


# NEWSPACKET

January 2025

Journal of the  
North Okanagan  
Naturalists'  
Club

A close-up photograph of an American Dipper perched on a dark, rounded rock. The bird is facing left, showing its brownish-grey upperparts and lighter underparts. Its beak is a pale yellowish-buff color. The background is a blurred stream with water and rocks.

American Dipper  
photographed by Harold Sellers

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**North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)**

**P.O. Box 473**

**Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4**

**Email**

**info@nonc.ca**

**Website**

**www.nonc.ca**



*NONC acknowledges the presence of the traditional, ancestral and unceded lands of the Syilx and Secwépemc peoples who have resided here since time immemorial. We recognize, honour, and respect the Syilx / Secwépemc lands upon which we live, work, and play.*

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- Swan & Eagle Count Norbert Maertens  
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- Trips contact the club
- Website & Social Media Laura Barker  
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**Annual Membership Dues:**

- Couple/Family \$50
- Single \$35

see nonc.ca

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## The Vernon Christmas Bird Count: 2024, the 75th Edition

by Don Cecile

**MY** heartfelt thanks to the 45 observers who helped make the 75th Vernon Count a success! I appreciate the time you took to help whether it was counting birds at your feeder, trudging through swamps and forest, or helping organize the wind-up! For those of you unable to participate this past year, I hope you can join us for the 76th Vernon CBC!

It was another excellent year with 104 species on count day (highest count since 1993 and third highest of all time!) and 2 species for 'count week' (Bohemian Waxwing and Say's Phoebe) for a **total of 106**.

### Highlights/Lowlights:

2 new species for the count were recorded with Great Gray Owl and Double-crested Cormorant.

Dusky Grouse was a winter rarity not recorded on the count since 1999.

First time in history of the count that zero Bohemian Waxwings were recorded!

21,118 birds were counted, the most in 5 years.

Brown-headed Cowbird was recorded for the 4th time and furnished a high count for the species (3).

Mourning Dove outnumbered Eurasian Collared-Dove (211 to 133).

Mallard furnished a new high count with 5,644 individuals.

Wild Turkey furnished a new high count with 42.

Virginia Rail furnished a new high count with 7.

If we can encourage more birders to help next year, we could do even better!

Cheers,  
Don Cecile, Co-ordinator

In the following list of species seen in this count, those in bold face are considered winter rarities for our area. "cw" = Count Week sighting

Great Horned Owl	4
Northern Pygmy-owl	1
Barred Owl	6
<b>Great Gray Owl</b>	1
Short-eared Owl	2
Northern Saw-whet Owl	2
Belted Kingfisher	8
<b>American Three-toed Woodpecker</b>	1
Downy Woodpecker	12
Hairy Woodpecker	15
Northern Flicker	151
Pileated Woodpecker	6
American Kestrel	6
Merlin	5
Peregrine Falcon	1
Say's Phoebe	cw
Northern Shrike	6
Canada Jay	1
Steller's Jay	12
Black-billed Magpie	262
American Crow	109
Common Raven	128
Black-capped Chickadee	389
Mountain Chickadee	28
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	3

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*Christmas Bird Count continued*

Bohemian Waxwing	cw
Cedar Waxwing	37
Red-breasted Nuthatch	57
White-breasted Nuthatch	3
Pygmy Nuthatch	25
Brown Creeper	8
Pacific Wren	3
Marsh Wren	12
<b>Canyon Wren</b>	<b>1</b>



above: Marsh Wren, by Scott Thomson

European Starling	3,366
American Dipper	2
Western Bluebird	9
Townsend's Solitaire	14
American Robin	109
House Sparrow	691
Evening Grosbeak	24
Pine Grosbeak	6

House Finch	274
Red Crossbill	2
White-winged Crossbill	1
Pine Siskin	10
American Goldfinch	241
American Tree Sparrow	9
Dark-eyed Junco	888
White-crowned Sparrow	66
White-throated Sparrow	8
Song Sparrow	194
Spotted Towhee	5

