

THE
**SAGEBRUSH
CHRONICLE**



Pizza Parley!!!!!!!!!!

January 23 @ 6:30 PM at the Police Point Park Nature Centre

Join us for Pizza, veggies, and refreshments (bring your plate)

**Let's plan
the Grasslands
Naturalists'
activities for 2024**

**and enjoy the
Members' slideshow
of 2023 highlights.**



Executive and Board Members

President **Phil Horch** 403-529-5918

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Vice-President **Paul Thibault**

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Secretary **Martha Maudsley**

Treasurer **Angela Turner**

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Past-President **Hugh Armstrong**

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Directors at

Large

Ian Turner

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Linda Fisher

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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

Inspired by Nature: Come and meet the high school artists at an evening reception: **Thursday, January 11, 7:00 to 9:00 PM.**

Winter Story Walk Launch: Saturday, January 27: This year's story is "Winter Dance" by Marion Dane Bauer and it will be up until the end of February.

Local Nature Trivia Night: Tuesday, January 30 7:00 to 9:00 PM. Play as an individual and test your knowledge of local nature. \$2 registration and places are limited. Call the Nature Centre to register. (403) 529-6225).

Look for more details on a **family/children's story telling event** happening at the Esplanade in early February.

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:** 1 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.

Young Artists "Inspired by Nature" This display will be at the Nature Centre from December 27 to January 29. It features art work from local High School Students.

Members' Corner

Your 2024 membership fees are now due. To this end the application forms can be found at the end of this Chronicle.

Note: Wednesday Walks have been cancelled for January and February. Watch this space in the March Chronicle for news about walks and field trips for 2024. We are also asking whether anyone would be interested in leading walks or field trips to areas of one's choice. Please contact Milt Spitzer (milton.spitzer@gmail.com) or John Slater at (jslater@telusplanet.net).

Who's Who - Field Trips

C. Gardner, Communication Committee, January 2024

Field trips are one of the most popular of our Grasslands Naturalists Club activities. We enjoy exploring areas with like minded people. And our trip leaders all add their own individual ideas or expertise.

John Slater is our field trip coordinator. Milt S. and Phil H. are frequent leaders, including some regular annual trips. Martha MG helps out with the Wednesday walks. Ian T. worked to formalize the trip ratings. It is always handy to know the activity level and difficulty rating for a planned trip.

We are always looking for ideas for field trips, perhaps including more extensive ones like we used to do. Are people interested in overnight trips to special places, perhaps camping? If you have suggestions for short or long field trips, please call John or Milt or talk to them at the next meeting. We are also looking for new field trip leaders to areas of your choice.



Field Trip Candid Shots and of course sometimes we “just wanna have fun”.

President's Report To GN: January 2024

What Is A Pizza Parley? I am looking forward to seeing you at our 41st 2024 Indoor Program on January 23. This is an important way for our Board of Directors to get your input as we plan events for your coming year as a member of Grasslands Naturalists. It is also an important step in the strategic planning that we have been participating in as a society. We cannot complete a strategic plan without the input of you, our members.

A synonym for parley might be confab, conference, consult, conversation or discussion. Combine that with pizza and refreshments, along with a slide presentation on past GN activities and we believe this is a unique and pleasant way to kick off our new year of programs and activities. In order for it to work, WE NEED YOU THERE! Our goal is to make our society grow, become better, and respond to our member's expectations. Board member Sheila McLeod will lead the proceedings and help elicit your thoughts and ideas as we discuss the future of our Grasslands Naturalists Society. SO bring your own plate for free pizza and come armed with your ideas and suggestions. We will engage in some guided round table discussion as well as enjoy each other's company in a pleasant informal gathering. In the coming months we have some excellent guest speakers planned that you won't want to miss.

First Call For Nominations – The month of January is only 3 months away from our Annual General Meeting when we elect the Executive for our society and we also entertain nominations for Honorary Lifetime Memberships. The Executive includes President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Board members at large are appointed by the Executive but we are always looking for suggestions for these positions as well.

In my position as President I plan to step down effective as soon as possible after the AGM because my surgery date is likely to happen some time this summer. So far one person has offered to stand for the position of President. We are looking for someone to let their name stand for Vice-President as Paul Thibault is now part of the Board of Nature Alberta and also holds several other positions with GN. He is willing to serve as a Director at Large. At this time I am not aware of any other vacancies, however, as a member of GN you are free to nominate any other member for an Executive position provided they are willing to let their name stand. To nominate anyone for the Executive contact Past President John Slater at jslater@telusplanet.net or phone him at 403-526-7003.

In order to nominate someone for Honorary Lifetime Membership you may contact myself or Past-president Martha Munz-Gue at mmunzgue@telusplanet.net or phone 403-526-2226. My contact information is on the masthead of this Chronicle. Anyone nominated for this position should have a long-term association and service with our society. Nominations may be submitted in writing to the Grasslands Naturalists mailing address listed on our Chronicle masthead.

City of Medicine Hat Environmental Framework receives initial approval – On December 19 the Medicine Hat City Council approved in principle the adoption of the long sought after Environmental Framework. This is the first step for a policy that our society has been long advocating for. It is now being reviewed by all city of MH departments in order to assess what Action Steps are needed going forward and should receive final approval this spring.

