

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Goodbye Prairie Rose

Dr. David J Larson

Dr. Larson's major career, from 1977 to 2004, was as Professor, Dept. of Biology, Memorial University, St. John's Newfoundland. His principal research interests were in the biology of diving beetles in North America as well as in Papua New Guinea, Australia, and East Africa.

After retirement Dr. Larson moved to a small ranch on the north slope of the Cypress Hills. This has been his base for investigating the biota of the southern Canadian Prairies with special interests in the beetles and bugs that has resulted in a reference collection of insects found in the region. He is also interested in the changing prairie environment including the effects of the rose stem girdler (Coleoptera: Buprestidae).

Since 2000, the prairie roses have undergone a catastrophic decline in abundance: where there were banks of roses only small, sparsely spaced bushes now exist. The cause is the Rose Stem Girdler (RSG), *Agrilus cuprescens*, an invasive beetle native to Europe but introduced into North America. It first appeared in New Jersey in 1923 and for many years it seemed to have been restricted to eastern North America but in 2000 it was found in southwestern Saskatchewan and has subsequently been reported from across the Prairie Provinces. Dr. Larson will detail the ecological effects of this invasive species on the prairie rose. The ecological impacts to the prairies of several other invasive species of wood-feeding beetles will also be discussed.

Tuesday, February 26, 2019 at the Nature Centre

7:00 to 7:45 PM: Business Meeting

7:45 to 8:00 PM: Socializing

8:00 to 9:00 PM: Goodbye Prairie Rose by Dr. David J Larson

Executive

President	Hugh Armstrong armstrongg.h@telus.net	526-1003
Vice-President	Anne Bernhardt	527-2792
Secretary	Betty Rainville brainville@telus.net	527-4949
Treasurer and Memberships	Eileen Cowtan ecowtan@hotmail.com	526-1264
Past-President	Dave McKenzie naturist@telus.net	527-1701
Directors at Large	Ian & Angela Turner ianang@telus.net Linda Fisher sweetgrass@gmail.com	526-1350 548-7706

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](#)

Monday, February 18: 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM:
Kiwanis Family Day: Help is required to assist with equipment, building bird houses and all sorts of other tasks. Some of these happen before the big day so call if you have some time to donate.

What's the Connection: New exhibit from Parks Canada explores the role of fire in mountain and grassland ecosystems.

StoryWalk® Froggy Gets Dressed is on a trail in the Park through February.

Seedy Saturday: This event will be happening in March., Get your seeds organized and plan to attend. Spring is on the way????

Easter is late this year (mid April) but we thinking about it. If you would like to learn more about our egg decorating so that you can help out, please give us a call. We are contemplating a training session.

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

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:

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

GN Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/GrasslandsNaturalists/>
You must be a Facebook member to view most of it.

Volunteers Required

Volunteers are needed to move equipment into the renovated ski room and to continue to empty the sea cans. Volunteers are also required to man the front desk on busy equipment rental days. Call the centre!

For Sale

A water fountain, featuring a water bottle refill station, has been installed at the Nature Centre negating the need for a cool water storage for water bottles and hence forth the Nature Centre will not be featuring or selling cold bottled water. Therefore the fridge is now surplus and is for sale. It is a nice Cuisinart beverage fridge with a glass door which retailed for \$350. We are asking \$200. Call the Nature Centre (403) 529-6225.

Member's Corner

A big welcome to new members **Alanna Dean** and **George Duffy!** We anticipate meeting you at one or more of our upcoming events.

A reminder to all our members " if you haven't renewed your membership for 2019 now is the time to do so." At the end of this Chronicle is the membership application form.

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

February 6 to March 31: What's the Connection? An Interactive Display from Parks Canada at the Nature Centre. This exhibit explores the role of fire in mountain and grassland ecosystems.

Friday, February 15: Cross-Country Skiing at Cypress Hills: John Slater is planning on doing some skiing at the Spring Creek Trail. If interested meet John at the trailhead at **10:30 AM**. If snow permits on Family Day there is also the potential for some cross-country skiing at Police Point Park.

