

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Photo by: Dwayne Myers

NO Tuesday Night Meeting This Month!

In lieu of our monthly Tuesday night meeting the Annual Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count is being held on **Sunday, December 18** followed by a Potluck Dinner at the **Police Point Park Nature Centre @ 5:30PM**. Regardless of your participation in the count all are invited to attend and to participate in the delicious assembly of dishes and fellowship. Please bring a dish of your choice (main course, dessert or salad) as well as a plate and cutlery; coffee or tea will be provided. It really is a fun time for all. If you wish to participate in the count contact Marty Drut at 403-529-6225.

Executive

President	Hugh Armstrong Armstr55@telus.net	526-1003
Vice-President	Anne Bernhardt	527-2792
Secretary	Betty Rainville brainville@shaw.ca	528-2925
Treasurer and Memberships	Eileen Cowtan ecowtan@hotmail.com	526-1264
Past-President	Dave McKenzie naturist@telus.net	527-1701
Directors at Large	Gary Martin gammag4211@gmail.com Ian & Angela Turner ianang@telus.net	878-3483 526-1350

MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grassland Naturalists)

Based in Police Point Park Nature Centre
Open Year Round

Tuesday to Sunday: 9:00AM to 5:00PM

Washrooms are on a timer and are open from
7:00AM to 8:00PM daily!

To get up to date information on what is
happening at the Nature Centre call the:
Nature Line at (403) 529-6225
Also find us on Facebook and Twitter
(policepointpark)

Present to Dec. 30: Photographers of a
Feather: This exhibit by local photographers is on
display at the Nature Centre.

Sunday, Dec. 18 to Jan. 8: Christmas StoryWalk
® "The Night Before Christmas" with amazing
illustrations by Canada's own Barbara Reid. Opening
at 3:00PM Sunday, December 18.

Sunday, Dec. 18: Medicine Hat Christmas Bird
Count during the day with Potluck Supper at
5:30PM at the Nature Centre. Contact Marty Drut
at 403-529-6225.

Jan. 3 to 29, 2017: Young Artists Inspired by
Nature Art Show. The opening reception for this
remarkable display of nature art will be held at
the Nature Centre on January 11 at 7:30PM.

The Sagebrush Chronicle is published ten times a year by
Grasslands Naturalists. **Submissions of writing and
artwork are welcomed but must 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. - May **Board
Meetings:** 1st Tuesday Sept. - 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 529-6225

Annual Membership Dues: Eileen Cowtan

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

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do not necessarily reflect those of the editor and the
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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:

<http://www.natureline.info/gn>

GN Facebook:

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

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

It's Time to Renew your Membership!

Member's Corner

Welcome to new members **Barry Bernhardt** and **Monique Gareau** who have recently moved to Medicine Hat. Also welcome to **Courtney and Sharon Tripp** who received a gift membership from long time members, **Wilbur and Nancy Tripp**. Also welcome back **John and Dianna Jossa**. We look forward to interact with all of you at upcoming functions. The potluck dinner (December 18) is always a great place to meet fellow members.

President's Message

Well, here it is, December, winter has set in and the busy holiday season is upon us!

Our Bird Trails information is on the website and readily available to all. The Committee has an attractive Rack Card ready to be printed in the New Year, with all the required access information. They will be available at the Nature Centre and distributed throughout the area.

Our Wildflower Brochure should be ready for printing before the spring blossoming season. The Horticultural Society has made a very generous donation towards the costs of the printing and we are waiting to hear from the Alberta Native Plant Council as to further funding.

There is the old adage from Robbie Burns- "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men Gang aft agley" And so it is with the GN this past month.

To begin, as we were continuing our preparation with the Webcam project, the eagles decided to start building a nest right in the prime Heron nesting area. We don't know what that means this spring, but have an idea the Herons will be moving; so we are kind of in a holding pattern right now.

Then, our Ranchland's project was put on hold as the city determines how it wants to proceed with the Baby's Breath and noxious weed control, and if we get funding from them this year. So it is also in limbo!

And, as of this month the Bird Tales program at Masterpiece has been put on hold due to personal changes, health concerns from the bird droppings under the feeders in the courtyard, and lack of staffing.

Another adage: Hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and expect the unexpected! - seems to be playing out in our GN projects.

But, on the good news front, the Lions Christmas Hay Ride was a rousing success with close to 1000 people coming out and enjoying the rides, crafts, hotdogs, hot chocolate and popcorn. Thanks to all those who volunteered their time.

So, as the year draws to an end, Dee and I wish you all a **Very Merry Christmas and a Healthy and Happy New Year!**

Cheers, Hugh

PS: Don't forget to sign up for the Bird Count and volunteer when asked.

