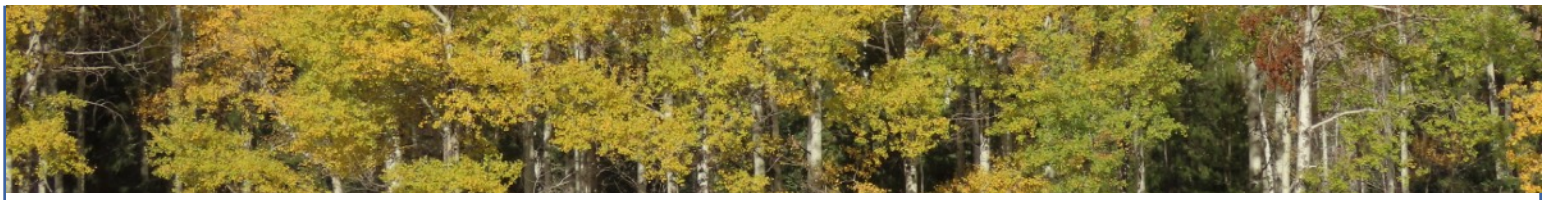
NEWSPACKET

Journal of the
North Okanagan
Naturalists' Club
November 2025

Great Gray Owl
by Harold Sellers



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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 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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November Migrants

by Harold Sellers

THERE are some birds that we start to see round this time of year, here in the North Okanagan. Let's take a look at a few.

Rough-legged Hawk

Rough-legged hawks migrate through British Columbia in the fall, with most birds leaving the southern parts of the province by mid-April. The Fraser Lowlands and other open areas like the Okanagan and Creston valleys are major wintering grounds, and you can spot them hunting in open country, grasslands, and fields, especially during the late fall and winter months.

right: Rough-legged Hawk courtesy of All About Birds

In North America, Rough-legged Hawks breed in tundra or taiga in arctic and subarctic Alaska and Canada and migrate across the boreal forest to winter in open country of southern Canada and the northern United States.

The winter diet is roughly similar to that of summer, although carrion can be important when snow limits the availability of small-mammal prey (voles and mice). Winter populations also fluctuate regionally, with "invasions" occurring in areas where small-rodent prey are abundant. As in summer, however, it is not known if individuals move in quest of prey.

Northern Shrike

Northern Shrikes migrate to British Columbia in the fall and winter, arriving in October and November to occupy open, low-elevation habitats in central and southern parts of the province. While some may stay year-round, most are migratory, moving south for the winter and returning north in early spring. The Fraser River valley appears to be a migration corridor for many birds traveling to wintering grounds on the Fraser River delta and southern Vancouver Island.

The species is a common winter visitor in open, low-elevation habitats in central and southern British Columbia.

They have a breeding range that spans the northern boreal and taiga from coast to coast, but it is much more often observed on its wintering range across southern Canada and the northern United States.

Birdwatchers look forward to catching sight of this songbird, whose Latin binomial means "butcher watchman", because it is a furtive hunter that impales its prey on convenient spines (its larder) for later consumption. Despite its predatory nature, it is a songbird, and family groups emit bizarre sounds while caring for noisy fledglings. Its melodious and erratic song can locally fill the remote mountains of northern British Columbia where few birders are lucky enough to venture.

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Migrants continued

above: Northern Shrike, photographed by Claire Christensen

Trumpeter Swan

Trumpeter swans migrate to British Columbia for wintering, primarily along the Pacific coast and in ice-free areas of the central interior, such as lakes and rivers where warmer water prevents freezing. They depart their northern breeding grounds in mid- to late February and return by late April or May. During spring, they fly north across the Coast Mountains, often stopping at lakes in central B.C., before continuing to their breeding grounds in Alaska and northwestern Canada.

Birds breeding in coastal Alaska and Canada move to ice-free waters in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia. Breeders from the Alaskan and Canadian interior winter in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. Scattered populations in the Intermountain West may not migrate at all.

