NEWSPACKET

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

January 2026



American Kestrel

by Harold Sellers



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
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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

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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	Michelle Gregoire, 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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Christmas Bird Count 2025

14 December 2025

by Don Cecile, Coordinator

WE had had 36 observers in the field and 12 feeder watchers reporting, for a total of 48. We tallied 98 species, which is well above our average of 86, but well below last year's total of 106. Total number of birds was 14,044 compared to 21,118 in 2024.

The story of the day was clearly the weather, a balmy day with no wind or precipitation!

Runner-up story of the day was the high count of American Robins, they were found in almost every area of the circle this year.



above: Trumpeter Swans in a Coldstream field

I am pleased to announce that again this year, Mourning Doves outnumbered Eurasian-collared Doves 295 to 238 respectively. Northern Flicker numbers were up 50% over last year with 225 tallied. Canada Goose numbers were almost half of last year's number with 1,846 tallied. Mallard numbers were down 65% over last year with 1,987 tallied.

Big misses:
Golden Eagle
Evening Grosbeak
Pine Grosbeak
Clark's Nutcracker
Northern Pygmy-Owl
Redhead
Common Redpoll
Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Record High counts:
Herring Gull 454
Rock Pigeon 849
American Robin 767
Pacific Wren 15

Rare birds (found on less than 10 % of counts):
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Brown-headed Cowbird
Western Screech-Owl (not seen on CBC since 1979)
Yellow-rumped Warbler

Voting for Bird of the day and runner up was done by electronic vote with the following results:
Bird of the day goes to Scott Thomson for Western Screech-Owl (87% in favour)
Runner up goes to Don Cecile for Lesser Black-backed Gull. (73% in favour)

Many thanks to all of you for helping with the count!

Cheers,
Don

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The Subnivean Wilderness

by Roseanne Van Ee

A WHOLE new temporary ecosystem develops every winter wherever snow piles deeply enough to cover plants. It's the subnivean (under snow) environment. High hills, subalpine mountain environments and northern BC re-establish subnivean worlds every November to April, and sometimes longer. In some places that's half a year or more.

As snow falls and settles, it bends over grasses, shrubs and even young trees and piles up on top creating a tunnelled network on the ground. The Earth is always giving off enough warmth to keep the ground air temperature above freezing. Imagine: it could be -20ºC or colder outside, but remain a consistent +5ºC on the ground under the blanket of snow.

Mice and other small mammals live under this downy quilt of snow that shelters them from the cold above. The critters run around through their tunnelled habitat, subsisting on lichens, seeds, fungi, plants, and some on stored food.

Hawks can't find the critters, so they migrate, but owls stay and listen. They can hear mice under half a metre of snow and dive down talons first to catch their prey. Coyotes can catch the scent of subnivean rodents. With a fierce pounce they dive into the snow, muzzle first.

Weasels/ermine enter the subnivean network through holes beside shrubs and tree trunks to catch rodents. Spruce Grouse and Ptarmigans will dive into subnivean air pockets to keep warm, especially at night.

By mid February the CO^2 levels get high in these passageways and pockets, and the little critters occasionally come up and out for a breath of fresh air. Wouldn't you know it; that's just when male owls get busy supplying their ladies with food and furs.



above: A female Spruce Grouse peeks out from a subnivean shelter on Silver Star Mountain
Roseanne Van Ee photo

Black Bears cozily hibernate under snow-covered fallen logs or against tree trunks with large, limber snow-covered branches that eventually close off the den once snow piles up.

Snowshoeing is a marvellous way to encounter this wild winter wonderland. Next time you're out snowshoeing, see if you can identify the wildlife tracks. Look for subnivean world entry holes beside tree trunks or near bent over, snow-covered shrubs which look like bumps on the undulating snowy

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Subnivean continued

landscape. And realize there's a whole busy community thriving under your trail.

If it's warm enough, stay still for a few minutes. You may be lucky enough to catch some subnivean comings and goings.

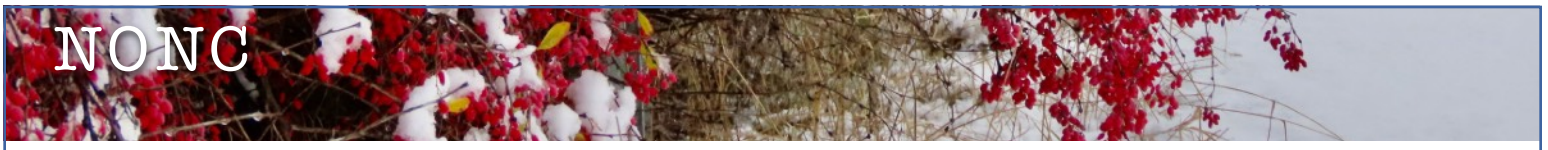


right: A Black Bear is snuggled under snow covered logs on Silver Star Mountain
Roseanne Van Ee photo

WINTER took its time coming to the North Okanagan, but it's now here. The trails now have snow and ice on them, but that needn't deter us from getting outdoors. If you don't have them yet, get yourself a pair of hiking poles, with steel tips to dig into the ice, and ice grippers for your boots. The ice grippers can be work to get onto your boots, but if they save you a trip to Emergency, they are worth the effort, time, and expense. These are the type that I use and recommend. (Harold Sellers, editor)







Goose Lake Range

by Harold Sellers

THIS new natural space was officially opened late last Fall. The land was purchased by the Regional District of North Okanagan from the Anderson family a few years ago with the intent to create a park for public use.