GN's Major Scenic Views Project Now Complete – I am happy to announce that the Scenic Views of Medicine Hat website is completed. I encourage you to view <http://grasslands-naturalists.org/scenic-views>. This digital website story informs the reader about the beauty and importance of our native grasslands, riparian areas, forests and wildlife. More about this next month.

Submitted by Phil Horch, President

Exciting Sightings

With the first week of 2024 upon us, the unusually mild temperatures we have experienced are coming to an end, with forecasts of colder weather. Canada Geese are roosting on the open reaches of the South Saskatchewan River, departing in their hundreds each morning with a great cacophony of honking, to forage in nearby stubble fields. Although GN birders were preoccupied with Christmas Bird Counts in December, some exciting sightings unrelated to the CBC have been reported by local birders eager to get a start on their 2024 species lists.

Snowy Owl- The return of this iconic arctic owl was reported by Dan Schiebelbein along TWP Rd. 114 west of the city on December 27th, which was followed by his sighting of a second owl further west on TWP Rd.114. The male can be all white, whereas the female and juveniles have dark markings. Adam Turnbull also reported a Snowy Owl on the Seven Persons Grazing Range on December 29th. Owls are attracted to this area each winter by the abundance of prey.



Snowy Owl photo by Dan Schiebelbein >

Pine Grosbeak-Initial sightings of this irruptive winter finch were reported back in mid-October, and others continue to be reported as recently as January 4th by Eric Vokes who observed 10 grosbeaks at Hillside Cemetery. Milt Spitzer reported 9 grosbeaks at Police Point Park on December 31st. The irruptive migrations in search of tree seed crops by Pine Grosbeak is clearly displayed by examining past and present Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Counts; in the 2022 CBC there were zero grosbeaks counted, and a record 92 in the 2023 CBC. (zero in the 2018 CBC, 61 in the 2019 CBC). The male's gray plumage is tipped with red on the head, back, and underparts, whereas the gray female has a yellow-olive head and back.



< Pine Grosbeak photo by Dan Schiebelbein

Northern Shrike- This shrike species is a rare winter visitor to Southern Alberta. It is larger than the Loggerhead Shrike which breeds here in summer. The Northern Shrike has a paler gray head and back, with lightly barred underparts, and its black mask does not extend above the eye and beak. The black wings and white primary patch on the wings are distinctive in flight. Dan Schiebelbein observed a shrike at Connaught Pond on December 11th, and Eric Vokes observed one at Echo Dale Park on January 3rd.

Thrush Species- Adam Turnbull observed a **Varied Thrush** while birding at Cavan Lake on December 31st. In summer this species is common in the coniferous forests of our mountain parks. The male's grayish-blue nape and back, orange eyebrow, underparts, and black breast band distinguish it from the American Robin. It is considered a vagrant in the prairie region in winter. Adam also observed a single **Townsend's Solitaire** at Connaught Pond on January 1st. The solitaire which acts much like a flycatcher, is a slender thrush of open coniferous woods, is gray overall with a bold white eye ring, and buffy patches on the wings. It is considered rare in the Prairie Region in winter.

White-breasted Nuthatch- This short-tailed acrobat climbs up, down, and around tree trunks while foraging. Its all-white face and breast contrasts with a black cap and nape, with a variable extent of rust on the underparts. It is rare in the Prairie Region, where sightings can be unpredictable. Dan Schiebelbein reported two Nuthatches in his Crescent Heights yard on December 18th.

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

Lovely Weather for Geese: A brief summary of the 42nd Annual Christmas Bird Count

By Genevieve Mathieu, MHIP Park Interpreter and 2023 CBC Compiler

Medicine Hat's 42nd Annual Christmas Bird Count is in the books. On December 17th, 48 field counters and feeder watchers, including a few new recruits paired up with experienced birders, covered 25 territories in the Medicine Hat area. In total, 22,625 birds were seen made up of 52 different species.

As you might have guessed, the most counted species was Canada Goose with the highest number to date (22,183), 607 more geese than the previous high in 2018. An Eastern Screech Owl made an appearance this year, marking its second CBC sighting since 1997. Other species that had a strong showing were Cackling

Goose (8), Gadwall (10), Common Merganser (28), and Pine Grosbeak (92). Check out the Exciting Sightings section for more in-depth information on the Pine Grosbeaks. Noteworthy low numbers included Sharp-tailed Grouse (1), American Robins (2), Bohemian Waxwings (5), Cedar Waxwings (0), and Pine Siskins (1). Birds weren't the only creatures seen on count day. Some of the mammals spotted include red fox, muskrat, jack rabbit, cottontail, mule and white-tailed deer, pronghorns, and coyotes. For anyone interested in seeing all of the details, stay tuned for the full report.



Thank you to everyone who helped make our Christmas Bird Count (and the delicious potluck afterward!) happen. The success of this citizen science project depends on the passion and dedication of community participants like you!

