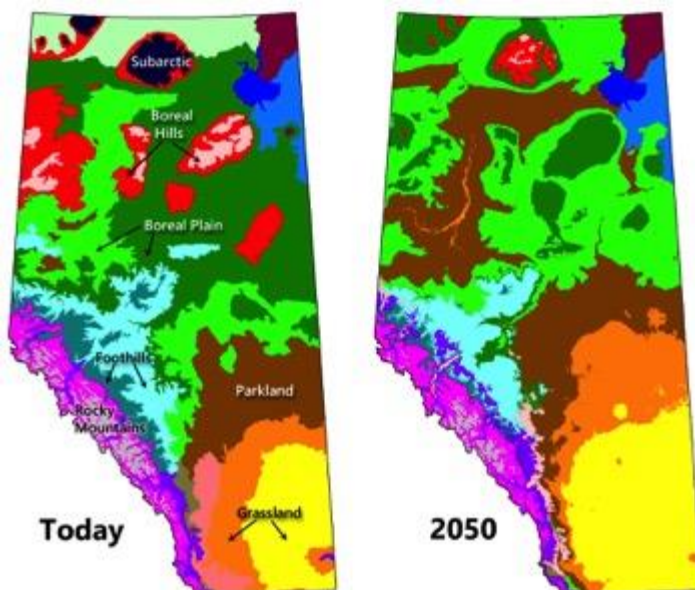


THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Time Travelling to Alberta's Past and Future Under a Changing Climate

Dr. Richard Schneider, Nature Alberta Executive Director



In this presentation, Dr. Richard Schneider will take us on a journey through time. We'll begin 6,000 years ago, when Alberta's climate was roughly 2 °C warmer than today, to see how our grasslands, boreal forest, and other major ecosystems were distributed under moderately warmer conditions. We'll then jump forward to 2123 to explore how Alberta's ecosystems are likely to shift in the future under best-case and worst-case warming scenarios. We will also spend some time at ground level, examining how changes in climate drive these large-scale ecosystem shifts. To wrap up, Dr. Schneider will discuss the implications of ecosystem changes for biodiversity conservation efforts.

Richard Schneider is a conservation biologist who has worked on species at risk and land-use planning in Alberta for the past 30 years. A new open access version of his book, *Biodiversity Conservation in Canada: From Theory to Practice*, is now available at: openeducationalberta.ca/schneider/. He currently serves as the Executive Director of Nature Alberta.

Monthly GN Meeting: Tuesday, November 28, 2023

At Nature Centre or by Zoom (info will be sent prior to meeting)

Note Change in Meeting Order for this Meeting Only

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

7:00 to 7:55 PM: Business Meeting

7:55 to 8:00 PM: Brief Break for set up for Guest Speaker Zoom Presentation

8:00 to 9:00 PM: Guest Speaker Presentation

Executive and Board Members

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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.

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

November 18: 10:00 AM to 3:30 PM: Holiday Market: Call the Nature Centre for more details.

November, 19: Ornament Making: Pre-registration is required. Call the nature line listed above.

A Swift Current- a Story of Police Point Park: This display is now up at the Nature Centre. A brief overview of how Police Point Park came to be: geomorphologically, socially, culturally and politically. Display ends December 31.

Birdseed Fundraiser: A second order for birdseeds will be made early in December. Call or visit the Nature Centre to place your order.

December 17: Christmas Bird Count and Pot Luck Dinner: See article later in this issue outlining the details of the count and dinner.

Come and visit the Nature Centre and browse the Gift Shop for Nature Related Items.

Members' Corner

President's Report To GN November 2023 submitted by Phil Horch, President

Being a member of a naturalist society has been an important part of my life ever since I was 20 years old. At that time I joined the Manitoba Naturalists Society as soon as I learned about its existence. Once I became involved I discovered birders and things have never been the same since. The Manitoba Naturalists Society was a big organization with over 3000 members (smaller today with over 1000) and indoor programs usually had over 300 people in attendance.

