

# THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Photo by Dwayne Myers

## December 17, 2017

### Christmas Bird Count During the Day

**Potluck Dinner @ 5:30PM:** Note it isn't necessary to participate in the count to take part in the Potluck Dinner. Just bring a dish of your choice (salad, main course or dessert), your own cutlery and dishes and enjoy the great food and fellowship of like-minded members and friends.

## Executive

<b>President</b>	<b>Hugh Armstrong</b> <a href="mailto:armstrongg.h@telus.net">armstrongg.h@telus.net</a>	<b>526-1003</b>
<b>Vice-President</b>	<b>Anne Bernhardt</b>	<b>527-2792</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Betty Rainville</b> <a href="mailto:brainville@telus.net">brainville@telus.net</a>	<b>527-4949</b>
<b>Treasurer and Memberships</b>	<b>Eileen Cowtan</b> <a href="mailto:ecowtan@hotmail.com">ecowtan@hotmail.com</a>	<b>526-1264</b>
<b>Past-President</b>	<b>Dave McKenzie</b> <a href="mailto:naturist@telus.net">naturist@telus.net</a>	<b>527-1701</b>
<b>Directors at</b>	<b>Ian &amp; Angela Turner</b> <a href="mailto:ianang@telus.net">ianang@telus.net</a>	<b>526-1350</b>

## 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](http://www.facebook.com/policepointpark)

**Young Artists Inspired by Nature:** Students from three local High Schools created this impressive display being shown at the Nature Centre throughout December.

**Christmas Bird Count and Potluck Dinner:** On Sunday, December 17. Dinner at 5:30PM; bird count during the day. For information contact the Nature Centre.

**Project Feeder Watch:** On Fridays and Saturdays through to April 6. Come and help count the birds at the feeders in comfortable surroundings.

**Packing Parties: TBA:** With the upcoming upgrade to the Nature Centre everything will have to be packed up. The Nature Centre needs your help. Contact the Nature Centre for details.

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 10<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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:** 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, Sept. - May **Board Meetings:** 1<sup>st</sup> 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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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.**

## Member's Corner

Grasslands Naturalists extend to one and all our best wishes to you and yours during this festive season and our hopes for a great, happy and healthy New Year.

With the upcoming New Year just around the corner it is time again to think, and do, something about renewing our membership in GN. Also a gift annual membership to someone who is interested in the natural world would be an inexpensive and relevant gift. If you so wish donations can also be made to the Grasslands Naturalists Society. All donations over \$10 will be receipted for use in your Income Tax submissions. Presently our membership stands at 83.

Our Treasurer, **Eileen Cowtan**, reported at our last general meeting that our share of the funds from the recent Casino have already been received and the amount totaled a bit over \$14,000. A great big thanks to all the volunteers who made this venture a success.

At our last general meeting, **Linda Fisher**, volunteered to take over the co-ordination of the Indoor Program. Thank you so much for stepping forward to take on this task. We look forward to continued excellence in speakers and programs. We also thank **Dave McKenzie** for doing such a great job during the past few years. He has arranged the upcoming programs until June, 2018.

It is with great sadness that we report that **Lisa Bey, Volunteer Co-ordinator**, will be leaving us as her husband is relocating to Wisconsin for work. Lisa did a great job at the Nature Centre and she will be truly missed. All the best in your new endeavours, Lisa.

In the November issue of the 'Chronicle', Angela and Ian Turner, our representatives to Nature Alberta, noted that the executive at Nature Alberta decided to distribute their e-magazine, free of charge, to all club members on a one-year trial basis. Towards that end, they are asking for the email addresses of our members. If you **do NOT want** these quarterly issues sent to your email address contact Eileen Cowtan to remove your email address from our submission. Please notify Eileen by the end of this month. You may contact her at [ecowtan@hotmail.com](mailto:ecowtan@hotmail.com) or phone [403-526-1264](tel:403-526-1264).

Nature Alberta, based in Edmonton, is a federation of several natural history organizations in this province. Grasslands Naturalists has been an active part of the federation for many years. Dennis Baresco, former Chief Interpreter of the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program has been editor of their magazine, which is published quarterly, for several years. It is a high quality publication with good editorials, articles and photographs.



Photos by Dwayne Myers

## President's Message

December has arrived and the busy holiday season is upon us!

