suggestion of continuing the present discussion at next month's meeting.

To get the conversation rolling a topic will be suggested: usually one brought to mind by recent events. However the board hopes members will use this opportunity to share all their ideas to help the society support the health of the natural environment here in the grasslands.

Sharing ideas and having amazing conversations will be interesting and fun. Come, and let's give it a try. Submitted by Sheila McLeod, board member at large

Further to the above regarding changes: We are going to introduce a letters to the editor column in the Chronicle. You are invited to send in your comments regarding directions of GN, suggestions, information, etc. If too many are received (The Chronicle is restricted to 10 pages) for inclusion in the print version the remainder will be published in the web site Chronicle.

Very special thanks to Bruce McLeod for volunteering to be the Casino Manager for GN. Bruce spent many hours arranging for volunteers and working at the Casino. The casino is a major fundraiser for GN. Also hearty thanks to all the members who volunteered to do a shift at the casino

The Grasslands Naturalists would like to acknowledge the receipt of a grant in the amount of \$550 from the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta "**Donna MacLean Grasslands Naturalists Fund**" in June, 2023.

The Grasslands Naturalists would also like to acknowledge the receipt of a grant in the amount of \$825 from the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta "**Canadian Fertilizers Community Fund**" in July, 2023.

Budget 2024 Reminder For All GN Committee Chair Persons

All Chairpersons for Grasslands Naturalists Committees are reminded that the deadline for 2024 budget submissions is November 15, 2023. You are asked to meet with your committee and establish your budgetary needs for the coming year and submit your request to our Budget Committee Chairperson, Paul Thibault. His email address is listed on page 2 of this Chronicle

President's Report To GN: September 2023

As I sit down to write this report, Summer is drawing to a close. And what a Summer it has been! Wildfires have been an ever-present event on every newscast every day. Drought continues to rear its ugly head in southern Alberta and in much of British Columbia. Many of us know friends or family who have been dislocated by the need to evacuate homes. I have a cousin who lives in West Kelowna and was evacuated. Fortunately his home has survived. However, hundreds of others were not so fortunate and our hearts go out to them. Likewise, many in the North West Territories have also been impacted.

In my last report I mentioned that Annalora and I were travelling to the Kootenay region as well as Montana in the month of June. As things turned out it was a delightful trip free of smoke and full of some pleasant family times. It was our first time visiting Nelson, BC and crossing Kootenay Lake on the world's longest free ferry. What a lovely experience! I hope that you and your family were able to make the best of this year's summer in spite of the environmental challenges. It seems we are no longer living in what we like to refer to as normal times. Right now southeastern Alberta is in need of much moisture. Dare I hope for much snow this winter?

Big Changes Coming For GN's Indoor Programs – You may have noticed in past indoor programs that the business meeting sometimes eats into our guest speaker time. We have decided to experiment with a new indoor program format. It will look like this beginning Tuesday, September 26:

6:30 – 7 p.m. – Refreshments and socializing

7 – 7:30 p.m. – Announcements & Business meeting Part 1

7:30 – 8:30 p.m. – Guest speakers – Rob and Corlaine Gardner – “This Summer's Trip To The Arctic”

8:30 – 9 p.m. – Business meeting Part 2

Please note the earlier starting time if you wish to socialize with your GN friends. After meetings and discussions. We have also decided to continue hybrid meetings so if you wish to participate from home, watch for the zoom link being sent to you a couple days before the meeting.

We Mourn The Passing of Veronica Swan, (Sept. 14, 1929 to July 25, 2023) GN Past President – On August 22, Annalora and I along with a few other GN members attended the funeral of Veronica Swann at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church. Veronica was President of the Grasslands Naturalists Society from March 1999 through March 2001 at the same time that I was Vice-President. She and I worked closely together and I subsequently succeeded her as President. Veronica was a passionate naturalist with strong leadership characteristics. With her articulate, soft-spoken voice, sly smile, and a steely will, she led our society skillfully during a time of very public issues. Everyone who dealt with her respected her including our mayor at the time. It was largely through her efforts that our city brought an end to destructive dirt bike racing in our river valley. She was predeceased by her husband James Gretton who was also a member of our society. It was a privilege to have known and worked with her for several years. Longer term members of our society will look back at her involvement with us as a very special time in the history of our society. She played a significant role in contributing to the respect and admiration that our society has earned in our community over the years.