<b>Yellow-headed Blackbird</b>	<b>2</b>
Red-winged Blackbird	1,281
Brewer's Blackbird	400
<b>Brown-headed Cowbird</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Snow Goose</b>	<b>1</b>
Cackling Goose	2
Canada Goose	3,387
Trumpeter Swan	23
Northern Shoveler	5
Gadwall	33
American Wigeon	49
Mallard	5,644
Northern Pintail	13
Green-winged Teal	22
Redhead	23
Ring-necked Duck	27
Greater Scaup	50
Bufflehead	41
Common Goldeneye	16
Barrow's Goldeneye	19
Hooded Merganser	41
Common Merganser	271
California Quail	942
Wild Turkey	42
Ruffed Grouse	3
Spruce/Dusky Grouse	1

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*Christmas Bird Count continued*

Ring-necked Pheasant	57	Bald Eagle	51
Pied-billed Grebe	21	Northern Harrier	8
Horned Grebe	34	Sharp-shinned Hawk	6
Red-necked Grebe	21	Cooper's Hawk	6
Western Grebe	9	Red-tailed Hawk	89
Rock Pigeon	71	Rough-legged Hawk	4 🌱
Eurasian Collared-dove	133		
Mourning Dove	211		
Virginia Rail	7		
American Coot	396		
Wilson's Snipe	5		
Ring-billed Gull	55		
California Gull	146		
Herring Gull	210		
Iceland Gull	2		
Glaucous-winged Gull	36		
Common Loon	2		
<b>Double-crested Cormorant</b>	1		
Great Blue Heron	9		
Golden Eagle	1		



Above: Double-crested Cormorant, by Jack VanDyk

This cormorant has been seen at Vernon's Paddlewheel Park over several weeks.

Left: Birders at sunrise at Swan Lake Nature Reserve

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## The Douglas-fir Tree

by Roseanne Van Ee

**IF** you're already familiar with Douglas-fir trees, then pass this on. It's surprising how few people know our local native trees and plants, or even the wildlife that requires them.

There are two trees everyone living in the Vernon area should know: the Douglas-fir and the Ponderosa Pine. Why? Because they're the major species of our North Okanagan forests and landscapes. And dead or alive, they're important to our native wildlife. The Douglas-fir is economically valuable as the timber producing king of western North America. It's also our typical, uncultivated, naturally fragrant Christmas tree. Did you have one?

You can often see it growing in a variety of forest types throughout BC. Here it grows from valley bottom up to Silver Star village. Our mature Interior Douglas-fir trees grow 20–50 metres (70–150') tall. Its leaves are flat, soft, individual needles 2-4cm (~1") long, that completely encircle the branches. New growth on the branch tips stands out brightly. And as the trees grow they lose their lower branches.



The young trees' bark is thin, smooth and grey with numerous resin blisters. On mature trees, usually exceeding 80 years, its thick and corky bark has distinctive vertical fissures caused by the growing tree's gradual expansion. This thick bark makes the Douglas-fir quite fire-resistant. The female cones hang down with scales overlapping distinctive long, three-pointed bracts which resemble the back half of a mouse with two feet and a tail. Take a look at one.

It's Latin name *Pseudotsuga menziesii* means "false hemlock" in honour of Scottish naturalist-surgeon, Dr. Archibald Menzies, who accompanied Captain George Vancouver in 1791. Its common name honours another Scott, explorer-botanist, Sir David Douglas, from the 1890s. Our original native Okanagan people called it tsk'ilhp's.

They ate its rare white crystalline sugar raw or mixed with black tree lichen or wild sunflower seeds. The wood made teepee/ lean-to poles and spear shafts. The boughs made roofing, bedding and flooring material. Today our homes are mostly framed with fir lumber and plywood.

Photo at left:  
A stately Douglas-fir

Squirrels, mice and birds love the Douglas-fir seeds. Woodpeckers and other insectivores feast on spruce budworm,

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## *Douglas-fir continued*

bark beetles and other insects attracted to these trees. Huge dead and dying Douglas-fir snags make fabulous Wildlife Tree habitats providing food, shelter, storage and cavity nesting. They also make awesome lookout perches and nesting trees for hawks, eagles, owls and osprey.

In moist forests, downed Douglas-firs become attractive nursing logs resembling fairytale woods for elves with mosses, lichens, mushrooms and tree sprouts. And you can often find large fir stumps in our forests; some with new trees growing up from them.

Now go outside and see if you can find a Douglas-fir tree. Can you see the mice hiding under the cone scales? If you have a Douglas-fir tree in your yard - enjoy it and take care of it. They attract birds, add to your property value and can live for a few hundred years. 🌿



Photo at right:  
Can you see the mice hiding in the cone?