February 15 to 18: The Great Backyard Bird Count: Participate by counting and reporting all the birds you see during this period whether you count for 15 minutes or much longer on one or more during this four day period. Anyone can take part, from beginners to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. Report your sightings on line to www.birdcount.org.

February 18: Kiwanis Family Day; 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM: Help is required to assist with equipment, building bird houses, and all sorts of other tasks. Some of these happen before the big day so call if you have some time to donate.

February 26: Monthly Meeting and Presentation at the Nature Centre: 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Business meeting from 7:00 to 7:45 PM: The presentation by Dr. Larson entitled "**Goodbye Prairie Rose**" will begin at 8:00 PM.

March 30: Annual Field Trip to the Manyberries area to observe early spring migrants as well as to view Sharp-tailed Grouse Dancing on their lek (note: viewed through scopes thus not interfering with their courtship ritual). Led by **Ben Verner**. Meet at **6:00 AM** at the Tim Hortons along Dunmore Road across from the Medicine Hat Mall. This trip will return to Medicine Hat in mid afternoon so bring a lunch and also dress warmly.

April 4 and 5: Ecotrust Environmental Gathering in Calgary: GN Members are encouraged to attend. The GN Issues Committee has budgeted for financial assistance to one or two members for registration and transportation. Martha Munz-Gue (403 526-2226) has attended the previous 3 gatherings and can provide information concerning this gathering.

President's Message-February, 2019

So we got through January with very mild temperatures, but we are paying for it now! Enjoy the crisp air!!

I am addressing one issue only in this month's message and will start by repeating that issue, as it was written in the January President's Message:

“However, starting the year off on a note of desperation is not how we should be doing things, but an organization is only as strong as it's membership and volunteers. As I have written previously, we are in dire need of new committee and board members. There will be at least two openings on the Board and the Issues and Operations Committees have vacancies. These are the most recent areas to have positions available and there could be more. Please step up and support the Society by letting your name stand at the AGM in March.”

GN is no longer just a “club”. We have the mandate (contract) to manage an excellent and highly used Interpretive Program; we have developed many great projects - Birding Trails Guide, Wildflower Brochure, Butterfly Website, Field Trips, Neighbourhood Walks, Speakers Program, Baby's Breath Project and Tree Wrapping, to name a few. These all require someone to oversee them - the Board and Various Committees - which require volunteers.

The Board needs at least two new members, as Anne Bernhardt and myself have reached the expiration date. Anne has been around longer than I have and has taken on all the Executive positions but Treasurer, and is on her third go round as Vice-Chair. I have been President for three terms now and it is time for some new blood.

The remaining Board members - Betty, Eileen, Ian, Angela and Linda - have all agreed to stay on in their present positions, if nominated, and I thank them for their continued commitment to the Society.

John Slater has had to step aside from his Chair of two different Committees, and we have had two long time members- Martha Munz Gue, temporarily, take over the Issues Committee, and Bob Townsend, temporarily, the Operations Committee. We thank them for their commitments.

So time is running out; no Board members, no Committees and no executive = no Society. Think about it!

Hugh

Reminders:

- 1. Volunteers are needed at the Nature Centre for Monday, Feb18th -Kiwanis Family Day.**

Abstract of Lorne Fitch's Presentation in January, 2019

The presentation by Lorne Fitch, P. Biol. on January 22, 1919 was extremely well received by the attendees. One comment was that this was the best presentation they had heard. We certainly cannot do the talk justice here but below is an abstract of the talk, as prepared by Lorne Fitch.