Are You Our Next Issues Committee Facilitator? – Over the years our society has been the leader in advocating for the environment of southeaster Alberta. There are several issues on our agenda presently. Included are things like the City of Medicine Hat Environmental Framework, Strong Towns, Irrigation Expansion and Upgrades, Invasive Species Mitigation, Carbon-Free Energy Initiatives, Urban Forest Review and Management and of course the ever over-arching Climate Change.

Presently we have some of these being addressed by individual committees. However, our board of directors is in desperate need of an over-arching Issues Facilitator that can take on the management and coordination of these disparate issues and determine positions, priorities and strategies. It is over-whelming for the Board of Directors to be involved with all these different issues as well as all the other responsibilities running the operations of our society.

We are looking for an individual who can assume leadership in this area and work with all the already existing committees. Are you passionate about protecting our environment? Can you speak publicly and authoritatively on environmental matters? Contact me if you would like to find out more. You would be working with a wonderful team who are already contributing greatly to the advancement of GN and its priorities. Let's have a conversation!

Submitted by: Phil Horch, President.

PHIL HORCH

Exciting Sightings

2023 is turning out to be the worst wildfire season on record. Out-of-control fires in NWT, BC, and Alberta, which have been linked to climate change, have resulted in evacuations and loss of property. Widespread smoke pollution has prompted air quality index alerts and warnings throughout the province; there have been extreme weather events and heat warnings adding to the on-going drought in Southeastern Alberta, as well as tornados, and hailstorms in central parts of the province. With fall migration now underway, it is unclear how wildfires in our boreal forests affect songbirds, or how avian species respond to smoke and particulate matter. Smaller fires can help promote the diversity of forest habitat, which in turn can benefit some avian species such as the **Black-backed Woodpecker** which thrives in burned over areas, and the **Lewis's Woodpecker**, both species have been reported at Waterton National Park this year (The Kenow Wildfire burned through the park in September 2017).

During the summer hiatus, and into the fall migration, there have been some exciting sightings reported as follows:

Indigo Bunting- The breeding male is a striking deep blue colour, without wing bars, and is considered a vagrant, and a very rare breeder in Alberta. This species had not been reported in our city for several years. Bob Frew reported a singing male Indigo Bunting at Police Point Park on July 6th, the bunting remained in the park for most of July with subsequent sightings by Adam Turnbull on July 16th, and by Dan Schiebelbein and Nathan Thokle on July 25th as well as by many out of town birders.

Lazuli Bunting- This is another specialty species which brings visiting birders to the Medicine Hat area each spring. The male is a bright turquoise above, and below the throat, cinnamon breast, and a white medial wing patch, and wing bar. This usually uncommon species was unexpectedly easy to detect both vocally and visually throughout the summer months at Police Point Park and was reported by numerous birders.

Vireos- are members of the Family Vireonidae; some vireos have “spectacles” and wing bars, others have eyebrow strips and no wing bars. On August 4th, Adam Turnbull reported a **Yellow-throated Vireo**, at Connaught Pond. This eastern species is considered by The Alberta Bird Record Committee to be a very rare vagrant in the province (accidental <10 accepted records). It has bright yellow “spectacles”, throat, and breast, and a white belly and wing bars. During the week or so it was here the vireo attracted a lot of attention, including birders from Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and a group of naturalists enroute from Ontario to our mountain Parks. Other vireo sightings by numerous birders at Police Point Park and other locales reported during August and early September included **Philadelphia, Blue-headed, Red-eyed, and Warbling Vireos.**



Yellow-throated Vireo: Photo by Adam Turnbull

Wood Warblers- (Family Parulidae) These neo-tropical fall migrants returning to their more southerly winter ranges are eagerly sought after by birders to add to their annual lists, and perhaps provide a second chance to add species missed during spring migration to their lists.