Happenings this month:

- We have decided to try a general email of each month's GM minutes as a way of informing those who don't make the meetings, and, as a way to speed up the GM by having everyone who does attend the meeting prepared to discuss or move acceptance. We will see how it works and get some feed back from the membership.
- The Lions Christmas Hay Ride was a rousing success again, with close to 900 people coming out and enjoying the rides, crafts, hot dogs, hot chocolate and popcorn. The weather did its part with a heavy snow giving a Christmas ambiance over the afternoon. Thanks to all those who volunteered their time and to the patience everyone showed on the icy hill at the end of the day!
- We are in negotiations with the city over a new contract for the Nature Centre and IP. We are hoping to have this wrapped up by the end of the year.
- The proposed renovations of the Nature Centre are proceeding very slowly. It is doubtful we will see much happening until February; so there is a good chance we will get one more GM in at the Nature Centre in January.
- Our Birding Trails Booklet went to the printers Dec 5<sup>th</sup>. We will have 2500 copies available sometime in January.
- And finally a good bye and big thank you to Lisa Bey as she returns to Wisconsin! We will miss you Lisa.

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.**

## **Paddling the Mackenzie River (summarized by B. Rainville)**

Kris Samraj, a witty and entertaining speaker, captivated GN members at the November 28<sup>th</sup> General Meeting with his presentation on his five week journey down Canada's longest river, The Mackenzie. On July 8, 2001, Kris and friend Zaak were driven to Fort Providence where they met up with Ty and Eric and began their river journey to Tuktoyaktuk in two canoes.

Black flies and large mosquitoes provided a rude awakening to Kris and friends at their first campsite, but eventually their skin became accustomed to the attacks. On a more positive note, Kris talked about the meditative aspect of the trip and the simple daily routine that required little decision making. He also mentions the profusion of wild flowers along the way, as well as the unbelievable abundance of Jackfish (Northern Pike).

Kris's slides showed the varied terrain along the route. One dramatic example is the Ramparts, a spectacular 11 km. long limestone cliff gorge barely 500 metres wide and up to 40 metres high. This feature is upstream from Fort Good Hope. We also saw the Pingos, which are small hills covered with tundra on the outside and containing a core of ice, created through processes of freezing and thawing and located near Tuktoyaktuk.

As opposed to the natural terrain, Kris's slides also featured man-made influences including Our Lady of Good Hope church located in the tiny community of Fort Good Hope and highlighting an unusual deep blue ceiling sprinkled with yellow stars. Later, at Inuvik, we viewed slides of Our Lady of Victory Church, sometimes known as the Igloo Church because of its dome shape. This building was made completely of wood with impressive interior paintings done by a local artist.

Kris's presentation could have ended on a tragic note, as a huge wave flipped his canoe near the beach at Tuktoyaktuk. Fortunately, local residents came to the shore to help, and the four wet travellers were invited to dinner by a generous and hospitable family.

Thank you for taking the time from a busy schedule to speak to us Kris. Your slides and presentation definitely help us to visualize this formidable canoe trip on The Mackenzie River.

## Exciting Sightings by Robert Frew

Birding can be slow during the transition from fall to winter; however avian numbers and diversity usually improve in time for the Christmas Bird Count. Small numbers of Common Mergansers, and Common Goldeneye, have been sighted in the company of overwintering Canada Geese on stretches of open water on the South Saskatchewan River. A pair of Bald Eagles is already re-establishing territory across the river from Police Point Park, where they have nested successfully in previous years. Recent exciting sightings reported include the following:

**Snowy Owl-** The first Snowy owl sighting this winter was reported by Dan Schiebelbein. The owl was spotted on November 14<sup>th</sup>, just as it landed at the top of a large tree in a field south of Twp Rd 120 and just east of Rge Rd 72. On November 18<sup>th</sup> three Snowy Owls were reported; the first one was perched on a pivot on the south side of Twp Rd 120 between Rge Rd 74 & 75, the second and third were seen close together perched on the ground on the north side of Twp Rd 114 between Rge Rd 73. In winter the pastures and fields bordered by Twp Roads 114 and 120, and Rge Roads 71 and 75, north of Seven Persons have proven to be good habitat for seeing this iconic arctic species. Four additional searches of this area during the last week of November produced five more owls.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl-** This small owl which is rare in the grasslands region, can occasionally be seen in our riparian areas. On November 21<sup>st</sup> several GN birders observed a sleeping Northern Saw-whet Owl in the bushes surrounding the Police Point Park Nature Centre parking lot. (editors note: this bird was initially spotted by R. Frew). The owl was seen only on one day.