Abstract: Stories are important - they help us navigate the world, make sense of it, see our place in it, and understand the changes in terms of benefits and consequences. We lack a single, cohesive, cogent prairie story. What we have are myths, fanciful, flawed descriptions of frontiers, endless space, and boundless opportunity. Myths are things that never were, but always are. They lead us, inexorably, to decisions that further erode the size, integrity, and biodiversity of the prairies. We can do better; we need to do better at telling the story of prairie. Based on a career of interacting with prairie, managing it, and thinking about the issues, this presentation contains thoughts about the story we should be telling, to change the hearts and minds of people about this fragile, superbly interconnected, impressive, and spiritual landscape.

Exciting Sightings by Robert Frew

There have been relatively few exciting sightings reported to Bob this month so he has decided to forego this month's edition. Suffice it to say that the Hooded Merganser continues on the river near the power plant and that Goldfinches have been recorded at the feeders at the Nature Centre.

Members Ian Wallis and Wendie Blackwell however are in the midst of many exciting sightings as they are presently touring Sri Lanka and India; not only that but they are certainly not in the midst of a cold spell. In spite of computer problems, Ian has been able to forward a couple of photos of birds of the day.



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater



Jungle Owl

Insect Apocalypse

When was the last time you had to scrape squashed insects off your windshield after a road trip? This occurrence (non-occurrence) is known world wide as the "windshield phenomenon". Researchers indicate insects are disappearing in a way similar to the reduction in bird numbers. For a long time we have blamed habitat loss, insecticide use, etc. as major reasons for the declining bird numbers but perhaps the decline of insects is a major factor. Perhaps the birds are starving to death!

The cover story in a recent issue of the New York Times Sunday Magazine called this decline "an insect apocalypse". <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/27/magazine/insect-apocalypse.html> . This story recounts many studies showing steeply falling insect populations.

In a 2012 Puerto Rico study the decline of insect eating bird species closely followed a decline in insect numbers. Birds whose diet is mainly fruit or grain showed no corresponding decreases. The Puerto Rican scientists attributed this decline to increasing forest temperatures (4 degrees F over 40 years). Bugs cannot regulate their internal temperatures thus with increased temperatures the sperm count decreases and the sperm lose motility. Studies in Britain, Germany, Singapore, Costa Rica, Brazil, Mexico and Australia also found insect declines. Three of the studies gave climate change as a reason for the decline.

This article has been gleaned from several sources, including articles by Jim Williams, Minnesota Star Tribune and Judith Golub, Edmonton Native Plant Society.

Another Reason for Insect Numbers Decline

By Gus Yaki, Calgary Naturalist

2018 marked the 25th year of continuous monthly surveys of the bird population along the Elbow River within Calgary. In those intervening years at least 16 species of once quite common birds have totally disappeared along this route. In recent years, many studies have attempted to explain the reason for the steep decline, especially in songbird numbers. In the previous article several causes are mentioned such as - habitat losses, increases in forest temperature (global warming), and pesticides. YES, all of them - and hundreds of other reasons are implicated, but I BLAME **Thomas Edison** and the development of his commercial light bulb!

Almost all baby birds need insects (mostly the larvae) as food to provide the protein that they need to develop and survive. However, the proliferation of the electric light bulb in the outdoors - in yards, on houses and street lamps, often burning all night, has not yet been suggested as a major cause for this decline.

We know that many insect species, especially moths, are attracted to lights at night - "moths to candles" - for example. If you leave your porch light on overnight, in the morning there will be some insects around it. Those insects, attracted by the light, fluttered around it all night long when they should have been mating and laying eggs. If the light is on every night, first thing in the morning, the adult birds soon discover this readily available bonanza for their own personal food. In eating them, they are eliminating the insects that are needed to feed their own future young.

Along the Elbow River, there has not been any significant environmental change that could explain the decline. The first species noticed to disappear were Western Wood-Pewees and Eastern Kingbirds, both in the Flycatcher Family, relying entirely on insects in the breeding season. Almost all the others, from Ruby-crowned Kinglet to Baltimore Orioles, also depend entirely upon insects for their food while here.