~20 species of warblers have been observed and reported in Southeastern Alberta by local GN and visiting birders during this fall migration, among those reported were **Cape May, Magnolia, Canada, Townsend's, Mourning, Black and White, Blackburnian, Wilson's, Palm, Ovenbird, Orange-crowned, Blackpoll, Chestnut-sided, and Tennessee Warblers.**



Ruby-throated Hummingbird:
Photo by Dan Schiebelbein

Hummingbirds- During the month of August, Dan Schiebelbein observed and photographed **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** and **Rufous Hummingbirds** which were attracted to the Fushia and Bergamot blooms in his S.E. Crescent Heights Garden (both hummingbird species were occasionally present together, as on August 10th). The **Ruby-throated** is an uncommon migrant on the plains. The male is green above with a ruby-red throat, and a black chin extending back under the eye. The **Rufous** is a common fall migrant through the Rockies, with small numbers reaching onto the plains. The male has a rufous back, with an orange-red gorget. It's stay in Southeastern Alberta is brief.

birders who birded the south shore of Sauder Reservoir TWP 120/RGE 84 by Highland Cemetery during fall migration; **Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Sanderling, Long-billed Dowitcher, Willet, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwit, Killdeer, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, White-faced Ibis, Wilson's Phalarope.** As we entered the first week of September numbers and diversity have declined significantly. Similar species were observed at Pakowki Lake along HWY 885 south of Etzikom.

Shorebirds- Species sightings listed below were compiled after brief discussions with several GN

Eastern Phoebe- This species is brownish gray above, and white below with a pale olive wash on the breast and sides. Their tail pumping habit, lack of wing bars, and distinct *fee-be* song distinguishes them from similar species. It is a casual to rare migrant in western Canada. Milt Spitzer reported sighting two phoebes at Police Point Park on August 18th.

Osprey- A pair have been nesting downstream from Police Point Park, and have been observed flying over the park, or perched on the lamp posts on Maple Avenue bridge on numerous occasions. The species is now considered more common.

Townsend's Solitaire- The breeding range of this thrush species includes the coniferous forests of our mountain parks; it is usually seen in Southeastern Alberta during migration. The solitaire is slender, gray, with white eye ring, buff wing patches, white outer tail feathers, and acts like a flycatcher. Bob Frew observed a single bird at Police Point Park on September 9th.

Please report your exciting sightings to Bob Frew at by phone 403-526-4573, or by email to robert.frew@shaw.ca

Upcoming Events, Walks and Announcements

Wednesday Walks:

September 20: 09:00 to 11:00 AM: Connaught Pond with Marilou Montemayor ED SEAWA; Lessons learned from 6 years of restoration. See which native species rebound when crested wheat grass cover is removed. Also check out the birds on the water and in the shrubs by the pond.

September 27: 09:00 to 11:00 AM: Saratoga Park to Seven Persons Creek behind old Oglivie Flour Mill with Marilou Montemayor. See the growth of well-maintained shrubs planted to stabilize the creek bank. Hear stories from the plant care team. Park at bottom of Scholten Hill.

October 11: 4:00 to 5:30 PM: Pond behind Canadian Tire with Bonita Bernhardt and team. Park along Somerside Way.

October 18: 10:00 AM to Noon: Saamis Coulee on Seven Persons Creek with Cathy Linowski and the Archaeological Society. Park at the Teepee or near the Ball Diamond in Kin Coulee next to the pedestrian highway underpass. Meet at the bottom of Teepee Trail at 10:15 AM.

Saturday Field Trips

September 16: Meet at 8:00 AM at Gershaw Drive A&W: Trip to the SEAWA habitat creation site at Sauder's Reservoir. Come to see what it looks like after 6 years of planting, weeding and watering under drought conditions. Bring a lunch if you wish to have lunch nearby.

September 23; Meet at 8:00 AM at Gershaw Drive A&W: Field trip to Murray Lake followed by a tour at 9:30 AM at the SEAWA Yeast Riparian Restoration Site. Marilou will describe the riparian restoration activity. Participants may like to have a picnic lunch or go for lunch at Premium Sausage in Seven Persons.

September 30: Meet at the Medalta Parking Lot at 8:00 AM: Field trip to McLaren Lake to observe late migrations of waterfowl. Because of the drought all the surrounding sloughs and even Schuler Lake are dry so this will be our only destination. Should be done by Noon.