Much of what I have learned about nature and specifically "birds" came about through my involvement with naturalist and birding societies. Some of my best friends over the years have come about through these organizations and some of my best outdoor experiences came about through them as well. During our years living in Arizona, we joined the Tucson Audubon Society and instantly had like-minded friends and activities.

Much of the quality of life my wife Annalora and I have experienced over the years came about through these involvements. Naturalist societies have some of the best and most interesting people as members. All of this is multiplied when one becomes an active volunteer in a naturalist society. Social relationships and friendships become more intense and satisfying when one is working on a regular basis with a wonderful group of people striving for the same goals. When serving on the Board of Directors or Executive of such an organization, which I have, one can look back and realize that this effort has created a legacy in the form of educating others, creating publications, saving priceless natural spaces or influencing government policies.

I am in the process of completing my 5th year as President of the Grasslands Naturalists; 3 of them currently and two more several years ago. In addition to that there are many more years serving on the Board of Directors or in various other volunteer positions. Those have been some of the most meaningful years of my life.

In January you will be seeing a call for nominations to fill elected positions with the Grasslands Naturalists Society. I urge you to consider volunteering in some capacity for our local society or, failing that, urging someone else to and nominating them with their permission. As many of you are aware, my age is creeping up on me, and it's time we had a new President. This current term of my presidency would not have been possible without the support and active involvement of Paul Thibault, our Vice-President. He has been able to carry a large amount of my workload in recent months for which I am most indebted. My several medical issues are slowly taking a toll.

If you consent to assume some volunteer position in the Grasslands Naturalists Society, I can guarantee you will never regret it. You will work together with Board members and Committees filled with the most marvelous people. You will accomplish things that can only be accomplished in the milieu offered by our society. Don't miss out on experiencing some of the best years of your life working with fellow naturalists. I can speak from 55 years of experience.

Grasslands Naturalists Submits Report to City on Environmental Framework – As you may be aware the City of Medicine Hat has committed to considering an Environmental Framework which would help ensure quality of life and protection of our environment in all city planning. Our society has been advocating for such a plan for decades. Our new City Council has hired a giant engineering consultant, WSP, to draft an Environmental Framework proposal which our City Council will consider adopting on December 22 of this year. Our Society has been designated a Key External Stakeholder in the process of creating this framework. In that role we have been given access to a Draft of this framework and have been invited to give input in its creation. A small GN committee have been intensely reviewing this draft and have prepared a 14-page report with recommendations which was turned in to the city on November 6. Our board members and a few other key members of our society all had a chance to provide some input in creating this response to the Environmental Framework Draft. If you are interested in seeing our recommendations check our website. Hopefully, this Framework will become a future working document for all city departments, assuming that City Council passes it on December 22.

Members' Corner (Cont.)

Who's Who? Submitted by Corlaine Gardner Communications Committee

The Interpretive Program, based in Police Point Park, is our biggest project. The MHIP Operations Committee acts as GN's guidance team to oversee it.

Hugh Armstrong chairs the committee, along with members John Slater, Bob Townsend, Bruce McLeod, Ian Turner, Paul Thibault (ex-officio for President Phil Horch). City Parks send a non-voting representative, and Alicia Lew attends as Chief Interpreter.



Hugh says "The Interpretive Program is by far the biggest and, in my opinion, most important project that GN has. The program has been in existence for about 25 years and has been very fortunate to have had excellent people acting as chief interpreters."

In summarizing their important work, Hugh notes that the committee meets at least 3 times a year. Its main objectives are:

- A. Review and provide broad direction, feedback, support, and guidance to the Chief Interpreter.
- B. Liaise with the City with respect to our Service Contract.
- C. Assist, review, monitor, and approve the annual MHIP operating budget.
- D. Hire the Chief Interpreter (Very Rarely- we hope!!)
- E. Prepare the MHIP Operations Committee's annual report for GN' AGM.

If any of you would be interested in helping with the Operations Committee, please talk to Hugh.

December 17th, 2023: 42nd Annual Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count and Potluck Dinner By Genevieve Mathieu, Park Interpreter

Dating back to 1900, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the longest running citizen science project in North America. Each year flocks of bird enthusiasts go forth with binoculars, bird books and clipboards to identify and count local populations. The data collected is used to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation efforts.