**Winter Finches-** These nomadic winter visitors from northern climates and boreal habitats, move south in search of seed and cone crops. Six Pine Siskins were observed at the feeders at the

Police Point Nature Centre on November 26<sup>th</sup>. This finch species is best identified by the yellow streaks on its wings. Dan and Mark Schiebelbein observed eight Red Crossbills along the road to Reesor Lake in the Cypress Hills on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and also encountered a fairly large flock of Common Redpolls. Pine Grosbeak sightings continue to be reported in our city parks. Winter finches are irruptive and sightings can be erratic.

**Pileated Woodpecker-** This is the largest of Alberta's woodpecker species, and is considered rare in the grassland region. Irregular sightings have been reported in the cottonwoods along the South Saskatchewan Valley. The most recent local sighting, in the backyard of her residence on the Southeast Hill, was reported by Linda Carney on December 3<sup>rd</sup> (her photograph of this bird is on page 6).

**Northern Shrike-** On December 7<sup>th</sup>, Dan Schiebelbein witnessed an unusual sighting involving three Blue Jays and a Northern Shrike at the bird feeder on his Holsom Road acreage. The shrike chased and attacked the jays, and vice-versa, in an aggressive altercation which lasted for approximately five minutes. The Northern Shrike is a migrant and winter visitor in Southeastern Alberta. There have been numerous Blue Jay sightings in the past month.

**Raptors-** Dan and Mark Schiebelbein flushed a Northern Goshawk from a caragana hedge at Longfellow Hall on Twp Rd. 112 on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. This raptor is the largest of our accipiter species. The brothers also counted six Rough-legged Hawks along the Jackpot Road which parallels the northern boundary of the Cypress Hills Provincial Park. Winter records for this buteo are common in the southern part of the province.



Photo by M. Spitzer

**Send your exciting sightings to Bob Frew: phone 403-526-4573, or e-mail [Robert.frew@shaw.ca](mailto:Robert.frew@shaw.ca)**

## Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

**Throughout December: “Young Artists Inspired by Nature”:** Students of the three local high schools have created this impressive art display. The exhibit will be up through December at the Nature Centre.

**Every Friday and Saturday: “Project Feeder Watch”:** Come and count birds at the Nature Centre Feeders for an hour or two any Friday or Saturday from now until April 6, 2018. If interested contact Marty Drut at the Nature Centre for more details.

**January: “Packing Parties”:** Items in the Nature Centre need to be packed up before the renovations begin. This is going to be a giant task and a lot of help is needed. If interested contact the Nature Centre for details. Refreshments and treats will be provided during these packing parties.

**Annual Waterton Christmas Bird Count: December 15, 2017:** Enjoy an hour or so of counting birds in your favourite part of the park! Self register at the Waterton Firehall on the morning of December 15 or the evening before. Meet at 2:00PM at the Waterton Park Lodge to share the sightings or email results to Pat Lucas at [pat.lucas.alberta@gmail.com](mailto:pat.lucas.alberta@gmail.com).

**Medicine Hat Annual Christmas Bird Count and Potluck Dinner: Count during the day and Potluck Dinner at 5:30PM at the Nature Centre:** If interested in doing the count contact Marty Drut at the Nature Centre but note that it is not necessary to participate in the count to attend the Potluck Dinner. The more the merrier at the dinner. Just bring a dish of your choice (salad, main course or dessert) and your own cutlery and dishes. The food is always delicious and the fellowship with fellow members and like minded nature enthusiasts is always interesting and rewarding. **The Potluck Dinner is in lieu of our monthly general meeting. The next general meeting will be held on January 23; details will be provided in the January, 2018 Chronicle.**

**January 2, 2018: Manyberries Annual Christmas Bird Count:** Contact Rob Gardner for more information or if you wish to participate in this count. Rob Garner’s contact information is (403) 527-2052 or email [gardner@telusplanet.net](mailto:gardner@telusplanet.net).

**February 7 and 8, 2018: 6<sup>th</sup> Native Prairie Restoration/Reclamation Workshop in Saskatoon, Sask.** Topics for this year’s workshop include Climate Change, Species at Risk, Soil Remediation, Grazing and Prescribed Burning, Wetland Restoration and more. For more information contact (306) 352-0472 or [pacap@sasktel.net](mailto:pacap@sasktel.net).



**Some More Recent Photos from Dwayne Myers**



< Canada Geese on the Ice

Middle Left: A Cedar Waxwing which is a part of a small flock of this species still hanging around Police Point Park.

Middle Right: A male House Finch at Police Point Park on of a flock of 20 to 30 which frequent the Nature Centre Feeders.



Another engineering wonder by the Beaver? Did they deliberately fell the tree so that they could use it as a platform to gnaw at the two standing trees?





## GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS

Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8

### Membership Form for 2018

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2018

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: \_\_\_\_\_