Other

Celebrate Thanksgiving at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. Select your dates between Tuesday October 3 and Monday, October 9. Camp sites self register when you arrive. Or come for day trips to enjoy the Park along the Milk River. Visitor Centre (403-647-2364). Any other questions can be discussed at the next GN Meeting on September 26. Contact John Slater (403-526-7003)



**Viceroy
Butter-
fly:**

**Taken at
Par
Three by
Hazel
Gray**



Birding Field Trip Produces a Mammal First Experience! By Phil Horch

Sixteen Grasslands Naturalists members and guests gathered on the Walmart Parking lot at 7 a.m., June 24 and formed a convoy of carpooled vehicles led by GN President Phil Horch. Their goal that morning was to experience the birds and wildflowers of the Cypress Hills at a time when both are at their peak presence in that locale.

Anticipation was high. Past experiences on this annual field trip have produced some memorable sightings of birds, butterflies and wildflowers. This year would prove to be no exception, except the high moment on this trip would come from a mammal encounter.

About two-thirds of the way to the Cypress Hills along Eagle Butte Road, Phil in the lead car, radioed the group that there were some unusual mammals on the road ahead. They were scurrying to get off the road into the left ditch. One mammal was larger than the other two. Just as the vehicles arrived, one of the smaller animals scurried back onto the center of the road and we all came to a sudden stop, not wanting to run it over. Now close enough to identify these creatures we realized that we were seeing a mother badger with two young. Nobody in our group had ever seen baby badgers before! As soon as we arrived at a stop, momma badger scooped up its nearby baby in its mouth and dived down a badger hole in the ditch to safety.



Photo by Gisele Saunier

However, the other baby was in the middle of the road surrounded by our vehicles. Soon momma badger re-emerged and watched with alarm as its other baby stood in the middle of the road in a confused state, not knowing where to go next. Momma made a couple tentative moves in the direction of her baby but backed off each time afraid to enter into our circle of parked vehicles and now excited humans. One of our group attempted to shoo the baby toward its momma but it would have none of that. In fact the little badger took a threatening posture and showed its teeth to our group! Someone in our group suggested picking it up and taking it toward the mother badger. Nobody volunteered! Then we realized that the best strategy was just to back off, give the little guy and mother some space, which we did. As soon as that happened, mother badger dashed onto the road, grabbed baby by the scruff of the neck and scurried into the deep grass in the ditch. The drama was over!

This is the first time that any of us have seen a badger parent interact with its babies. It would turn out to be the highlight of the day. Not that the day didn't have other highlights.

At our initial birding stop just south of Medicine Hat along Black and White Trail, we had heard Common Yellowthroats singing in a marsh, along with Yellow-Headed Blackbirds, Wilson's Snipe, Marsh Wren and not too far away, a Common Nighthawk perched on a fencepost.

Just prior to the badger encounter, we discovered a Great Horned Owl family, two adult birds and one young, perched in willows beside a dugout. Upon arriving at the Cypress Hills we began to see the first of many Mountain Bluebirds and the bird sightings were often interrupted by the myriad of wildflowers that had the heads looking down instead of looking up through binoculars!

One of the biggest bird surprises of this outing came at Bullshead Reservoir when our leader pointed out half a dozen White-Winged Scoters along with the many other waterfowl on this lake. Neither Phil or Milt could ever remember seeing this uncommon species on this particular water body before. They are known to breed on Elkwater Lake but otherwise are very scarce in our region.

Upon arriving at Spruce Coulee, a Cypress Hills birding hot spot, the group was treated to the songs of a Western Tanager, several Veeries, an Ovenbird, a likely Black-Headed Grosbeak and then finally to a persistently singing, fiery orange and black American Redstart, that most of us at least caught a glimpse of. All of these latter species are uncommon in southeastern Alberta but can be expected annually in the Spruce Coulee area. A Black Tern skimmed over the water of Spruce Coulee Lake and gave us some good looks as it wheeled right over our heads.

By the time our group gathered at an Elkwater picnic site for lunch, our group had tallied a total of 60 bird species which were added to with about 5 more species after lunch. Once again the annual Cypress Hills field trip proved to be a birding year highlight but this year the most excitement was generated by the rare badger encounter. Pretty well everyone agreed on that!

Who's Who

I would like to introduce your Grasslands Naturalist Communications Committee; Milt Spitzer, Tina Regehr, Paul Thibault, Alicia Lew, and Corlaine Corlaine. We try to keep you informed about what is happening with the Club. We also want to let non-members know that the club is active and available.

Milt is our long standing Sagebrush Chronicle editor. He gathers material from a variety of contributors and puts it all together for you. If you have ideas that you would like to see in the Chronicle, please get in touch with him.

