

NEWSPACKET

**Journal of the
North Okanagan
Naturalists' Club**

December 2025



Rough-legged Hawk
by Margaret MacKenzie

NONC

North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)**P.O. Box 473****Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4****Website****www.nonc.ca****Email****naturevernon@gmail.com**

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.

EXECUTIVE

President	Eric Kowalski 604-600-6725
Vice-President	Michelle Gregoire 250-308-2838
Past President	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
Secretary	rotational amongst Executive
Treasurer	Marnie Williamson 250-545-4743
Directors	Susan Ghattas 250-550-7063 Robert Hettler 250-309-7794 Pam Jenkins 250-545-0490

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 250-309-5896
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	\$55
Single	\$38

see nonc.ca

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Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park NONC's restoration and enhancement efforts during 2025

by Harold Sellers

IF YOU have visited this park since early November, or even before that, you probably noticed some additions to the features and appearance of the grasslands and riparian areas.

Every year of this current decade, NONC has been fortunate to be the recipient of generous funding from the North Okanagan Conservation Fund and the Greater Vernon Trails & Natural Spaces Grant. Both distribute grant money, designated by the [Regional District of North Okanagan](#), for local projects. In addition, we have had several grants from the [BC Naturalists Foundation](#), which was set up many years ago by [BC Nature](#) as an endowment fund to support clubs. Further, for 2025, we received a grant from [Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation](#).

NONC has also contributed financially to the work at Swan Lake.

Major projects a few years ago were the viewing tower and the Osprey nesting pole. Plantings have been done over several consecutive years.

2025 saw a continuation of some efforts and some new projects too, and those are what I wish to describe to you in this article.

It began in March when two stone benches were installed to provide resting stops along the grasslands loop trail. The approximate \$5,000 cost of purchase, delivery, and installation of the benches was equally shared by RDNO and NONC. Several NONC members generously donated to NONC to support the project.



above: one of the new benches

Then in April we had a workday at the park to gather and dispose of some of the old agricultural debris left behind from the days when the open areas were hay fields. Wood, metal, and plastic items were loaded onto pickup trucks and trailers and taken to the landfill.

When October rolled around, it was time for more plantings. A few trees and shrubs were added to previous plots, to replace plants that had not survived and to expand the varieties. A number of forbs - flowering plants - were added to previous plantings near the tower. And finally, we established four small plots of four varieties of native grasses. We'll be monitoring these to see how they do and, if successful, we may add more grasses in the future.

The planting day (October 2nd) was a huge success. Our partners at the [Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society](#) picked up the plants we had purchased from [Sagebrush Nursery](#) near Oliver, and brought them to the park. Then 63 volunteers set to work to plant the trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses. Besides the OSSS friends and NONC members,

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Swan Lake continued

there were employees from [Associated Environmental Inc.](#) volunteering their time, and dozens of students, with teachers and adult volunteers, from the [Awaken Inquiry Adventure Okanagan](#) program out of Fulton Secondary School. Within a few hours, the plants were in the ground.



above: some of the debris collected

This year we made the decision not to water any of the plants introduced in past years. 2024 had been a dry year and we had planted in May 2024, so helping the plants to survive was a necessity. But this year we felt, with better weather, we needed to encourage the plants to learn to survive on their own. If they didn't, we would replant or take other steps in the future. In the Spring of 2026, when plants begin to grow again, we'll be able to see how they have done.

Throughout the year the plots of plants required maintenance. This ranged from staking up plants with supports to installing mole guards around the trunks and stems. Mowing of grasses and weeds was also necessary several times. This helps keep the young plants from being smothered by other



above: students and others planting

right: Bluestem grass, one of the varieties planted this year



vegetation and also allows us to maintain and repair. Equally important, it

allows us to monitor the survival of the plants. This is particularly true near the riparian area, where the invasive Reed Canary Grass can grow taller than an adult man! Fortunately the club was able to purchase a battery-operated brush cutter in 2024 and it does a wonderful job.