This year marks the 42nd anniversary of Medicine Hat's participation in the CBC and the count will be taking place Sunday, December 17th. There are several ways to participate including walking, driving or monitoring at a bird feeder, and new bird counters are always welcome. For more information, or to sign up to participate in the count, please contact Genevieve Mathieu at the Nature Centre: 403.529.6225 or mhip@natureline.info

There will also be a Potluck Dinner at the Nature Centre after the count! Dinner at 5:30 PM, doors will be open at 5:00 PM. Please bring a dish for sharing (one of either a main course, side dish, salad, or dessert) as well as a plate and cutlery. Coffee will be provided. Members of the public who did not participate in the count are definitely welcome to join in the potluck and bird banter! Please RSVP for the potluck by calling the Nature Centre (403.529.6225) to help inform how many tables/chairs/etc will be need to be set up.

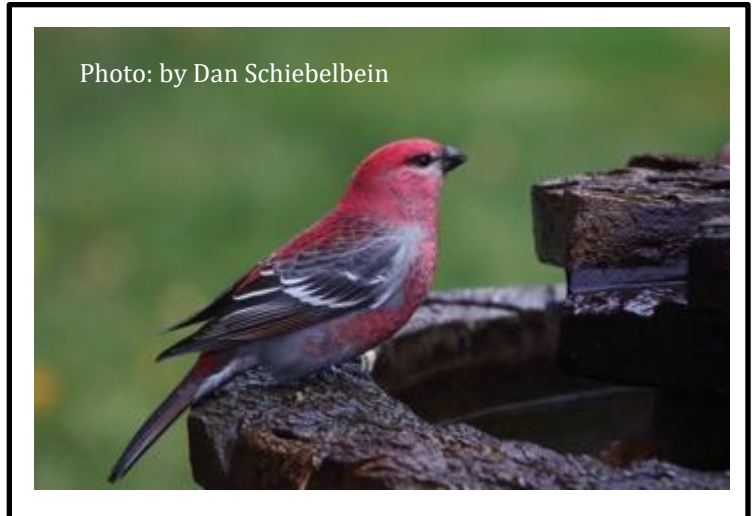
Wednesday Walks: Now Switched to the afternoons: Come to the Nature Centre on Wednesday afternoons at **1:30 PM** to enjoy social Qi Gong activity and the display as well as other exhibit material. Then, depending on the weather and ground conditions, we can take a walk in Police Point Park or select another location to explore nature. Dress for the conditions. **Come and enjoy nature on Wednesday Afternoons.**

Exciting Sightings

With the first snowfall of the season behind us, and the onset of winter weather, fall bird migration is coming to an end. November is a good time to encounter lingering migrants and possible rarities, as well as arctic species from their northern ranges. The Pine Grosbeak is one of many subarctic-resident bird species that exhibit irruptive behavior, as fruit-crop abundance varies from year to year. Sightings of this species were reported by several local birders during the third week of October. Recent exciting sightings reported include the following:

Pine Grosbeak- There were very few reports of this irruptive winter finch in Southeastern Alberta during the fall of 2022. This fall Phil Horch heard the song/call of a single grosbeak at Strathcona Island Park on October 14th, and Barry and Judy Anderson observed another in their Ross Glen neighbourhood also on October 14th. Bob Frew tallied four grosbeaks At Police Point Park on October 15th, and seven more on November 6th. When encountered the species is quite approachable.

Red Crossbill- This irruptive migrant is like the White-winged Crossbill but lacks the bold white wing bars. Crossbills inhabit coniferous woods and can be identified by their unique crossed bill tips. The Red Crossbill nests at any time of the year and wanders widely. Dan Schiebelbein reported a single bird in his garden in NE Crescent Heights on October 18th.



Varied Thrush- This thrush species breeds in the Rocky Mountains and Foothills regions and usually shows up in the Grasslands during fall migration. The male has a grayish-blue nape and back, orange eyebrow, underparts, and a black breast band, which distinguishes it from the American Robin. Barry Anderson reported a single Varied Thrush in his Ross Glen Garden on October 21st, the thrush was still present as of October 26th, possibly due to the heated water bath in the Anderson's Garden.

