

SOCIETY OF GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS
Minutes of General Meeting – April 26, 2016
Police Point Park

1. Call to Order: 7:00 pm, Hugh Armstrong- Chair, Betty Rainville – Secretary
2. Review and Adoption of Minutes of General meeting February 23, 2016. Motion Carried.
3. Exciting Sightings: John saw Merlins in his area, while Marty spotted White - Crowned Sparrows. Milt saw Bluebirds making nests, as well as one nest with 3 eggs. Gary saw tropical Frigatebirds recently, outside Canada. Members observed local plants such as Lupines, Saskatoons, and Buffalo Beans in bloom.
4. Treasurer's Report and Membership: Eileen reported GN donation revenue for April was \$1,300., with April Membership donations at \$1,400. Total Current GN Assets this month are \$29,594.32. Motion carried. There are 69 paid memberships at this time.
5. Correspondence: Eileen said none received.
6. Priority Business:
 - a. Ranchlands Baby's Breath and Leafy Spurge: John said Corlaine's proposal for a \$6,000 grant from the city has been approved. GN/IP is to provide a match amount of \$6,000 and Volunteers' In-Kind contribution of \$5,500 brings the project's total budget to \$17,500. A student has been hired and will be starting in early May.
7. Interpretive Program Report: Corlaine said the Full Moon walk on Earth Day, April 22, was good with 15 in attendance. On Saturday, 40 people participated the Kin Coulee Cache In Trash Out event! May 15 will see an Early Prairie Blooms Walk on Sunday afternoon .Two additional walks are scheduled later. Two grants are being worked on: 1. Riparian areas-involving river programming, and 2. Upgrading the Wetland Program-involving a helper hired for 6 months, who will work with Marty. Corlaine said we are waiting on official notification of approval from FCSS on a major upgrade to the Volunteer Program.
May 29 is the Spring Bird and Flower Count at various Medicine Hat Locations. Let Marty Drut know by email or phone if you are interested in participating. The Nature Line is (403) 529-6225.
8. Committee Reports:
 - a. Issues Committee: John reported one meeting was held April 11 at the Leisure Centre. Marty and Dwayne led a walkabout in the Pocket Prairie Patch to observe the Native Prairie. June 12, MHIP will lead a walk to explore this same area near the Leisure Centre. A possible proposal to the City may be submitted to retain some of this original Prairie. John showed an example of a wildflower brochure similar to the one Martha is working on. She still needs submissions of wildflowers pictures. Dave wrote an article in the April Chronicle on Butterflies, Dragonflies, and Bumble Bees
 - b. Indoor Program Speakers: May's GM speaker will be Dominique Liboiron who will talk about his 3,300 mile canoe trip.
 - c. Field Trips: Elaine will contact Gary regarding the Heritage Walk. "Exploring Our Neighbourhood": John said the last 2 walks had a good turnout. He and Rob also explored the Ross Creek area recently. Martha will lead a walk Thursday, April 28 starting at 10:00 am at the Palliser Airshed Monitoring Station near McCoy High School. Ian and Angela Turner may lead a walk in the Ranchlands Phase 4 area in the future. Corlaine also has walks listed through the IP that may change occasionally. May 14, Phil Horch leads an Annual Field Trip to Sauder/Murray Reservoir. Meet at the Gershaw Drive A&W at 7:30 am.
 - d. Fund Raising Committee Update: Hugh said the Co-op has not responded yet to the grant application. Gary has had no news yet on Casino funds from the last Casino Fundraiser held.