<common visitor to bird feeders: photo by Donna Steele

2023 MANYBERRIES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

December 22, 2023 Compiler: Rob Gardner

The regular Manyberries CBC was held on December 22. Six participants allowed us to divide into three parties, giving better coverage than usual. Most notably, not a single snowflake was recorded. This allowed the birds to scatter across the fields, away from the roads.

Also absent were Snow Buntings, for the first time in 19 years, and Sharptail Grouse, for only the second time. However, we managed to find 11 species for a total of 231 individuals. Birding is tough, with no water and very few trees or shrubs. As we ate lunch at the Southern Ranchmen's Inn (closed), about 100 Common Redpolls joined us. They noisily ate seeds in the naturalized (weedy) yard next door.

Dan & George made the sighting of the day: a new conservation area, very recently purchased by the Alberta Conservation Association. At about 800 acres, it includes about three km. of Manyberries Creek. Good shrubby riparian habitat will be filled with birds this spring. Watch for a GN field trip to check this place out!



Well Worded – Travels C. Gardner, Communications committee, Jan. 2024

Have you travelled South America? Author Kate Rawles explored from Columbia to Patagonia, meeting with conservation groups, reporting on projects, and reveling in the ecosystems from Amazon jungles to high mountain passes to deserts. She found many people working to ensure that local people were recognized as part of healthy, sustainable life styles. There is a school whose whole curriculum is based on turtles, and the health of the community is improving. She visited a town who rejected a massive mine proposal in order to maintain local food production and clean water. There are indigenous groups who own and manage ecotourism lodges, including education about the centuries old traditions of sharing the jungle with the native plants and animals. Through her experiences she confirmed that maintaining healthy, functioning ecosystems is the best way to deal with climate change. **Protecting biodiversity is essential to our survival.**

Rawles travelled the length of South America by bicycle, specifically a bamboo bicycle which she built herself. Her book, “The Life Cycle - 8,000 miles in the Andes by Bamboo Bike” is available from the Public Library. For those of you who have visited South America, you might see some familiar scenes. For those of you who haven’t, you can do some armchair travelling



ANTHILL, a novel, by E.O. Wilson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Quoting from the prologue, this is a story about three parallel worlds, which nevertheless exist in the same space and time. They rise together, they fall, they rise again, but in cycles so different in magnitude that each is virtually invisible to the others.

The smallest is the ants; the second world is human; and thousand times greater in space and time is the biosphere. The message behind the slow-moving, yet engaging stories is that for each careless step we take, our species will pay the price.

The 38 short chapters are grouped into 6 sections. Most follow the life of Raph from childhood solo excursions into pristine nature, through family relations, adult work and studies, to becoming an environmental lawyer in order to stand up to forces that destroy nature. A section towards the middle, titled the Anthill Chronicles, details the life-and-death struggles for ant colonies. Wow! I have learned a lot about ants!

Readers of this book will increase their understanding of the nature of two species: humans and ants.

Submitted by Martha Munz Gue

Streams of Consequence: Dispatches from the Conservation World by Lorne Fitch

Well known Lethbridge naturalist/retired biologist Lorne Fitch will be the in-person Guest Speaker at our March 26, 2024 AGM, (following the Elections). Lorne's book is receiving glowing reviews; you still have time to read it before his presentation - he mentioned that he will include a reading from *Streams of Consequence*. 3 copies are still available at the discounted price of \$ 23.63, and will be available for purchase at the January 23, 2024 General Meeting. Payment can be made by cash or a cheque made out to *Grasslands Naturalists* and given to Angela at the January general meeting.

Webinars, Speaker Series, Workshops, Etc.

Tuesday, January 16 at 12:00 PM: “Protecting native plants from the ever-pressing threat of invasive species!” Speaker; Megan Evans: Hosted by the Alberta Native Plant Council with Alberta Invasive Species Council: This kicks off the Alberta Native Plant Council’s Annual lunchtime webinar series, with this year’s theme of “Under Pressure: Threats to Alberta’s Native Plant Communities”.

More information: naturealberta.ca/anpc-webinar-mini-series

Wednesday, January 17 at 7:00 PM: “Taking Action: Launching an Environmental Advocacy Campaign” Speaker: Dr. Richard Schneider: Hosted by Nature Alberta: Dr. Schneider will describe how environmental campaigns are organized and run, how land-use decisions are made, and how to be effective in influencing those decisions.

More Information: naturealberta.ca/environmental_advocacy

Thursday, January 18 at 09:30 AM: Alberta Prairies Conservation Forum Webinar:

More information: <https://www.albertapcf.org/pcf-member-meetings>

February 7th and 8th: 10th Native Prairie Restoration/Reclamation Workshop: Event Theme: “Building Bridges to Tomorrow: Restoration and Reclamation for the Future”. Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Register at: <https://www.site.pheedloop.com/event/NPRRW2024/home/>

Great Plains Conservation Network: This site details programs and webinars that are pertinent to great plains conservation. <https://plainsconservation.org>

Unusual Animal Species within the City of Medicine Hat

This unusual city species (elk) was seen and photographed in the Ross Glen backyard of Gordon M. on June 15.

(From the Cypress Hills or the British Block?)





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



Membership Form for 2024

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.

Waiver 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: _____