## 2025 Swan & Eagle Count : Sunday, January 12th

To participate, contact  
Norbert Maertens:  
[nmaer10s@gmail.com](mailto:nmaer10s@gmail.com)  
tel. 250-503-8790



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## Fishing Line: A Simple Deterrent for House Sparrows

by Margaret MacKenzie

**December 8, 2024** — I usually have at least a half dozen House Sparrows come daily to feed on the black-oil sunflower seeds in my feeders. I put out no other kind of seed or I'd attract many more sparrows. They aren't keen on sunflower seeds but they will eat them. In their defence, they never seem to bully the other birds, but feed quietly among them. However, it's best to *not* try and help their population increase!

I read the article that you included [*an article published in a US bluebird club newsletter - Harold*] and why that hanging clear fish line from bird feeders will keep HOSP away, but at the same time it doesn't prevent the other bird species from using them. I have now tried it out for 7 days with success. It's still too early in the experiment to be sure, but at this point I suggest



anyone interested in keeping HOSP away from feeders try this simple measure.

Here is what actually is happening at my bird feeders



in my backyard. When I hung up short pieces of fishing line from the 2 suet feeders and the box feeder, two male HOSP flew into the Mock Orange bush, as they seem to usually scout before the rest come. They immediately flew to the suet and were immediately repelled! Just like that! Magic for sure.

left: fishing line hangs from this feeder, but the flicker is not deterred

above: fishing lines hanging from this feeder do not bother these finches

I was really shocked that such a simple thing worked. One flew away, but each day one or two have returned. In the beginning, one HOSP flew 4 times to the hanging suet feeder and stopped,

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## *Fishing Line continued*

hovered, and backtracked in the air away from the feeder! After that incident and one more time when it flew to the box feeder and the same thing happened, I've not seen them even try. The last 3 days, they just arrive, sit in the tree, watch the other birds, then leave. However, I'm worried they may figure it out with all this sneaky surveying.....so stay tuned.

lone female arrived, flew to the sunflower feeder, then seemed repelled as if by magic and left the yard entirely having had no seeds at all. It really seems amazing and I'm hoping others will try this simple deterrent to see if it will work in places where there are many more HOSP at feeders than mine. 🌱

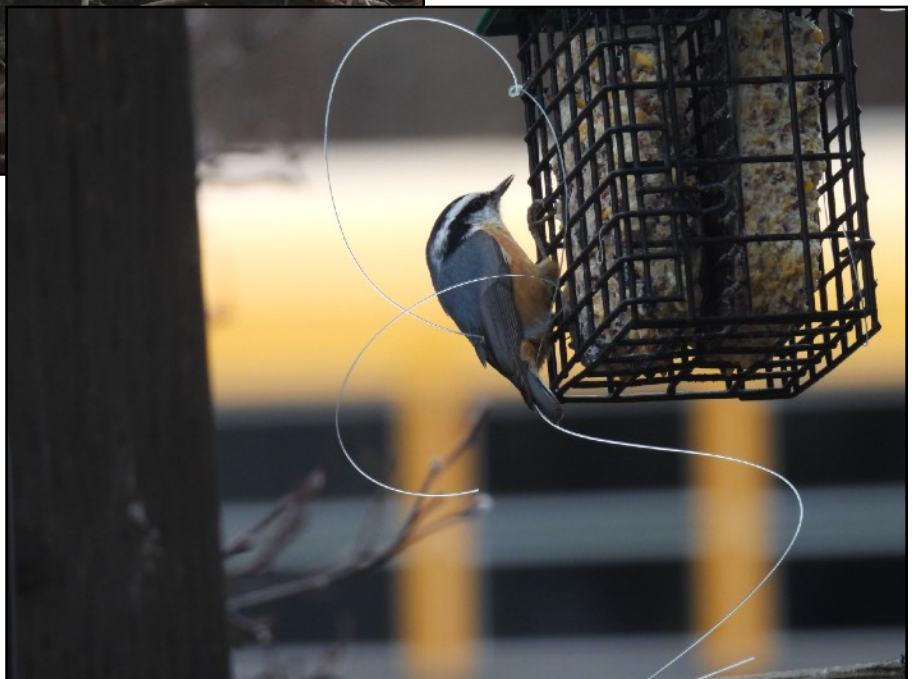


### *Editor's Note:*

*Give the monofilament fishing line a try and let us know how it works. The same techniques could be used at nesting boxes this coming spring and summer.*



above: HOSP watching from the Mock Orange. The other birds never seem to notice the fishing line, such as the nuthatch in the photo at right