It's not too early to renew your GN Membership and perhaps if you know of someone who is interested in Nature you might consider giving a gift membership for Christmas. Membership rates are detailed on page 2. Also all donations to GN over \$10 are issued a Tax Receipt.

Upcoming Events and Announcements

Present to Dec. 30: Photographers of a Feather: This exhibit by local photographers is on display at the Nature Centre.

Sunday, Dec. 18 to Jan. 8: Christmas StoryWalk ® "*The Night Before Christmas*" with amazing illustrations by Canada's own Barbara Reid. Opening at **3:00PM Sunday, December 18.**

Sunday, Dec. 18: Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count during the day with Potluck Supper at 5:30PM at the Nature Centre. Contact Marty Drut at 403-529-6225.

Wednesday, Dec. 28: Manyberries Christmas Bird Count: Find out what bird species enjoy the grasslands in winter! Meet at the Medicine Hat Mall parking lot directly across from the Tim Horton's at **08:00**. For more information or to confirm your participation please call **Rob Gardner at 403-527-2052.**

Jan. 3 to 29, 2017: Young Artists Inspired by Nature Art Show. The opening reception for this remarkable display of nature art will be held at the Nature Centre on **January 11 at 7:30PM.**

Feb. 8 & 9, 2017: Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan will be hosting the 5th Native Prairie Restoration/Reclamation Workshop in Regina, Saskatchewan. The theme for this year's workshop is "Reclaiming Spaces, Restoring Species". For more information and complete listing of workshop speakers and topics, please visit: <http://www.pcap-sk.org/upcoming-events-workshops/2017-nprrw> .

Feb. 23 to 25: Alberta Ecotrust Foundation is announcing their second annual Environmental Gathering: "Breaking Through" in Edmonton. For early bird registration (up to January 11) and more information visit: www.albertaecotrust.com/gathering2017 .

November through April: Project Feeder Watch. Count the birds at the Nature Centre every Friday and Saturday. The Nature Centre provides a comfy chair, coffee and cocoa!

Watch this spot for announcements concerning Bio Blitz Canada 150. For more information go to: <http://bioblitz.ca/default.aspx> .

Dec. 27 or 28th: Year End Inventory of all the Nature Store Supplies. **Volunteers are Required!!!** Phone the Nature Centre if you can help out. 403-529-6225.

Shop the Nature Store

Are you getting low on your backyard feeder supplies? Do you need new bird feeders or other feeding apparatus? Stop and Shop at the Nature Centre! Also do you require last minute Christmas Gifts? The Nature Centre has a number of nature inspired gifts and nature books as well as shade grown coffee. Of particular interest are the Christmas Elves that were made by one of our newest members, Wendy Blackwell. Wendy has graciously donated the proceeds from these to the Nature Centre. Now that we have a little snow remember that the Nature Centre also rents snowshoes and cross-country skis.

Exciting Sightings

November's weather was unusually mild, as we experienced an extended period of above seasonal temperatures. However, an abrupt change in weather in the first week of December brought a spell of snow and bitterly cold temperatures. Bird sightings can be slow during this transition from fall to winter, as was the case this past month with fewer sightings, and species being reported. Hopefully, we can expect increased activity at local bird feeders, and the anticipated arrival of boreal winter finches.



Photo by Dan Schiebelbein

The numbers of migrating **Snow Geese** observed at Sauder's Reservoir and Murray Lake appear to be down from previous years. Milt Spitzer reported a flock of 500 at Sauder's Reservoir on December 2nd. Sightings of small groups of **Tundra Swans** were also reported at this reservoir as late as November 26th.

In mid-November Dan Schiebelbein got a brief look at a **Long-eared Owl** that he had flushed at Police Point Park on November 26th. These nocturnal hunters roost in dense foliage, where their camouflage makes them hard to find. On December 2nd, Milt Spitzer confirmed the sighting at the same location. This species has nested in the park successfully in previous years.

On November 18th, two adult **Bald Eagles**, together with two juveniles, were observed circling over the South Saskatchewan River at Police Point Park. On November 14th and 26th, one of the adults was observed carrying large branches to a nest site in the Heronry across the river from the park. It appears the adults are nesting again, and this time in hostile territory!

A flock of about 60 **Snow Bunting** was reported by Dan Schiebelbein on Range Rd. 43 northeast of Bullshead Reservoir.

A **Northern Shrike** was observed by Milt Spitzer and Bob Frew at Police Point Park on November 20th. This species is a predator of small birds and mammals, and a winter visitor to the southern grasslands.

The **Northern Goshawk** is the largest of our three accipiter species. Identification can sometimes be a challenge as juvenile birds are often confused with the **Cooper's Hawk**; however the goshawk is usually larger, with a bold white stripe over the eye. There have been goshawk sightings by several birders at Police Point Park; most recently on December 2nd.