Our friends at the Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society added a new feature in the park this year. There are now four photopoint stations (see picture on the next page) where you can place your

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Swan Lake continued

cell phone and take a picture. The pictures are then uploaded to the OSSS website. Since every picture taken at any photopoint will show the same view, over time we will document the vegetation growth and the results of our restoration efforts. Instructions are provided at each photopoint post. OSSS will add the historical perspective on their website in the future.



above: photopoint station

The final work day for a group effort was on October 31st. A large number of NONC volunteers came out for a few hours. During that time eighteen bird perching poles were installed, a tower with two bat houses was erected, more debris and old barbed wire fencing was removed, and the viewing tower was swept.

With the arrival of Winter we are again in monitoring-mode, keeping an eye on things at the park and anticipating what can be done in 2026.



Plans are in place and we are hoping for another grant.

As always, there are enjoyable and satisfying opportunities to be volunteer stewards at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. We hope to see you there! 🌱

left: bat house tower

below: perching pole



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When to report dead/dying birds

from the [*Interior Wildlife Rehabilitation Society \(IWRs\)*](#) website

TO REPORT waterfowl (wild geese, ducks etc) with “neurological symptoms” including behaviour such as falling over, not able to walk, swimming in circles, twisting neck in a repetitive movement, yet without an obvious injury (such as bleeding or having been impaled by foreign objects), call: 1-866-431-(BIRD) 2473 to speak to the Environment Canada HPAI hotline (responsible for migratory birds). Environment Canada officers give priority to reports of 3 or more dead birds (of any species) found in the same geographic location and await instructions by an officer for collection/removal. Report your findings, chances are there are more in the same area. **DO NOT TOUCH** a dead wild bird without PPE.

The federal and provincial governments are collaborating to monitor and investigate sick or dead wild birds.

The Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative provides excellent info on current disease outbreaks in

wildlife Canada-wide. Find fact sheets including Avian Flu information on their website.

Reporting:

<https://cwhc.wildlifesubmissions.org/>

Main page with handling instructions:

https://www.cwhc-rscf.ca/report_and_submit.php

Dashboard for stats, looks like Vernon has geese, owl and skunk:

<https://cfia-ncr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/89c779e98cdf492c899df23e1c38fdbc>

diagnostics/testing (if possible)

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/animal-health/animal-health-centre/diagnostic-testing-and-services>

Also this from the province of BC:

What to do if you find sick, injured, or dead wildlife

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/wildlife-conservation/wildlife-health/what-to-do-if-you-find-sick-injured-or-dead-wildlife> 🌿

Thank you to these organizations who supported our efforts at the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park in 2025.



**REGIONAL DISTRICT
NORTH OKANAGAN**
One Region, One Future



**HABITAT
CONSERVATION TRUST
FOUNDATION**



Together for BC's Biodiversity
Today and for the future

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Our Winter Solstice

by Roseanne Van Ee

THIS Winter Solstice, let's celebrate the Sun — our greatest source of life, energy, light, warmth, and renewal. It may feel unusual to praise the Sun in the depths of winter, especially for those of us tilted far from it as the Northern Hemisphere leans away on its orbital path. Brrr!

Fortunately, the same human ingenuity that led us to tap into fossil fuels may also help us solve the challenges they've created. But I digress — back to celebrating the Sun.

The Winter Solstice, on December 21st in the Northern Hemisphere, marks the shortest day and longest night of the year. (In the Southern Hemisphere, it is the Summer Solstice.) Ancient



Sun shining over Vernon under a winter inversion
Roseanne Van Ee photo

Humans are the only creatures on Earth who use fire, the element most akin to the Sun's power. From burning wood for heat, cooking, and light, to burning oolichans and later whale blubber, and eventually the dense fossil fuels of coal, oil, and gas. As these dense fuels burn they release large amounts of CO₂, which we now understand has polluted our atmosphere, altering the air we breathe, our weather patterns, and the once-stable global climate. Thankfully there's a limited supply of fossil fuels buried within the Earth that took eons to produce, so we may as well secure other energy sources like solar.

Northern European pagans knew that after this date, longer daylight would slowly return. They celebrated with a midwinter "Yule" festival, honouring the Sun's annual "victory" over darkness.

This time of year also coincided with practical necessities. Livestock that couldn't be fed through winter were often slaughtered, providing fresh meat. Drinks brewed since autumn were finally ready. With food and drink on hand and the promise of returning light, midwinter celebrations flourished.