- e. Budget committee: Hugh said Committees are reminded to get a budget to Paul. The Indoor Program Speaker Budget is needed as well as the Field Trip Budget.
 - f. MHIP Operations Committee Report: John reported this committee met yesterday, April 25. Copies of Corlaine's Chief Interpreter's and Tentative Schedule of Events and Displays for Spring 2016 and beyond have been submitted to the GN Board and will be available soon on the GN Website.
 - g. Birding Trails Project Update: The April Chronicle features Trail 5: Pinhorn / Onefour. A different Map continues to be shown monthly. Phil Horch will return April 27 after which a Birding Trails meeting will be scheduled.
 - h. Communications Committee: Angela Turner reported the committee held a meeting and formulated a budget. They are waiting for approval of this budget to do poster cards, a GN banner, and a Nature Centre banner. The group also hopes to do an upgrade to the website pending budget approval.
9. New Business:
- a. Tree Planting Update: The City will contact GN to act as guides one week before planting 2,500 trees. Please let Hugh or Dave McKenzie know if you are interested in training as a guide for this project.
 - b. SEAWA: will be holding their AGM April 28 in the Crowfoot Room at the College. Martha said the organization is looking for Board Members from GN to volunteer. Please let Hugh know if you are interested.
 - c. Donation of Art: Martha has kindly donated a painting of two waterfowl to GN, possibly to be used as a fundraiser.
10. Other Business:
- a. Where are we going as an organization? Hugh asked GN members for suggestions and ideas at the April 26 General Meeting. Recommendations and ideas were noted to bring to the next Board meeting.
 - b. Next GN Board meeting: Tuesday, May 3, 2016 at Anne Bernhardt's home.
 - c. Next GN General meeting and presentation: May 24, 2016 at the Nature Centre 7 pm
 - d. Adjournment: 7:30 pm with 30 people attending.
 - e. Refreshment Break.
 - f. Program: All about Amber by Dr. Ted Pike

All about Amber by Dr. Ted Pike

Grasslands Naturalists were fortunate to have Dr. Ted Pike answer some pertinent questions about amber, as Guest Speaker at the General Meeting April 26. Dr. Pike is a long time Alberta naturalist with a particular interest in insects. Between 1989 and 1995, Ted completed a Ph.D. on the importance and meaning of the Grassy Lake amber deposit.

Ted explained that amber is formed from fossilized resin from Coniferous trees. It is not the same as sap since buried resin turns into amber in 10 million years. The Juniper, which is a coniferous tree, is still producing resin. In the past, as resin flowed down the tree it trapped animals or plant matter such as no-see-ums (Ceratopogonidae), conifer needles, fossil nematodes, spider webs, and even mites on a midge, in its path.

Dr. Pike stated that 99.9% of amber comes from the Baltic Sea. Mainly it is found in the Baltic Region of Northern Europe where tons of amber are mined each year from one major mine. To a much smaller degree, pieces of amber from the sea floor are cast up by the waves and collected by hand, dredging, or diving. The next largest deposit of amber is found in the Dominican Republic where surface mines are used for extraction. This type of amber tends to be more expensive and is usually sold directly to buyers, who then sell it to jewelers. A third source of amber is Chiapas, Mexico, which uses small-scale mining. This Mexican amber is roughly 20 million years old.

Closer to home, Dr. Pike told us why the amber from Grassy Lake, Alberta deposit is special. Firstly, it is the only amber deposit in the world "in situ", or the only deposit that has not been moved from its original place of

deposition by waves or water. (This particular location is found in an abandoned open pit coalmine). A second reason making Grassy Lake amber special, is its evidence of dinosaurs. Fossilized feathers found in specimens from this area may suggest such evidence. Lastly, the Grassy Lake area amber is 78 to 79 million years old which makes it closest to the Cretaceous-Tertiary mass extinction event which is dated approximately 66 million years ago.

Dr. Pike was able to give us an idea of what Alberta was like 79 million years ago by specimens that he has found in amber. He developed a way to standardize measurements of specimens numbering 165 specimens per kilogram. The 165 specimens do not include fungi, plant fossils, or the odd invertebrate. In fact, Ted found feathers that measured about 65 grams, which is about the size of a Sparrow. Evidence of cockroaches is an indicator that the climate of the time appears to have been warmer than it is now. Sedimentary and fossil pollen studies help suggest that Medicine Hat looked similar to a bayou, with still water.

In concluding this interesting presentation, Dr. Pike invited GN members to take a few specimens of Burmese amber that he had on display. (The majority of pieces from the Grassy Lake area are 1 cm or less in diameter). He told us the density of amber is 1.08 grams/cm cubed, so it will sink in water. However, authentic amber will float in seawater. If you decide to search for amber; he suggested waiting for a rainy day so the amber shines and will be easier to spot. It may easily be confused with beer bottle glass, poplar husks or red shale. Finally, Dr. Pike reminded us that if we do choose to search for amber, all fossils and amber belong to the Provincial Government.