

NEWSPACKET

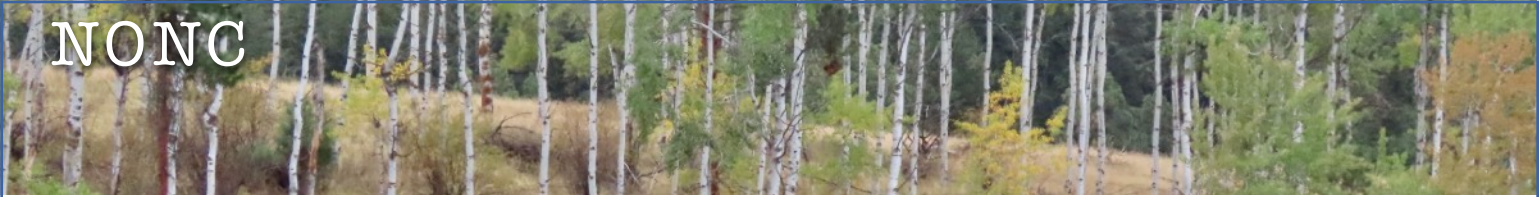
November 2024

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club



Black Bear
photographed by Justin Oblak

NONC



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 Secwepemc peoples who have resided here since time immemorial. We recognize, honour, and respect the Syilx / Secwepemc lands upon which we live, work, and play.

EXECUTIVE

- President Harold Sellers
250-307-3543
- Vice-President Eric Kowalski
604-600-6725
- Secretary Rod Drennan
250-545-4999
- Treasurer Marnie Williamson
250-545-4743
- Directors Stephen Brown
250-589-5009
Susan Ghattas
250-550-7063
Robert Hettler
250-309-7794
Pam Jenkins
250-545-0490
Eric Kowalski
604-600-6725
Pat McAllister
250-540-6284

LIFE MEMBERS

- Ray Arlt, Kay Bartholomew, Joan Heriot,
Phil Jones, Peter Legg, Malcolm Martin,
Frank & Mary Paul

PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Contact the following if you have questions.

- BC Nature Eric Kowalski
604-600-6725
- Bluebird Trails Margaret Mackenzie
250-542-2712
- Botany Margaret Mackenzie
250-542-2712
- Christmas Bird Count Don Cecile
- Conservation Harold Sellers
250-307-3543
- Cools Pond Rod Drennan
250-545-4999
- Hummingbird Banding Louise Breneman
250-542-4050
- Nature Walks Ruth Drennan
250-545-4999
- Newsletter Harold Sellers
250-307-3543
- Speakers Bruce Tattersall
778-874-4614
- Swan Lake Joyce Heard, Robert Hettler,
Margaret MacKenzie, Chris
Siddle, Marnie Williamson
- Swan & Eagle Count Norbert Maertens
250-503-8790 &
Rod Drennan
250-545-4999
- Trips contact the club
- Website & Social Media Laura Barker
519-532-6600

Annual Membership Dues:

- Couple/Family \$50
- Single \$35
- see nonc.ca

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Vernon Nestbox Report : Year End 2024

by Margaret MacKenzie

ALTHOUGH this summer was again hot and dry, many nesting birds, especially the Tree Swallows, did quite well. Earlier in the spring, in anticipation of hot weather, we had researched and picked a pattern for a heat shield to add to the nest boxes for sun protection. The shields, originating with Charlie Peti, and redesigned somewhat by Rod Drennan, were built by Venture Training. All eggs and chicks did better with this added sunshade. We now have thicker plywood built nest boxes stained an off-white, plus this extra sun roof separated from the box to allow an air passage. Hopefully, these changes to boxes will prove effective for the expected temperature increases in the future.

Some trails did well - perhaps because sources of food (caterpillars, grasshoppers, etc.) were present at the right time for the young to be nourished properly. Fledgling success for Western Bluebirds was very mixed depending on the location of the trails. Adventure Bay continues to be a prime example of Bluebirds successfully nesting in a Ponderosa Pine and grassland habitat. That trail with 26 total boxes, had 14 pairs of Western Bluebirds nesting with 62 fledged chicks. Some of the other grassland trails like Vernon Hill also did very well with 7 pairs of Western Bluebirds fledging 44 young.