Tina manages our Facebook page. Do you ever check it out? It is our public face for many potential members. Tina needs access to local photos, and updates on things related to south east Alberta environment. Send her a message on Facebook at Grasslands Naturalists.

Paul is web master for the Grasslands Naturalist website. It has a lot of history and up to date information about the Club. There are some new areas being developed including a blog and a "Letters to the Editor" page. You can find it at grasslands-naturalists.org

Alicia is our Chief Interpreter, leading the team at the Interpretive Program. The Operations Committee oversees the Program but Alicia meets with us to help us stay in touch and coordinate activities.

I chair the committee and try to look at the big picture. We could be attending public events or promoting our club in other ways. We need your ideas. I'd love to talk to you.

See you soon, Corlaine

Well Worded - Fall Reading submitted by Corlaine Gardner

Summer is drawing to a close. The camping, hiking, gardening, and other summer activities may be winding down. Now, we have a chance to think about picking up a book in our long evenings. This month, our Well Worded column offers fiction and non-fiction suggestions.

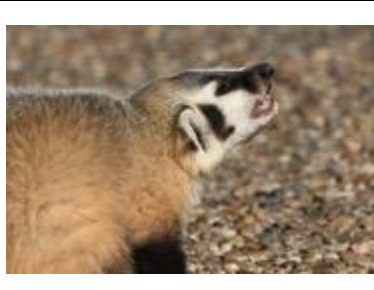
Canadian author Steve Burrows has a history of travelling and writing about birds. Now, he has produced a series of birder murder mysteries. He says that the same attention to detail that makes a good bird watcher can also make a good detective. I have "*A Siege of Bitterns*" and "*A Shimmering of Hummingbirds*" to pass along. I will bring them to the September meeting unless someone calls and asks for them before then.

Our club, like many other groups, has a land acknowledgement, recognizing the long history of people as part of our prairie environment and heritage. Acknowledgements can spark an interest in learning more. "*The Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*" by the Royal Canadian Geographical Society/Canadian Geographic, is a fascinating 4 volume set. Each of the 4 books can be signed out from the Public Library.

What are you reading this fall? Let us know.



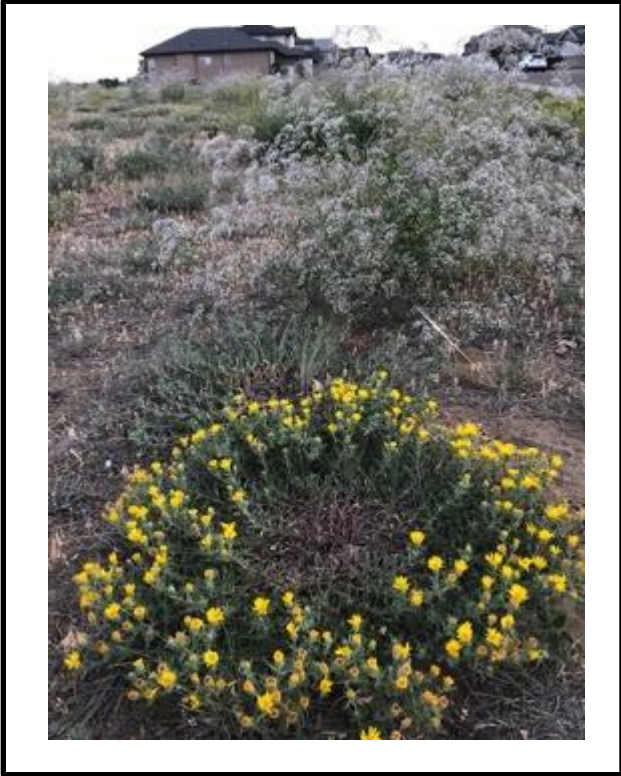
Rufous Hummingbird
Photo by Dan Schiebelbein



Baby Badger and Mom
Photo by Gisele Saunier



More Summer Nature Photos



**Hairy Golden Aster in field of Baby's Breath
Photo by Martha Munz Gue**



**Sphinx Moth at Elkwater
Photo by Brent Cowan**



**Blue-headed Vireo
Photo by Dan Schiebelbein**



**Great Blue Heron Fishing
Photo by Dan Schiebelbein**



**Palm Warbler
Photo by Adam Turnbull**