This swan:

- pumps its feet up and down over edible roots to create a current of water that frees the roots from the surrounding mud
- may live in captivity for up to 35 years, but in the wild, swans generally live for less than 12 years
- has an unusually dense layer of down that seems to make it almost impervious to the cold
- was once hunted and harassed to the point where in 1933 there were only 77 Trumpeter Swans breeding in Canada and 50 breeding in the United States

above: Trumpeter Swans, photographed by Kenn Whyte

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Migrants continued

At present, biologists recognize three populations of Trumpeter Swans: the Pacific Coast Population, the Rocky Mountain Population, and the Interior Population. Two of these populations developed primarily from remnant flocks that survived the historic decline. The third consists of flocks that have been created by transplanting wild birds from established flocks into promising habitat and by breeding swans in captivity and releasing the young to the wild.

Bohemian Waxwing

Waxwing migration in British Columbia is nomadic and unpredictable, driven by food availability, particularly berries.

While some Cedar Waxwings breed in B.C. from late May to early September and some residents stay year-round, they are most reliably seen in large flocks during the migration periods of late summer to early spring when they move in search of food.

above: Bohemian Waxwing, photographed by Harold Sellers

Bohemian Waxwings are more nomadic, migrating south from their boreal breeding grounds in northern parts of B.C. during the winter months to forage on berries. They often form large flocks in response to food supplies.

Sandhill Crane

This once abundant bird has declined across North America due to habitat loss, disturbance and unregulated hunting. Breeding populations in the Southern Interior and in the Fraser Valley were decimated in the last century. Sandhill Cranes are sensitive to human activity. They pass overhead by the thousands during fall and spring migration, and often land and feed during migration, but it appears that few nest in the Okanagan.

Most Sandhill Cranes seen in British Columbia are migrating between nesting grounds in Alaska and wintering grounds in the southern United States. The Okanagan Valley is one of three main migratory routes in British Columbia. Spring migration sightings peak in the last half of April and fall migration peaks in late September and early October.

While the peak of the fall migration in British Columbia is usually in late September and October, some cranes may still be migrating in early November, with small populations overwintering in certain areas like the Reifel Bird Sanctuary. The main migration routes are the coastal and central Interior, which include the Okanagan Valley and the Douglas Plateau.

White-throated Sparrow

White-throated sparrows migrate through British

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Migrants continued:

Columbia in November, but it's the end of the fall migration, with most birds moving to wintering grounds in California or the southern US. While most of the breeding population in eastern Canada moves south, a western subpopulation migrates to the Pacific coast for the winter. Some may linger in BC, seeking out areas with cover, like thickets, forest edges, and parks, to forage for food before the snow makes it difficult.

above: Sandhill Crane, courtesy of All About Birds

left: White-throated Sparrow, photographed by Jack VanDyk

Sources:
Google AI
https://www.birdatlas.bc.ca
https://www.allaboutbirds.org
https://www.hww.ca
https://www.env.gov.bc.ca

WINTER BIRDING TIPS

- Plan Around Shorter Days: With limited daylight, plan shorter, strategic outings. Birds are most active in the early morning as they frantically search for food after the cold night, so aim to be at your observation spot before sunrise.
- Focus on Food Sources: Birds gather where food is plentiful. Look for native plants with persistent seeds and berries, such as coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, and berry-producing shrubs.
- Seek Open Water: Unfrozen water sources are magnets for birds, especially as natural sources freeze over. Check lakes, rivers, or consider adding a heated birdbath to your yard.

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Cloud Watching

by Roseanne Van Ee

EVER since working at the Allan Brooks Nature Centre years ago, I've been slowly learning about clouds. That knoll offers some of the most remarkable cloud-watching opportunities I've ever experienced. The site is truly a place for *weather experiencing*. You can hear the rolling of a summer thunderstorm in one darkened, cloud-filled valley, then turn to see sunlight streaming down another clear one. You can watch storms and cloud masses move all around the Okanagan—often surrounding the centre, but sometimes never passing over it. That's the "donut" phenomenon, when the sun keeps shining right at the centre. Other days, you could almost be blown off the knoll. Stand there with your eyes closed and you can feel the still air shift to a breeze and back again within minutes as air masses move by.

As a child, my brothers and I loved finding funny, familiar animal shapes in clouds—usually giraffes, elephants, and the like. I even remember distinctly seeing an enormous bat shape once. But I've matured now; I want to *understand* clouds. I want to know the processes that create them. Clouds aren't fluffy, solid masses—they're visible collections of tiny water droplets or ice crystals suspended in air. On land, we experience the same phenomenon as fog. They form through condensation when warm and cold air meet.