In Iranian and Persian cultures, the Winter Solstice is celebrated as **Yalda Night** or **Shab-e Chelleh**, when

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Winter Solstice continued

families gather to eat, drink, share stories, and recite poetry. “Shab-e Chelleh” means “night of forty,” marking forty nights into winter.

The Romans held **Saturnalia** from December 17th to 23rd in honour of the Roman god Saturn, and believed the Sun’s rebirth, *Sol Invictus* — the “birthday of the unconquered sun” — occurred on December 25th.

Christians later chose this time of year to celebrate Jesus’ birth. His actual birthday is unknown, but early Christians saw symbolic meaning in linking the arrival of the “light of the world” with the return of sunlight after the Solstice. They also absorbed and reinterpreted several existing Solstice customs, blending them into what became Christmas traditions.

The Jewish Festival of Lights, **Hanukkah**, begins on the 25th of Kislev — a month that often falls in December. Since Jesus was Jewish, some scholars believe this timing may have also influenced early Christian choices. With overlapping calendars and limited ancient records, historians conclude that the origins of December 25th as Christmas are complex and intertwined with many traditions.

Perhaps one day our own **Vernon Winter Carnival** could celebrate the Sun as well in February when winter’s chill begins to lift and we turn towards the Sun’s life-giving warmth and light.

Whatever tradition you follow, and however you choose to observe it, may your Winter Solstice be filled with light, joy, and renewal. **Happy Sun Celebration — whenever and however you celebrate. Cheers!** 🌿



*above: Sun setting over Okanagan Lake
Roseanne Van Ee photo*



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Species Spotlight: Belted Kingfisher Behaviour

by Margaret MacKenzie

THIS is not the first year or time that I've watched a female Belted Kingfisher fly back and forth over and over into the same cavity in the same clay bank. I saw the almost exact performance in the same place and time at the beginning of the Polson Park boardwalk 3 years ago.

First she makes her loud rattle call, then flies to the hole, enters,



stays a few seconds, turns around and flies back to the overhead wire where she sits and



excitedly carries on with more rattle calls.

Why she is interested in the nest hole as winter approaches is a mystery to me? Perhaps she is longing for spring already? 🌱



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Clearcut Logging and its Dangers

*It Takes a Community... by Mikaela Cannon
Armstrong/Spallumcheen Climate Action (ASCA)*

*Originally published in the November 2025 issue of
Your Country News. Reprinted by permission.*

THE other day I had the great fortune of meeting Dr. Younes Alila, a hydrologist and professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He has been studying the effects of clearcut logging in watersheds for 30 years. He and his graduate students have worked on compiling information and running it through models that can attribute flooding, droughts, and landslides to clearcut logging. The Kettle River watershed was studied extensively for five years and he has been able to determine that the devastating flood in 2018 can be directly attributed to the clearcut logging there. This flooding severely impacted Grand Forks, damaged more than 400 homes and businesses, and millions of dollars (50+) were spent in clean-up and mitigating future risk. Dr. Alila points out that two-thirds of BC's watersheds have been logged this way in the last 30 years, and that it's not tenable. He served as an expert in the class-action lawsuits launched by citizens of Grand Forks, where they accuse the province and the logging companies of faulty practices that destroyed their homes.

When a valley or hillside is clearcut logged, more snow gathers on the ground, as it isn't intercepted by the trees, and this snow melts faster in the spring due to lack of coverage to keep the ground cooler. When the snow melts faster it doesn't have a chance to percolate into the ground, but instead, it rushes off with the spring freshet. When the soil is no longer held together by tree roots, landslides follow. In

addition, less groundwater causes drought conditions in drier months. Droughts lead to death of vegetation, which opens up barren land. The drought conditions, paired with higher temperatures increase the likelihood of wildfires to ignite from lighting strikes. Dr. Alila explains how all these occurrences are related to upstream clearcut logging. His research has led him to decide that he has no choice but to publicly speak up about the industry practices of clearcut logging with heavy machinery. As more and more data are compiled he can no longer be silent and watch how waterways became damaged and threaten communities and people. Together with film-maker Daniel J. Pierce "Trouble in the Headwaters" was created to highlight his research and the effects on water by logging. You can find the movie here: <https://thenarwhal.ca/trouble-in-the-headwaters-documentary/>

Dr. Alila explains that even though the forestry companies are mandated to replant trees, those conifer forests do not regenerate fast enough to mimic the ecological function of an intact forest. The conifer trees need 60-80 years to become mature enough to be able to mitigate the damage done from clearcutting. Dr. Alila works closely with Dr. Suzanne Simard and other forestry researchers.