Northern Shrike- Larger than the Loggerhead Shrike, the Northern Shrike is an uncommon to rare winter visitor in southern Alberta. It has lightly barred underparts, and its black mask is narrower than the loggerhead's and does not extend above the eye. Its bill is longer with a more distinct hook. Adam Turnbull reported this falls first sighting at Sauder Reservoir on October 9th. Bob Frew observed one at Police Point Park on October 18th, and another on November 2nd.

Brambling- The male brambling has tawney orange shoulders, spotted flanks, and its head and back are tinged with buff when in fresh fall plumage. The checklist of the Birds of Alberta, by the Birds Record Committee describes the Eurasian finch species as accidental >10 records. Adam Turnbull and Nathan Thokle reported a sighting at Hillside Cemetery on October 16th. A previous Brambling sighting was reported in Rob Wapple's Ross Glen Garden on December 17th, 2018.

Rough-legged Hawk- This large arctic buteo is best seen in the fall and winter months in the southern areas of our province, usually hovering over coulees and prairies looking for prey. This buteo species comes in light, intermediate and dark morphs, and plumages may vary between males, females, and juveniles. Phil Horch reported a dark morph Rough-legged Hawk along the Black and White Trail on October 26th. In flight, a distinctive black "carpal" wrist patch is visible on the underside of the wings, contrasting with the white underside of the primary flight feathers. The species has long narrow, broadly tipped wings, a small bill and feet, and feathered legs, which are apparently arctic adaptations.

Exciting Sightings Continued



Evening Grosbeak- Adam Turnbull observed a pair of grosbeaks at Police Point Park on October 22nd. The male has a dark brown and yellow body, with a conspicuous white primary patch on the inner wing. It has a yellow forehead and eyebrow. The female has gray on the head and back, and buffy below, and has a second wing patch which is visible in flight. The Evening Grosbeak is considered a vagrant on the Southeastern Alberta Checklist.

< photo by Adam Turnbull

Snow Geese- Numbering in the 10s of thousands, flocks of Snow Geese were seen by both Milt Spitzer and Dan Schiebelbein on November 9 and 10 respectively in the Sauder's Reservoir and Murray Lake area feeding in stubble fields and resting on the reservoirs as well.

Hooded Merganser- On October 25th the day following a snow fall, Dan Schiebelbein observed ~20 Hooded Mergansers. the most he has seen at one time. 14 were about a kilometer upstream, and 6 downstream from the picnic site at Police Point Park. The male's white head patches are fan shaped and conspicuous when its crest is raised. The species is uncommon to rare in the west.

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

Well Worded (in time for Christmas) by Corlaine Gardner

Many of us are familiar with **Lorne Fitch's** writing. We often see his articles in the Nature Alberta magazine, and in AWA's Wild Land Advocate. His depth of knowledge and his ability to draw readers into the wonders of the natural world offer connections and understanding. His broad experience working for the Alberta government in various departments gives him an insider's view of the challenges and successes in caring for our environment. His writing is always interesting, often humorous, and reflects his honest passion for his subjects.

Lorne's new book, "**Streams of Consequence - Dispatches from the conservation world**" was published in October. Our club has purchased 10 copies. The new downtown bookstore River Bee Books, gave us a discount that we can pass on to you, allowing members to purchase one of these 10 books for \$23.60. Three have already been spoken for. If you want one email linda.fisher@grasslands-naturalist.org to reserve one for yourself or to give as a Christmas present. She will bring the copies to the November meeting. She says that if there are any copies not reserved, and there is line of potential purchasers, you can arm wrestle for them.



Report by Gerry Ehlert

1. **Scenic Views.** Completion of SV underway with David having received from Paul the computer software to do the SV PDF brochure. Paul, John, and Ger have started building the remaining 9 SV trail maps, (total of 17 scenic views) confirming SV points of interest and photo gallery pics and captions, and land acknowledgement statements for the 3 SV write-up sections: Overview, Saamis Tepee, and Saratoga Park.