To really know clouds, though, you need to understand weather. And to understand weather means appreciating the dynamics of air movement (air pressure) and temperature. Ask any pilot—they know this well. Cloud watching opens a whole new window into nature appreciation.

November is a funny month for outdoor adventures. You have to move fast outside or stay cozy inside. The weather can shift wildly from day to day—cold rain one afternoon, slushy snow the next. That's what makes it such a

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Cloud Watching continued

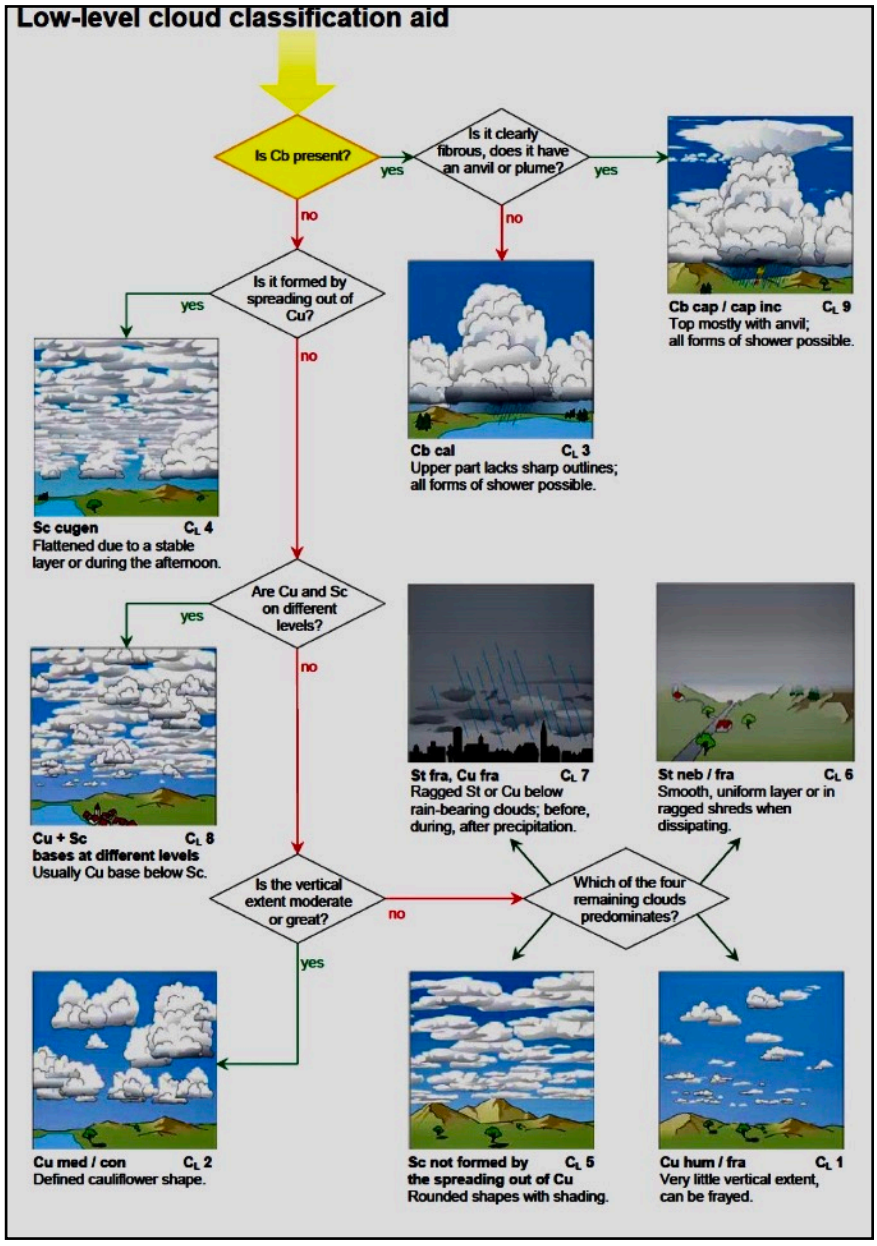
good time to study clouds. They're full of rain or snow, or just drifting overhead, and you can appreciate their ever-changing nature even through a window. Sunrises and sunsets can be especially striking now—bold and dramatic, if not fogged in.