The first report of a **Snowy Owl** this winter was received from Milt Spitzer who observed a male southwest of the city near the intersection of RGE Rd. 71/ TWP Rd. 122, on November 26th. Later, on December 4th, Dan Schiebelbein reported two females, both on RGE Rd. 73, one just north of TWP Rd. 120, and the other just north of RGE Rd. 114. The pastures in this area appear to be rich in prey. Male Snowy Owls are usually white overall, whereas females are heavily barred.

Occasional **Pileated Woodpecker** sightings continue to be reported Police Point Park. This crow-size woodpecker which can be detected by its loud hammering, was heard and observed on November 8th.

A late report of a **Brown Thrasher** came into the Nature Centre on December 9. This bird has been visiting a heated water bowl.

A female **moose** was present at Police Point Park at the beginning of December.

Send your exciting sightings to Bob Frew : Phone 403-526-4573 or e-mail Robert.frew@shaw.ca

Hiking the Appalachian Trail: Presentation by Kris Samraj, November 22

Summarized by B. Rainville

Kris Samraj is a humorous and engaging speaker who you may have seen speaking at Pecha Kucha evenings, or lending his expertise at various library-related activities in Medicine Hat. He is in charge of nonfiction services at the Medicine Hat Public Library. Kris is known as a “thru -hiker” because he hiked the entire Appalachian Trail starting at Hundred Mile Wilderness. He was twenty-two years old and the year was 2002. Kris’s desire for adventure, as well as the fact that his friend Ty had hiked this trail before, were just two of the reasons Kris decided to take on the challenge.

The Appalachian Trail covers 2100 miles (3,360 km) and runs from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mt. Katahdin, Maine through fourteen states. Earl Shaffer was the first person to complete a “thru hike” in 1948 to “walk the war out of his system”. Emma Gatewood, born 1887, walked the Trail in 1955 at the age of 67, again in 1960, and then in 1963 at 73 years of age. This mother of 11 children was the first woman to do this, using only minimal equipment and relying on the hospitality of strangers. As Kris pointed out, the Trail has been and continues to be a place of refuge for those who travel it.

Kris hitchhiked to Maine from Lacombe, Alberta in mid-May then started the Trail at Hundred Mile Wilderness heading north to south, following the white blazes along the way. He described the rugged Maine terrain where rain turned the trail into a creek. He became lost and disoriented at times with no cell phone, or maps to guide him, and described crossing cold rivers with no ropes. Hypothermia set in, and he lost all strength in his hands. Kris explained that the Kennebec River Crossing is so arduous, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy hires someone to ferry hikers across the river. Even more formidable, wind in The White Mountains in New Hampshire may reach speeds of 236 mph (380 km).

Kris frankly admitted that he was not in shape at the start of the trip. He started with 12 days worth of food and carrying 50 pounds of gear which he lightened by switching a heavy MSR stove for a free pop can stove, and a blow-up mattress for a \$30.00 foam pad. The first 2 months Kris averaged 10 miles a day, but later averaged 20 miles a day as he became more fit. His longest distance travelled in one day was 35 miles. As a result, Kris burned between 3500 to 4000 calories a day. Peanut butter, macaroni and cheese with tuna, and ultra light pop tarts provided the blast of calories needed to maintain energy and minimize weight loss. Kris showed an impressive slide of a typical 5 day supply of these rations. He spoke about the kindness of local people who generously drove hikers to town for supplies, and left jugs of water and food along the trail. This was part of the trail magic that local “trail angels” experienced from doing good deeds for hikers.

Unfortunately, mice and other rodents sometimes claimed hikers’ food, especially at backcountry shelters usually built close to water along the trail. Kris remarked it was often better to leave his pack open rather than attempt to seal it shut for mice to chew through at these “lean-tos”. Metal cages to keep hikers locked away from bears could also be found surrounding the perimeter of some shelter locations. Throughout his entire trip, Kris counted 21 black bears, some of which impressed him with their climbing skills. Other animals he mentioned seeing were free ranging ponies in Virginia, and snakes warming on the tortuous boulders along the trail in Pennsylvania. Perhaps the most unsettling slide of the evening showed a large group of black millipedes, of which the African variety may reach a length of 12 inches. Kris had unknowingly set up camp in the middle of the night over a nest of these arthropods. Evidently, that experience took a few days to forget.

In concluding his presentation, Kris explained that he finished this north to south thru-hike at Springer Mountain, Georgia on November 4, 165 days after starting in the Hundred Mile Wilderness in mid-May. He felt happy the trip was finally over, but sad at the same time. He described it as a powerful moment.

Thank you Kris for sharing this fascinating adventure with the audience and members of Grasslands Naturalists. Your dedication is an inspiration to all of us.