There are many alternative ways to log that are not as harmful to the ecosystem and to the precious water that we all depend on. The 2018 flood could have been prevented and the damage to the cost of millions could have been avoided if this area had not been clearcut logged over the past 30 years. When forestry companies tout economic gain as the reason they should be allowed to continue this practice, we need to also calculate the cost of the droughts, flooding, fires and landslides these logging methods bring. These costs definitely outweigh the benefits.

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Clearcut Logging continued

The taxpayers foot the bill for these. The forestry companies pocket the money from the timber and then they move on to the next patch. Perhaps it is time for communities to be in charge of the forests around them. A functioning forest is so much more than its timber value. A functioning forest cools the climate, ensures biodiversity, sequesters carbon,

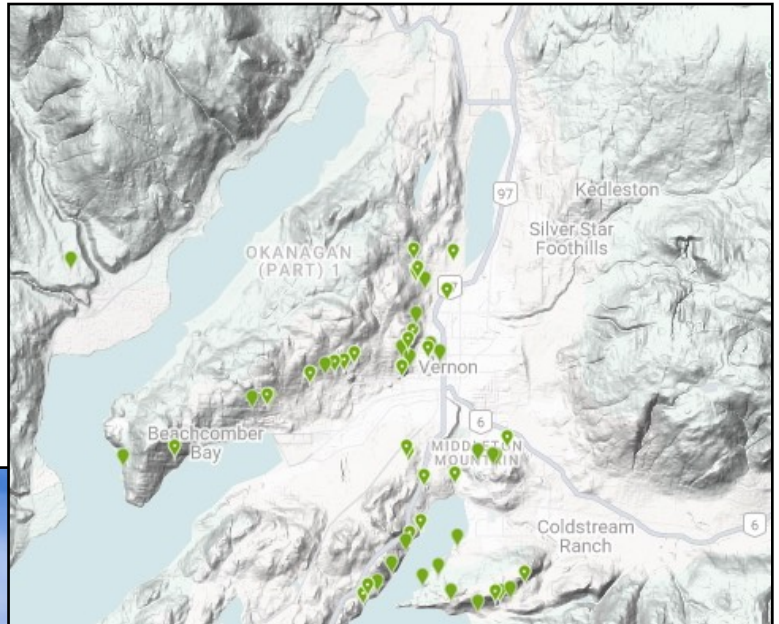
recharges the aquifers, and provides food, medicine and material to animals and people. 🌱

Dr. Younes Alila and movie maker Daniel J. Pierce did a showing of their movie "Trouble in the Headwaters" at Vernon Library on September 9, 2025, sponsored by the Armstrong Spallumcheen Trails Society.

Big Sagebrush Stops Here

by Harold Sellers

WHILE walking at the new Goose Lake Range Park this past Saturday during our weekly nature walk, we noted and commented that there was NO sagebrush in the park. We found it strange, given that there is lots of it just a bit south in the Blue Jay area [photo]. Sure enough, a look at iNaturalist observations (see the map) tells us that Vernon is at the



northern limit of this plant's range in the Okanagan Valley. It can be found in other valleys, but the Goose Lake area definitely appears to be a natural boundary.

Big Sagebrush has soil and environmental preferences, the locations of which clearly show on this map.

Interesting! 🌱

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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, December 3rd. Guest speaker: Janice Hodge, Green Acres Permaculture Food Forest

Wednesday, January 7th: Guest speaker: Jason Webster - Local Fisheries

SATURDAY NATURE WALKS

Join us Saturdays at 10:00 am (Winter start time). 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.

December 6 - 10am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a nature walk on the 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

December 13 - No walk due to Christmas Bird Count**Sunday, December 14 - Vernon Christmas Bird Count**

Coordinator is Don Cecile <dcecile@shaw.ca>. Volunteers are always needed!

December 20 - 10am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk at 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

**December 27 - 10am DR 1**

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a nature walk on the BX Ranch Trail. 5 km loop. Meet at the parking lot on East Vernon Rd, north of Black Rock Road. Contact Harold at hikerharold@gmail.com