Evening light often paints the clouds pink and gold before melting into orange lustre as the sun sets. Even on gloomy, grey days, clouds remain dynamic. Air pressure shapes them, sometimes into dark, heavy, snow- or rain-laden puffs. Temperature dictates whether they'll release rain or snow. Air masses push them along. And nights capped with clouds stay warmer—like being tucked under a giant blanket.

Classifying things, whether objects or organisms, helps us make sense of what we see. I'm grateful to Luke Howard, the English pharmacist and naturalist who, in 1803, developed a system to classify clouds. He noticed that all clouds belong to one of three basic groups. You've probably heard their names: *Cumulus* (meaning "heap" or "pile" in Latin), *Cirrus* ("curl"), and *Stratus* ("stretched out"). But Howard also realized these basic categories only described primary forms, so he combined names and linked them to their altitudes in the atmosphere, creating ten cloud types—such as *Cirrostratus*, *Cumulonimbus*, and *Altocumulus*. That's where the real study begins!

I used to think November was a gloomy month. I wished the sun-kissed, wildly coloured warm Octobers would linger till snow covered the mountains. This November, I'm going to curl up with weather books starting off with Exploring the Sky By Day, by Terence Dickinson. I'd love to reread a marvellous book called Heaven's Breath; A Natural History of the Wind, by Lyall Watson. There's only one catch; Heaven's Breath is now unavailable. Can someone lend me a copy?

Happy cloud watching everyone!



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Species Spotlight: Snow Goose

by Harold Sellers

Snow geese have returned to Rawlings lake. Winter can't be far behind.
October 13 post, Loretta West, NONC Facebook

THE snow goose is a species of goose native to North America. Two subspecies are recognized: Lesser and Greater.

The Lesser snow goose *Anser caerulescens* breeds north of the timberline in Greenland, Canada, Alaska, and the northeastern tip of Siberia, and spend winters in warm parts of North America from southwestern British Columbia through parts of the United States to Mexico. iNaturalist has reports throughout BC, particularly in the valleys, on rivers and lakes.

Snow geese are very vocal and can often be heard from more than a mile away.

Long-term pair bonds are usually formed in the second year, although breeding does not usually start until the third year. Females are strongly philopatric, meaning they will return to the place they hatched to breed.

Snow geese breed from late May to mid-August, but they leave their nesting areas and spend more than half the year on their migration to-and-from warmer wintering areas. During spring migration (the reverse migration), large flocks of snow geese fly very high and migrate in large numbers along narrow corridors, more than 3,000 mi (4,800 km) from traditional wintering areas to the tundra.

Traditionally, lesser snow geese wintered in coastal marsh areas where they used their short but strong bills to dig up the roots of marsh grasses for food. Outside of the nesting season, they usually feed in flocks. In winter, snow geese feed on left-over grain in fields. They migrate in large flocks, often visiting traditional stopover habitats in spectacular numbers. Snow geese frequently travel and feed alongside greater white-fronted geese; in contrast, the two tend to avoid travelling and feeding alongside Canada geese, which are often heavier birds.

The breeding population of the lesser snow goose exceeds 5 million birds, an increase of more than 300% since the mid-1970s. The population is increasing at a rate of more than five percent per year. Non-breeding geese (juveniles or adults that fail to nest successfully) are not included in this estimate, so the total number of geese is likely higher.

Source: Wikipedia
Snow Goose in Syilx is "smik'ʷt k̓ʷsixʷ".
Calls of the Snow Goose (click to listen):
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/142622161

Keep House Sparrows Away From Your Feeders

by Margaret MacKenzie

Editor's Note: This is a repeat of a previously published article. The technique has proven useful in keeping House Sparrows (HOSP) away from nesting boxes, but it also helps keep them away from feeders, which many people put up at this time of year.

"FEEDING HOSP only helps increase their population. We have no cavity-using songbirds nesting in our city due to AGGRESSIVE HOUSE SPARROWS. Clear nylon Fishing Line hung on bird feeders keeps HOUSE SPARROWS away! Try it and send us your results". - Margaret MacKenzie

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!

Hanging clear fishing line from bird feeders will keep HOSP away. Pictures here show how I've used the line.