Gray Jay: Canada’s National Bird

The Canadian National Geographic Society has recommended that the Gray Jay (Whiskey Jack) for Canada’s National Bird. The reasons for their choice include: it is present throughout Canada, it doesn’t migrate, and it’s a lover of winter, even laying its eggs in February. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology says the bird is deceptively cute and intrepid. Robert Bateman says: “Like Canada, the gray jay is a quiet bird but not shy. In fact, it is friendly in a gentle way which is the way I like to think of us Canadians”.

GN Field Trips, Activities and Events in 2016

12 Neighbourhood Walks; 9 Field Trips; 12 MHIP Events; 8 Other Activities
By Gary Martin and John Slater

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
19-January	John Slater led Cross-Country Skiing Field Trip in Elkwater
31-March	Rob Gardner led Field Trip to Ross Creek Nature Park
02-April	Ben Verner led Annual Field Trip to Manyberries
11-April	GN Issues Committee Walk in Brier Run
12-April	Neighbourhood Walk in Marlborough Coulee led by John Slater
19-April	Neighbourhood Walk in Marlborough, Kin and Ajax Coulees led by John Slater
28-April	Neighbourhood Walk NECH near McCoy School led by Martha Munz Gue
03-May	Neighbourhood Walk SE Hill Trail led by Rob Gardner
07-May	City Wide Cleanup Brier Run/Family Leisure Centre
11-May	Dwayne Myers led Photos of Brier Run for City Submission
14-May	Phil Horch led Annual Trip to Sauder/Murray Reservoirs
15-May	MHIP Early Blooms Wildflower Walk in Police Point Park
17-May	Neighbourhood Walk NECH starting at Northland Coop to Ponds led by Milt Spitzer
29-May	MHIP Spring Flower and Bird Count in Med Hat area
31-May	Neighbourhood Walk Seven Persons Creek to Saratoga Park led by John Slater
05-June	Neighbourhood Walk in Ranchlands led by Ian & Angela Turner
07-June	Neighbourhood Walk in Strathcona Island Park led by John Slater
11-June	City Tree Planting Event in Strathcona Island and Lions Parks
12-June	MHIP Prairie Patch Walk in Brier Run/Family Leisure Centre
14-June	Neighbourhood Walk in Ranchlands Riverine led by Dwayne Myers
18-June	Milt Spitzer led Nature Field Trip to Princess Springs & Bindloss
19-June	MHIP Berm Walk at Strathcona Island and Lions Parks
21-June	Neighbourhood Walk in East Glen Coulee led by Dave McKenzie
22-June	MHIP Ranchlands Walk #1 by Brenda Powder
25-June	Dave McKenzie led Butterfly Count in Elkwater: cancelled due to bad weather
26-June	Elaine Spitzer led walk of 1st St SE Heritage Homes
28-June	Riparian Health Assessment Training
05-July	Rob Gardner led Nature Tour Field Trip to Mitchell's Ranch
09-July	Phil Horch led Annual Field Trip to Cypress Hills Birding
13-July	MHIP Ranchlands Walk #2 by Brenda Powder
09-August	Tree Wrapping in Police Point Park
24-August	MHIP Ranchlands Walk #3 by Brenda Powder
27-August	MHIP Kin Coulee Pond Activity
31-August	Neighbourhood Walk & Activity in Ranchlands Phase 2F&G led by John Slater
24-September	Great Cdn Shoreline Cleanup of Strathcona Island Park
30-September	Great Cdn Shoreline Cleanup of Lions Park
02-October	MHIP Alberta Cultural Days Festival in Police Point Park
15-October	MHIP "I Spy a Beaver" in Police Point Park
27-October	Neighbourhood Walk in Ranchlands led by Ian & Angela Turner
04-December	MHIP Lions Club Christmas Hayride
18-December	MHIP MH Christmas Bird Count & Potluck Supper



GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS

Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8

Membership Form for 2017

YES! I would like to be part of the Society of Grasslands Naturalists.

Name: _____ Name of 2nd Family Member: _____

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

City / Prov: _____ Family: \$25/year _____

Postal Code: _____ Organization: \$25/year _____

Telephone: _____ Donation: _____ Tax Receipt Available

Email: _____ TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

Prefer to receive GN Chronicle by: Post _____ Email _____

Signature(s): _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

Informed Consent and Waiver Form for 2017

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

I affirm that as a participant I am prepared to stay with the group and follow the directions of the coordinator. If I choose to bring my child(ren)/ward(s), I will ensure they also 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 and events which may result in injury to me or result in my death.

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, 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.

Photograph Release

The Grasslands Naturalists have my expressed permission to use photographs of me in their publications.

Email Consent

The Grasslands Naturalists have my expressed consent to email me with information regarding my membership. Should I choose to revoke this consent, I may do so at any time by contacting Grasslands Naturalists to that effect.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____