2. **Invasive Species.** Depending on weather this week, we have two more mornings work planned with the City to spray buckthorn trees at PPP. Since our September report, we have moved from SE Hill and Kin Coulee to Connaught Pond and PPP. At Connaught Pond we pulled hundreds of tall buckthorn seedlings and saplings and pulled flags on 2022 city sprayed and dead buckthorn (pulled flags), and located additional buckthorn around the pond for City to spray, likely in 2024. At PPP, John and I spent several mornings doing follow-up work to confirm sprayed and dead buckthorn trees (if so take off flags) and gatorize hundreds of tall seedlings and saplings located on east side of main road (Areas 1 and 2), south and east side of Nature Centre Bldg. and Parking Lot, and in Areas 3 B and 3 C. We worked with City crew to spray in the 30 meter roadside strip along the east and west sides of the main road in Areas 2 and 3 C. See some pictures below of gatorizing saplings and dead mature buckthorn. In 2024, we plan to focus more in the PPP on the invasive buckthorn (gatorize and spraying) and less in other city areas other than checking 2023 spray follow-ups in SE Hill. End of Oct.: I am meeting with MHC Brent Smith and Morganne Wall to discuss the development of a invasive species digital id "brochure" to allow users to identify the difference between desirable natives and some "look-alike" invasive species such as buckthorn versus chokecherry, yellow clematis versus western white clematis, etc. At SE Hill, John and Hazel planted some chokecherry seeds into the area from which we removed a complete ground cover of buckthorn. We will see if this idea works, and next early summer we plan to plant some chokecherry seedling plugs into this area as well. Also our thanks to Bruce McLeod and Grant McLeod for their volunteer help at Kin Coulee and SE Hill re buckthorn removal.

Stats for Common Buckthorn Invasive Work so far in 2023:

Total Hours 169 hours; and total plants extracted

2062. Number of Plants extracted from:

- College Pond = 17
- SE Hill = 410
- Ajax Coulee = 60
- Connaught Pond = 670
- PPP = 905

(Note: the City kindly got us some flagging tape - 19 rolls, and purchased our 2 Big Bertha extractigators.

Russian Olive (RO) Task Force Meeting Oct 18, 2023. A productive meeting with results soon to be shared with GN Board. Highlights include discussing education, strategies, and actions and integration of the City Integrated Pest Management Plan included in the Environmental Framework. SEAWA and GN will work with City to design/complete the RO website, and future follow up meetings to discuss and plan details. Important to note that as RO being a not- regulated noxious invasive under the AB Weed Control Act, there is no action taken once the RO's have been reported using the EDD Maps AB. However, the city takes the reported information and puts it into their GIS data. In addition, Brent Smith from the MHC provides RO information via his remote sensing and ecological mapping work. Confirmed in the matter of RO work by SEAWA and GN, SEAWA takes the lead and GN supports. All RO operational ideas/programs, etc. that take place on city land must first be vetted and approved through the City. Opportunity for a trial RO Mite biological control research project to be implemented in CMH is back on the table. We are presently in discussion with AFSC to draft city's information request, approval, and implementation for 2024 May/June. RO mite releases in 2023 have taken place in Cypress County, and City of Lethbridge; with formation of mite galls reported.

Report by Gerry Ehlert Continued

B.C.'s Summerland also had a trial mite release.

4. **Environmental Framework.** City and consultants met with core stakeholders Oct 19 to go over draft EF highlights. No written material was handed out at the meeting, and opportunity for limited discussion took place. However there was a discussion of a Vision statement. Subsequently, as reported in the President's Report, we did have access to a copy of the written draft so we have provided input prior to City Council approval in December, 2023. Also I have met with Brent Smith and City (Kevin and Adria) to discuss Brent's native grasslands ecological mapping data and report and how that fits into the Environmental Framework, etc.



Buckthorn Removal

Note: the little red wagon; an integral piece of equipment in this program.



Left: A moose in John Slater's backyard (photo by John)
Above: A Fox Sparrow in Dan Schiebelbein's yard (photo by Dan)