Burying Beetle

by Harold Sellers

WHILE walking at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park on October 3rd, Joyce Heard spotted a small mouse carcass on the trail. It was moving! Calling Linda and I over, we all observed orange-black beetles crawling over and in and out of the carcass, making it move.

A quick search with the app Seek, by iNaturalists, identified the beetle as a Burying Beetle.

According to Google AI and Wikipedia burying beetles are found across British Columbia,. These fascinating insects are known for their practice of burying carcasses to raise their young and use their large, club-shaped antennae to detect the scent of dead animals from a distance.

Searching the internet, two species come up as possible for these seen at the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park on October 3rd.

One is Common Sexton Beetle *Nicrophorus vespilloides* (at right)

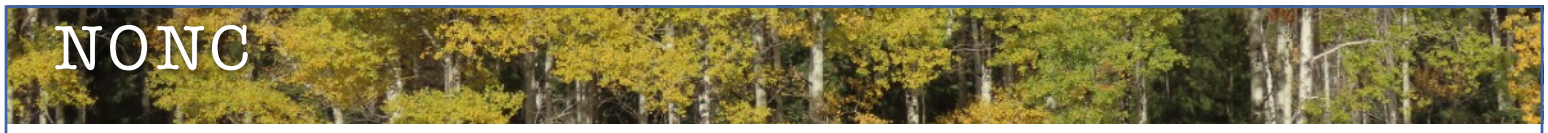
and the other Boreal Burying Beetle *Nicrophorus defodiens*.

Burying beetles are typically 2-3 cm or larger, black, with orangey-red markings on their outer wings (elytra). They bury a carcass and use microbes from their guts to process the food for their family.

If multiple beetles encounter a carcass, they will fight to the death to control it, with the largest beetles typically winning.

Their orange and black markings serve as a warning sign to avian predators that defends them from attack. Their distinct wing cases are squarish in shape and are shorter than their abdomens. They can fly, especially to locate carcasses.

Upon locating a suitable carcass, the beetle parents engage in a collaborative effort to bury it beneath the soil. This is a meticulous preparation process where any fur or feathers are carefully removed, and the carcass is shaped into a compact ball. This ball is then coated with a concoction of antimicrobials and secretions, a deliberate action taken by the beetles to slow down the decomposition process. It is in the vicinity of this carefully prepared carcass, now nestled within the soil, that the beetles choose to lay their eggs. A few days after the eggs are laid, the larvae hatch and instinctively navigate their way to the carcass, which serves as both their food source and nursery. The adult beetles then take on the role of providers, offering their young pre-digested food and protecting them from potential predators and competitors.



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, November 5th. Guest speaker: Christina White - Invasive Mussels in the Lakes. The club's Annual General Meeting will begin the evening, but is usually very brief.

Wednesday, December 3rd: Guest speaker: Janice Hodge - BC Forests

SATURDAY NATURE WALKS

Join us Saturdays at 9:00 am (switching to 10:00 in December). 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.

November 8 – 9am DR 2
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk at the Thomas Hayes Ecological Park in Spallumcheen Township. About two hours. Take Otter Lake Cross Road exit from Hwy 97, follow this road behind the Tolko Mill and turn left onto Thomas Hayes Road. Contact Norbert at nmaer10s@gmail.com

November 15 – 9am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists" Club for a walk on McLennan Road to Blackcomb Way, in the Foothills area. Take L&A Road to McLennan, turn right and meet at trail parking area on the left, opposite Grey Canal Road. Walk first on Grey Canal Road and then on trail, and return. Contact Marnie/ Paul at mpw660@telus.net

November 22 – 9am DR 2
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk at Kalamalka Park. Kal Park loop and Kidston Pathway. Short and steep uphill followed by gravel trail that meets up with paved pathway. Meet at the corner of Cunliffe Road and Palfry Drive West. Contact Rod/Ruth at wereadquilt@gmail.com

November 29 - 9am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a nature walk at the new Goose Lake Range Park. This park will have just opened to the public. It has about 4 km of trails, with views of Goose and Swan lakes. Bring binoculars and cameras! We will carpool. Meet at the Village Green Mall at 8:45 am (be on time!), in front of the old Bay store, south side, facing 43rd Ave. Contact Harold at hikerharold@gmail.com

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