In summary, Western Bluebird numbers increased slightly this year, Mountain Bluebird numbers remained the same as past years, House Wren numbers were lower than last year by nearly half but comparable to some other years as their numbers tend to fluctuate. The Seed Orchard nest boxes had 3

pairs of Black-capped Chickadees that did well and Swan Lake Nature Reserve had a pair that even had a successful second nesting which was quite a pleasant surprise. A White-breasted Nuthatch has nested successfully all but one year since 2018 at Adventure Bay - rather interesting especially if it is the same one.



Western Bluebirds bringing meals to their young
(Margaret MacKenzie)

The invasive House Sparrow continues to be a problem. Monitors with affected trails are mostly dealing very effectively with either oiling, pricking, or removing eggs to prevent any from hatching. One sad event occurred at Swan Lake Nature Reserve where House Sparrows relentlessly attacked and killed returning Tree Swallows. Before they could continue with further devastation, we closed up the nest box holes to prevent further nesting. The unhappy Tree Swallows stayed and continued to waste their time and energy trying to enter the boxes. We have since removed all the boxes located near the farm where the House Sparrows originated.

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Nestbox Report continued

We will continue to build and use more telescopic poles on our nest box trails as they are proving themselves in providing extra protection from predators. Nesting birds using them have had no missing eggs or chicks.

right: Bluebird trail on Vernon Hill (Margaret MacKenzie)

Dr. Laura Grieneison from UBCO began her Tree Swallow Research Project this summer at Swan Lake Reserve. She and her graduate student, along with the monitors of the nest box trails, Rob Hettler and Eric Kowalski, collected

the Tree Swallow nests after the young had fledged to test for parasites in the nesting material. Next year they plan to monitor the nestlings over the period of their growth, weighing them at different ages, etc. and collecting faecal samples for microbiome studies to study how the growth and survival of young are affected by climate change.

We held our first Vernon Spring Bluebird Workshop since 2019 this April 6 at the Vernon Public Library. It was well-attended by our bluebird trail monitors, NONC members and the public. As well, The Friends of Black Mountain asked for a presentation at their annual AGM which was held March 20th in Kelowna. They support the bluebird monitoring programs at Black Mountain Regional Park and two members from CONC (Central Okanagan

Naturalists' Club) monitor that extensive bluebird trail. A final presentation for Pathfinders at a Girl Guide Camp in September was held to share information on nest box birds and Bluebird Trails. Workshops are a good venue for monitors to share their concerns and stories, and to inform the public



about the responsibilities, time, and energy that monitors put into their nest box trails.

And, again, I thank all the Bluebird Trail Monitors who make our Bluebird Program happen. As well, a thank you to Venture Training who builds the nest boxes so well, to Rod Drennan who oversees the building of the boxes, and to Charlie Peti who helped design the first pattern for a sunshield. Finally, thank you to Norbert Maertens who is always ready to design and build telescopic poles to keep out predators, to help put them up, make signage, and generally help out where needed. Our program's success depends on all these people who help with their time and energy and expertise. 🌿

[see table on next page]

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2024 Nestbox Results

Total # of Nestboxes Available: **475**

Total # of Nestboxes Used: **274**

Cavity Nesting Species	# of Boxes Used	# of Eggs Laid	# of Eggs Hatched	# of Chicks Fledged	# of 2nd Nestings in same box
Western Bluebird	53	347	277	220	20
Mountain Bluebird	9	49	23	19	
Tree Swallow	172	1035	805	638	30
Violet-green Swallow	1	6	6	6	
House Wren	35	174	114	110	
Black-capped Chickadee	5	40	35	25	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	1	5	5	5	
House Sparrow	11	53	6	6	
European Starling	4	14	5	5	

New Signs

NONC has some new signage, thanks to a grant from the BC Naturalists



Foundation. One sign is already in place at the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. The A-frame sign will be showing up wherever NONC is at work restoring biodiversity and protecting the natural environment. 🌿



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Salish Sea Gull Project... a Vernon Connection

ON October 12th I spotted these gulls with colour bands at the mouth of Vernon Creek and Okanagan Lake in Vernon. B.C. — Jack VanDyk

Jack was able to track down Mark Hipfner at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