In North America, the steepest population declines appear to be in the most populated areas, especially in the eastern part of the continent. Insects are literally being sucked out of the environment, and many baby birds are dying of starvation in their nests..

Many day-flying insects also rely on other insects for their food - so they are also disappearing. As a result, the web of life is rapidly disintegrating - to our own peril.

Gus Yaki-403-243-2248

2018-19 Southern Alberta Christmas Bird Counts

by Teresa Dolman (dolman@utleth.ca)

Teresa has again put together a comprehensive report and summary of the results of the 2018-19 Southern Alberta Christmas bird counts. Space in this document doesn't allow for a full reproduction of the report but rather below is a very brief summary while on the following two pages are tables detailing count numbers. Should you wish the full report contact Teresa at the above email address.

The eight Christmas Bird Counts in southern Alberta included: Crowsnest Pass, Waterton Park, Lethbridge, Vauxhall, Taber, Milk River, Manyberries, and Medicine Hat. The number of species tallied this count season was 81 as compared to 83 last year. Depending on weather and number of participants, the number of species found on individual counts can vary widely.

With the exception of the Crowsnet count all other counts recorded relatively low numbers of winter finches; Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Pine Grosbeaks, and Pine Siskins. Similarly, although present, only low numbers of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks were recorded.

SPECIES	Crowsnest	Waterton	Lethbridge	Vauxhall	Taber	Milk River	Manyberries	Medicine Hat
Snow Goose					29			
Cackling Goose			33	2	2			
Canada Goose			29,445	850	6770	1		21,586
Trumpeter Swan		2						
American Wigeon								4
Mallard	5	4	1279		2010			2,495
Canvasback								1
Redhead								1
Ring-necked Duck								1
Greater Scaup								2
Lesser Scaup					1			5
Bufflehead		3						8
Common Goldeneye		7	254	1	47			110
Common Merganser		CW	18					13
Gray Partridge				19	17			8
Ring-necked Pheasant			21	3	10		10	47
Ruffed Grouse	2	CW						
Greater Sage Grouse							2	
Sharp-tailed Grouse	3						19	12
Wild Turkey	165		7					
Rock Pigeon	3		1274	40	183	132		778
Eurasian Collared-Dove			297	38	120	74	5	159
Mourning Dove			1					1
American Coot								4
Killdeer	5	CW						
White-faced Ibis					1			
Bald Eagle	1	CW	20		18	1		6
Northern Harrier				3				
Sharp-shinned Hawk			2					
Northern Goshawk								1
Red-tailed Hawk				1	1			1
Rough-legged Hawk		CW	1	CW	4	5		3
Golden Eagle	2	CW	2		1	1	2	2
Great Horned Owl			2	2	3	1	1	4
Snowy Owl				5	4		1	1
Northern Pygmy-Owl	CW							
Belted Kingfisher			1					
Downy Woodpecker	14	1	33	2	1	1		44
Hairy Woodpecker	6		CW		1		1	2
Northern Flicker	1	2	228	1	8	1	1	167
Pileated Woodpecker	2		1					
Merlin	1		7	1	1			3
Prairie Falcon			2	1	3	7		2
Northern Shrike	CW							3
Canada Jay	4	CW						
Steller's Jay	1							



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



Membership Form for 2019

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

Current and recent Chronicles can be viewed and downloaded from the Grasslands Naturalists website www.natureline.info/gn

* Required information. ** Required information for family membership.

+ Optional Information. For phone number(s), please note if it is a residence, cell phone or business number.

++ Information required if you wish to receive the Chronicle or Nature Alberta Magazine by email.

Informed Consent for Field Trips

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.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____



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 *Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)*. 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"/>	_____

As a GN Member, you can receive, free of cost, an electronic version of the quarterly Nature Alberta Magazine. To receive the magazine, GN must supply your email address to Nature Alberta so that it can email you the magazine. Please indicate your consent to receiving the electronic version of the Magazine by email from Nature Alberta. Yes No

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 2 nd Family Member
Date: _____	Date: _____