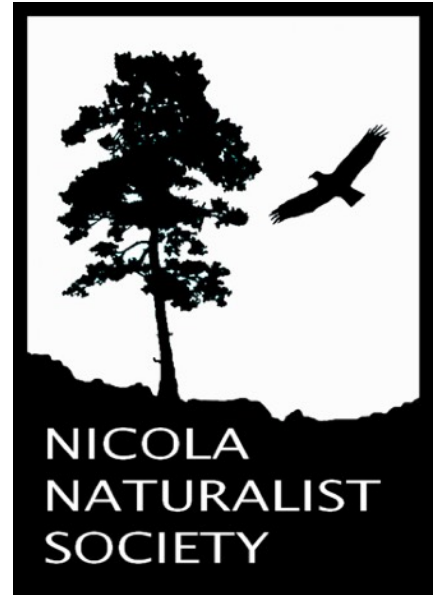
**December 21 Update** — It's been nearly 3 weeks that the clear fishing line has worked to keep House Sparrows from my feeders and even from my yard. After the first few days, NO HOSP came to my yard at all. Yesterday, one

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## Nature in the Rainshadow

The Nicola Naturalist Society is hosting the 2025 BC Nature Spring conference and AGM in Merritt, 22-24 May 2025.

Details at <https://bcnature.org/2025-bc-nature-conference-and-agm/>



## Vernon Creek rehabilitation in Polson Park brings benefits

by Harold Sellers

Many NONC members have enjoyed the presence of two American Dippers in Polson Park this winter.

The rehabilitated section (pictured at right) is obviously very much to their liking. The fast-moving shallow water, flowing over a stoney creek bed, provides perfect feeding conditions. The dipper “dips” under the water, searching for invertebrates in crevices and under stones.

The cover photo on this newsletter is of a dipper I photographed there in December. 🌿



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## What have you been reading?

I have this page to fill and thought it would be interesting to hear from our members what books (of a naturalist interest) you have been reading. Here are two that I have recently enjoyed. Send us your suggestions for a future newsletter. — Harold Sellers

### Stewards of Splendour: A History of Wildlife and People in British Columbia

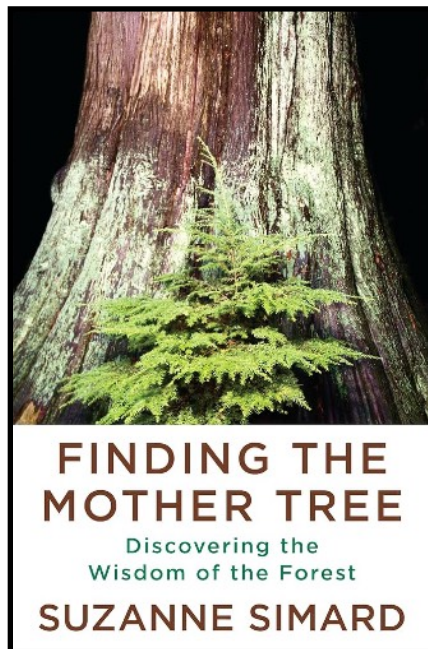
by Jennifer Bonnell. Royal British Columbia Museum Publications, 2023

From concern over dwindling orca populations to debates over the effects of hunting, resource extraction, roads and infrastructure, the subject of wildlife both unites and deeply divides British Columbians.

Spanning the deep history of human relationships with wildlife, from pre-contact Indigenous land stewardship to the present day, *Stewards of Splendour* explores the ways that scientists, Indigenous leaders, hunter-conservationists and naturalists have contributed to and contested wildlife management practices in British Columbia.

Drawing upon historical and scientific literature and over 80 interviews, the book examines the effects of rising scientific understanding and public appreciation for the province's fish and wildlife and the gradual reclamation of land and management authority by First Nations.