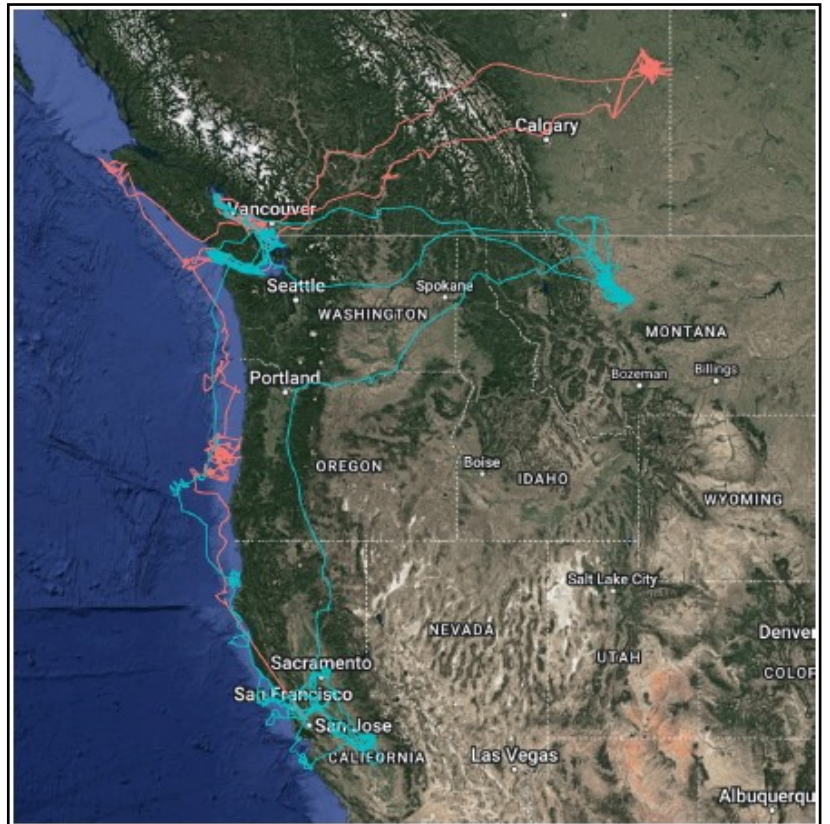
In an e-mail to Jack, Mark stated “Thanks so much Jack – we don’t get re-sights of our California Gulls very often (we only banded 20) so your photos are very valuable.”

In a further e-mail, Mark wrote: “We banded and put GPS tags on 20 California Gulls over winters 2022 (including yours, banded green-red-yellow) and 2023. The gulls were trapped at the Nanaimo landfill – they stage in the spring awaiting the start of the herring spawn and at that time feed regularly in the landfill where they are easy to catch. I’ve attached GPS tracks for 2 of the 20 gulls, which are representative of the behaviour of these gulls.

“The full analysis of the tracks will start in January.”

The Salish Sea Gull Project is part of Environment and Climate Change Canada’s Salish Sea Marine Bird Monitoring and Conservation Program. Our research assesses the health and habitat use of marine birds in this highly human-impacted area focusing on the movements, diets, and contaminant levels of gull species in the Salish Sea.

The project started in 2020 and is a
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Map 4. Year-round movements of two California Gulls tagged at the Nanaimo Landfill, BC. After tag deployment in March 2022 both individuals remained in the Salish Sea for the herring spawn. In early spring, one individual moved to breed near north-east of Calgary, Alberta (red track), while the other migrated to Montana (blue).

Both gulls left their breeding grounds in late summer and returned to the San Francisco Bay area, California by December. Interestingly, one individual (blue track) returned to its breeding site in Montana for a second year, but instead took an inland route that did not involve travelling through the Salish Sea.

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Gull Project continued

collaboration between Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and academia.

ECCC has banded adult and juvenile Glaucous-winged Gulls along the North Coast, Haida Gwaii, Metro Vancouver, Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. Adult California Gulls were also banded on the east coast of Vancouver Island. Researchers are investigating the movement, site fidelity, and survival of these species across the Salish Sea and beyond. Gulls are banded with a unique combination of two plastic colour bands on their left leg and a plastic colour band over a metal band on their right leg.

The Salish Sea is an important habitat for several species of gulls. Glaucous-winged Gulls and California Gulls are abundant, generalist foragers that occupy coastal habitats in both urban and natural areas throughout the year making them effective indicators of ecosystem health. Glaucous-winged Gulls are the largest and most abundant species of gull present year-round in the Salish Sea, and the residents are joined in winter by large numbers of migrants from Alaska and elsewhere. California Gulls stop-over in the Salish Sea on their migration to take advantage of ephemeral food sources, notably herring spawn, before dispersing to breed inland on freshwater lakes. 🌿

NEWS from BC Nature

NONC is a member of BC Nature

- The Nicola Naturalist Society is hosting the 2025 BC Nature Spring conference and AGM in Merritt, 22-24 May 2025. Mark your calendars now for this great event. Online registration and conference details will be posted after January 1st.
- Two clubs have recently joined BC Nature: Garden City Conservation Society, in Richmond, and the Hamilton Wetlands and Forest Preservation Society, on Vancouver Island.
- BCN Scholarships update - BC Nature received 34 applications for the Bert Brink and 36 applications for the Rene Savenye scholarships. Angelina Kellas was selected for the 2024 Rene Savenye and Eve Kenny was selected for the Bert Brink.
- BC Nature Science Fairs update - BC Nature has returned to the Science Fair Foundation fold. SFF facilitates the regional ceremonies etc. BC Nature clubs in each region participate in judging and attending the regional ceremonies on behalf of BC Nature.
- The BCN Science Fair award categories are for grades 10 – 12, grades 7-9 and grades K – 6 to be split between K – 3 and 4 – 6 projects.
- BC Nature Camp at Wells Gray Provincial Park - The Kamloops Naturalist Club hosted a camp at the Thompson Rivers University Research and Education Centre. There were 21 participants who attended from July 11 to 14. This was the first BC Nature camp since the pandemic.



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Disappearing Partridges*by Chris Siddle*

THE Gray Partridge is not native to North America. It's an Old World species with a widespread distribution in Europe and Asia. However, people have been introducing the species to various parts of North America since the late 18th Century. All told, Gray Partridges have been let loose in over 30 states and provinces. Populations have done particularly well in the prairie provinces and states, while in many other locations the introductions failed, some within a couple of years, as an introduction did at Vanderhoof (1931-1933), and some after a few decades, like the populations around Vancouver Island (introduced in 1908 with a final bird recorded in 1972.)

In B.C.'s Okanagan Valley Gray Partridges first appeared in the winter of 1916/17 when one collided with a powerline at Summerland. Presumably the southern interior birds were not introduced but expanded from populations introduced to north-central Washington State between 1913 and 1917.

By 1925 Grays had reached Salmon Arm and ornithologist J.A. Munro speculated that by the mid-1930s the partridge would "outnumber all the species of upland game birds combined." Munro was counting his partridges before they had hatches, because in 1926 or 1927 the Okanagan population crashed. Remnant populations hung on locally in open country such as irrigated hay, alfalfa and grain fields, sagebrush areas and orchards in the North Okanagan.

In the 1980s Gray Partridges were not hard to find in the alfalfa fields along Mission Road, fields around Head of the Lake, and the Goose Lake range. Given a few hours' search a birder could usually find a pair

(early spring) or a covey (the rest of the year) in one of these locations.

When I moved to Vernon in 1989 Gray Partridges had become scarce. Finding a covey made for a red-letter day as people used to say. As the 1990s passed there were fewer partridges even though birders from the rest of the province still believed that Vernon was the place to add the species to their lists. During the first decade of the twenty-first century a few birds were seen around Desert Cove Estates, but by 2007 even these stragglers had disappeared. Therefore, it's not surprising that in 2010 as a compiler of the North Okanagan bird checklist I listed the Gray Partridge as extirpated. Dumb move.



above: a Gray Partridge (AllAboutBirds.org)

On December 17, 2012, my friend, Gary Davidson, and I were covering our part of the Vernon Commonage for Vernon's Christmas bird count. As was our habit which had evolved over the decade and a half since we had been given the area, I drove Gary to Kekuli Bay Provincial Park so that he could walk the railway tracks to the north end of Kalamalka Lake. This route was productive; Gary