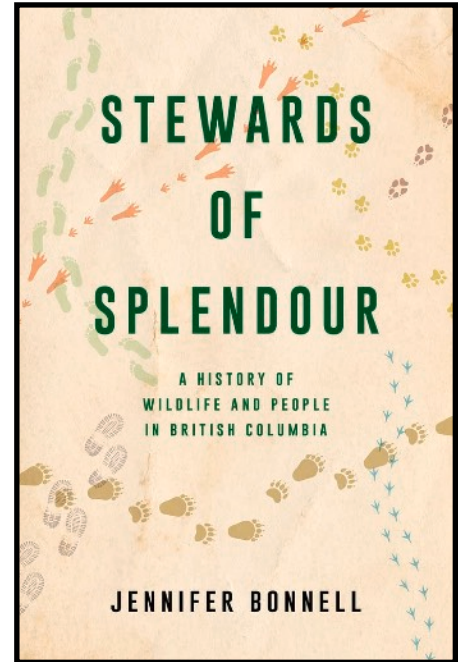
As it has in the past, Canada's western-most province, with its astonishing biodiversity and unusually high proportion of public land, continues to carry the greatest opportunities for wildlife conservation and to risk the greatest losses. ◊



### Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest

by Suzanne Simard. Penguin Canada, 2021

In her first book, Simard brings us into her world, the intimate world of the trees, in which she brilliantly illuminates the fascinating and vital truths – that trees are not simply the source of timber or pulp, but are a complex, interdependent circle of life; that forests are social, cooperative creatures connected through underground networks by which trees communicate their vitality and



vulnerabilities with communal lives not that different from our own. Simard writes – in inspiring, illuminating, and accessible ways – how trees, living side by side for hundreds of years, have evolved, how they perceive one another, learn and adapt their behaviors, recognize neighbors, and remember the past; how they have agency about the future; elicit warnings and mount defenses, compete and cooperate with one another with sophistication, characteristics ascribed to human intelligence, traits that are the essence of civil societies – and at the center of it all, the Mother Trees: the mysterious, powerful forces that connect and sustain the others that surround them.

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## NONC CALENDAR

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

NONC monthly meetings are held in the Emerald Room at The Schubert Centre for Seniors, 30th Ave., in downtown Vernon. No entry fee. Members and non-members welcome. Coffee and cookies served!

**Next meeting : 7:00 pm, Wednesday, January 8th:**  
Guest presenter: The Interior Wildlife Rehabilitation Society.

### SATURDAY NATURE WALKS

Join us Saturdays at 9:00 am. Visitors welcome. Dress for the weather. We do a lot of birdwatching, so bring binoculars if you have them. No dogs please. See list below.

DR 1 & 2 are generally suitable for almost anyone, of any age. However, if you have issues of mobility and/or stamina, you should speak to the leader before attempting.

DR 1 Easy — Suitable for most people. Mostly paved or good-surface path, fairly level with some gentle climbs.

DR 2 Moderate — Suitable for most walkers and hikers with no mobility or endurance issues. May have longer distance with steeper hills and switchbacks, some uneven and rough path.

#### Jan 11 – 9am DR 2

Grey Canal Trail, Blue Jay to Turtle Mountain. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Blue Jay Road (Old Kamloops Road to Goose Lake Road then left on Blue Jay Rd). Contact Jean at Jean.amatt@gmail.com

#### Jan 18 – 9am DR 1

Grey Canal Trail, Rugg Road north to McLennan Road and beyond a short distance, then return. Park in the trail parking lot on Rugg Road, a short distance off L&A Road. Contact Harold hikerharold@gmail.com

#### Jan 25 – 9am DR 2

Bear Valley Trail at Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park. Meet at the park entrance at the Cosens Bay parking lot on Cosens Bay Road. Contact Norbert at nmaer10s@gmail.com

#### Feb 1 – 9am DR 1

BX Creek North Trail. Trail follows BX Creek from 48th Ave to Hwy 97. Meet on Deleenheer Road, east of 20 Street. Contact Marnie/Paul at mpw660@telus.net

### FEBRUARY:

**Feb 5 Monthly NONC Meeting:** Pat McAllister: Nature on Vancouver Island

#### Feb 8 – 9am DR 1

Longacre Trail, Okanagan Landing. Meet at the small parking lot at east end of trail on Apollo Rd near Longacre Dr. Take Apollo Rd south off Okanagan Landing Rd. Contact Rod/Ruth at wereadquilt@gmail.com

#### Feb 15 – 9am DR 2

Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park. Grassland, Corral, Cairn, Lookout and Kidston trails. About a 5 km loop. Easy, good trail surface, some tree roots, some short climbs. Meet in the Red Gate parking lot on Kidston Road. Contact Harold hikerharold@gmail.com