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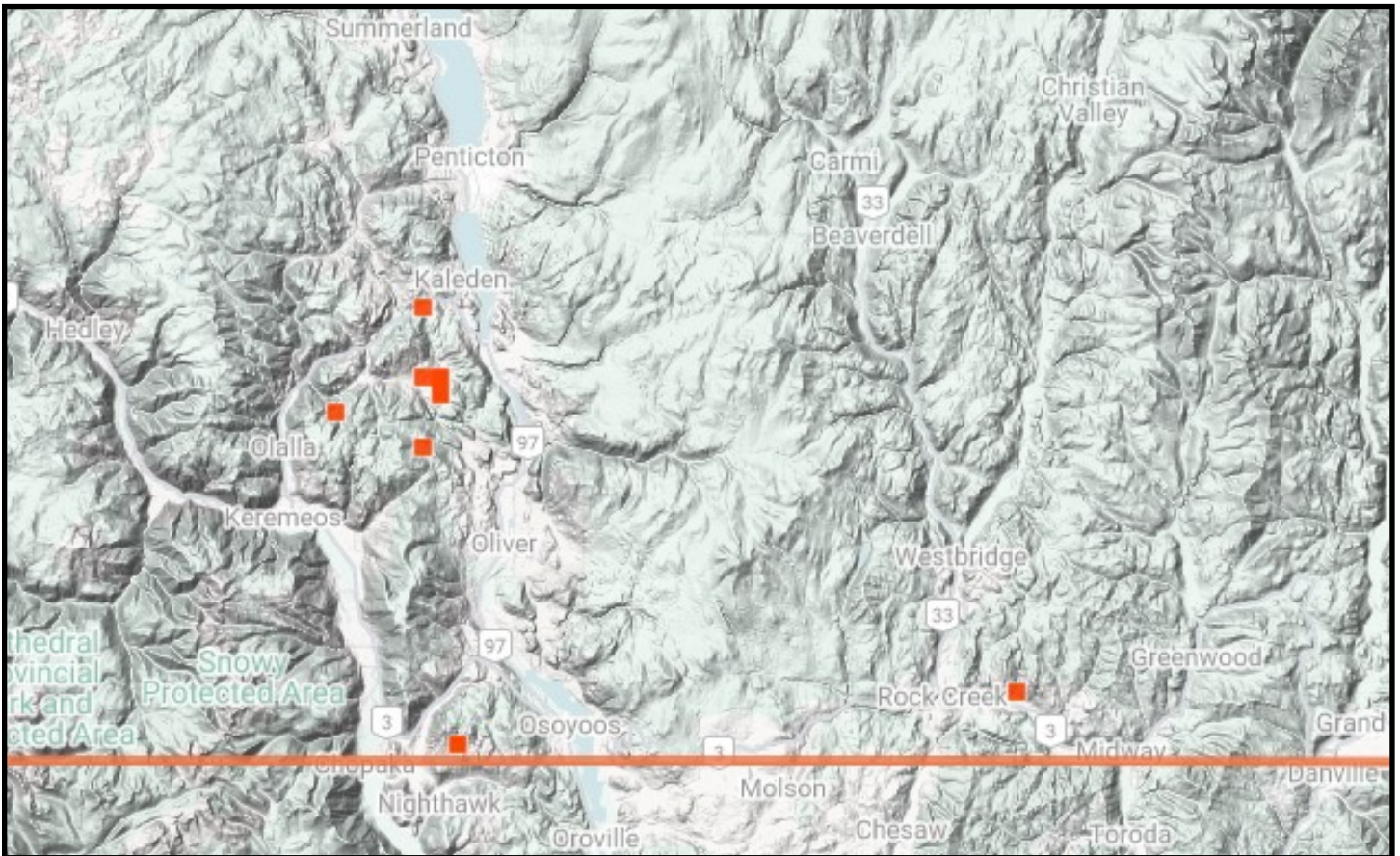
Partridges continued

usually saw a few species that we would otherwise have missed, including Barrow's Goldeneye, White-throated Sparrow, and Spotted Towhee. That afternoon about midway through his hike he flushed three small plump gamebirds. As they flew directly away from him, he saw gray upper wings, backs and tail centres bordered by rufous outer tail feathers. Gray Partridges!

But this is not a story of recovery. The birds Gary saw were survivors; a tiny population hanging on against heavy odds. But they were alive and well enough to make a point with me. Never declare a bird extirpated until many years after the last one has been seen.

Since 2012 single Gary Partridges have been recorded twice more. The most hopeful sighting occurred at the south end of Goose Lake, the species' old stomping ground. On September 13, 2017 as I was walking down the path to the thickets near the shore, a covey of about 12 Gray Partridges appeared before me. One bird was larger, probably a female, and surrounding her were several large chicks, well on their way to adulthood. Wow! Here was proof that the Gray Partridge, despite my gloomy prediction, had hung on. Somewhere on the Goose Lake Range boy partridge had met girl partridge, they had hooked up, as the kids say, and she had nested and hatched chicks: hope, albeit slim, for the future. 🌱

The map below comes from iNaturalist and shows the locations of sightings in recent years. In 2024 there have been seven reports of Gray Partridge, all in the South Okanagan. - editor



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Cooper's Hawk

by Jack VanDyk

THE morning of 17 October started out like a regular busy feeding day for our birds in the yard, but when I don't see any activity I know something is lurking here, and sure enough I spotted a juvenile Cooper's Hawk sitting on a branch in a pine tree not far from the deck, above some feeders and birdbath.

I first thought this to be Sharp-shinned Hawk as they usually tolerate me when moving around, compared to a Cooper's Hawk, as they usually take off when they see me come outside. However, when seeing the clean streaking, blocky head, and sturdy legs I knew this was a juvenile Cooper's Hawk.

This Cooper's was focusing intensely, paying attention to many California Quail feeding down below under cover of our native Rosebushes and sounding their alarm at the same time. When it took a dive I had to take cover on the deck as about fifty quail took off heading my way before veering off to



both sides of the house. One even hit the nylon netting in front of our window. Unfortunately for the hawk they all got away safely.

The hawk finally took off, most likely returning later for another try. Not long after, it was feeding as usual by the many birds, as they returned again to the yard, all being part of life for them.

It is always interesting to watch this interaction between our feeder birds and raptors. Oh how I love my "little paradise" bird sanctuary. 🌿

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Have Your Say About the Future of Our Community

By contributing to our:

- COMMUNITY PLAN
- TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The City of Vernon is updating its Official Community Plan and its Transportation Plan. Both are very important documents that will guide city politicians and staff into the future.

Vernon residents should take this survey:
<https://www.engagevernon.ca/ocp-tp/surveys/phase-2-community-survey>

below: an undated picture looking east over Vernon; Vernon Hill in the background



VERNON, B.C. LOOKING EAST.

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NONC CALENDAR

MONTHLY MEETINGS

7:00 pm, Wednesday, November 6th, at the Schubert Centre. Our speaker will be Louise Breneman on "Hummingbird Banding". 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!

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.

Nov 9 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Thomas Hayes Ecological Park in Spallumcheen Township. Take Otter Lake Cross Road exit from Hwy 97, follow this road behind the Tolko Mill and turn left onto Thomas Hayes Road. Contact Marnie/Paul at mpw660@telus.net

Nov 16 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the BX Ranch Trail. 2.35 km one way. Meet at the parking lot on East Vernon Rd. Contact Jean at Jean.amatt@gmail.com

Nov 23 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the 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 Norbert at nmaer10s@gmail.com

Nov 30 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the trails around Sparking Hill Resort at Predator Ridge. Easy to moderate with short steep sections. Great views over Adventure Bay and Head of the Lake. Meet in the trail parking lot on the left side of Birdie Lake Drive on the road towards Sparkling Hill. Contact Karen at reczuchkm@gmail.com

Dec 7 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk in Kalamalka Park. Start at Red Gate and take the Cairn, Outlook, and Parabola trails to loop back to Red Gate. Meet at the Red Gate parking lot on Kidston Road. Contact Susan at supepghat@hotmail.com

Dec 14 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Coldstream Cemetery. Bird watching at the cemetery and along the creek, perhaps adding on a walk to Friesen's Country Tyme Garden for coffee, and return. Take Howe drive south from Kalamalka Road to cemetery. Contact Margaret at Mhubble@telus.net