Located in the Stepping Stones subdivision in Spallumcheen Township, it offers over 3 kilometres of gravel trails. The park is approximately 113 acres (46 hectares) in size.

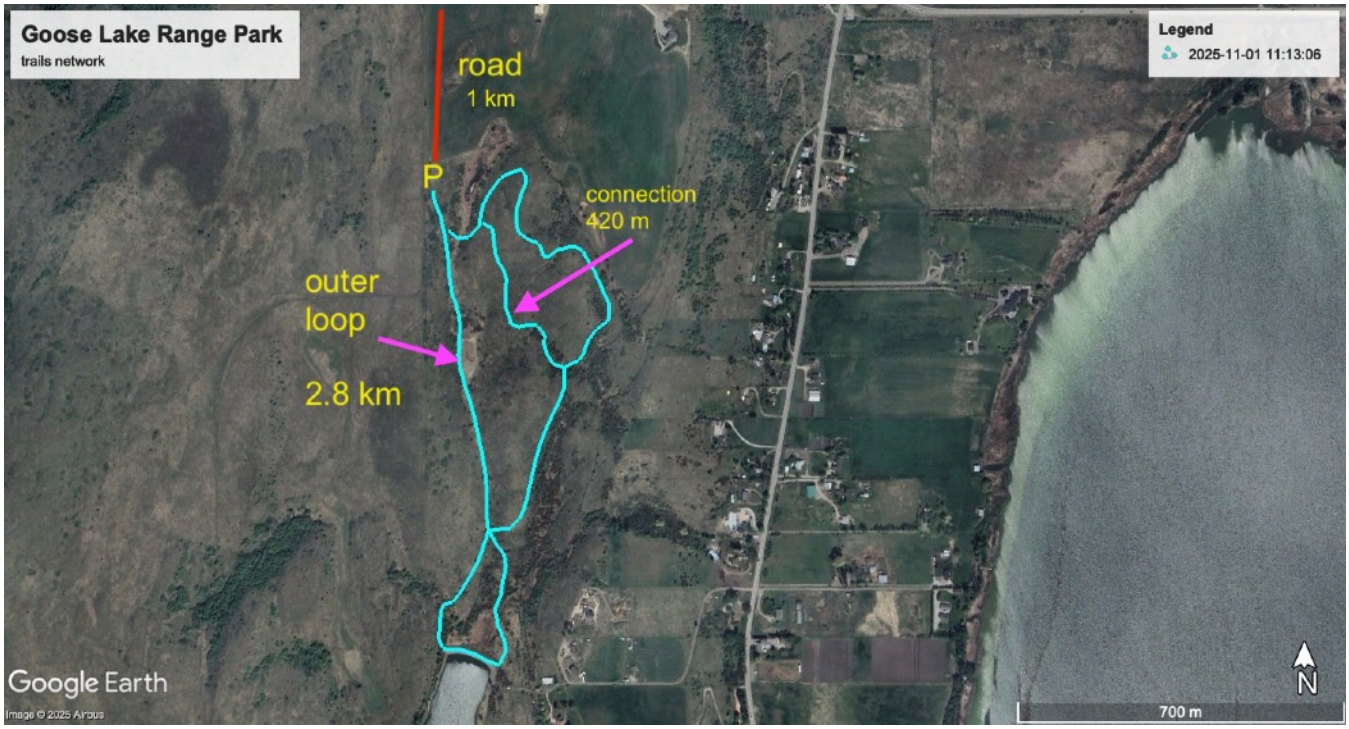
Located on a plateau between Swan Lake and Okanagan Lake, the park has already become very popular for both residents and visitors. NONC has added it to our list of locations for Saturday morning Nature Walks.

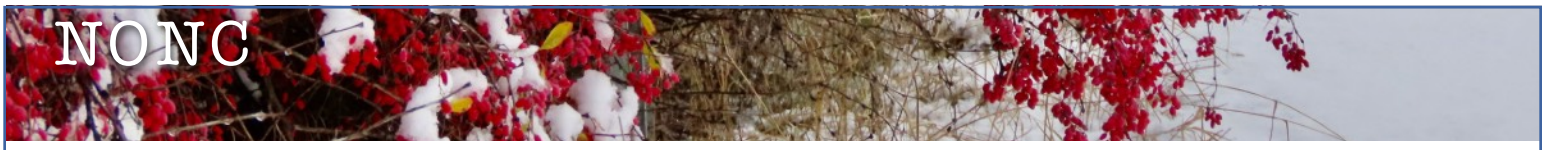
Birding can be quite good, with lots of open grassland, plus shrubbery to provide food and shelter. At the southern edge of the park is Goose Lake, which has a long history as a reservoir for agricultural water. Lake levels fluctuate with the time of year, but waterfowl are present when the lake is ice-free.

The park is a dogs-on-leash area. The parking lot can accommodate many cars. The trails offer several loop options. Next Spring RDNO plans to install a pit toilet.

Directions to Goose Lake Range Park:

- From Vernon, follow Highway 97 North (towards Kamloops)
- Turn left on Mendenhall Road
- Continue as Mendenhall becomes Stepping Stones Road
- Take a slight right, then left on the access road, at the Goose Lake Range Park signage
- Follow the access road approximately 1 km to the parking lot





BC Big Tree Website and Registry

https://bigtrees.forestry.ubc.ca/

Mandate
To identify, describe, monitor, and conserve the largest trees of each species within British Columbia, and to educate and enlist the help of its citizens in this task.

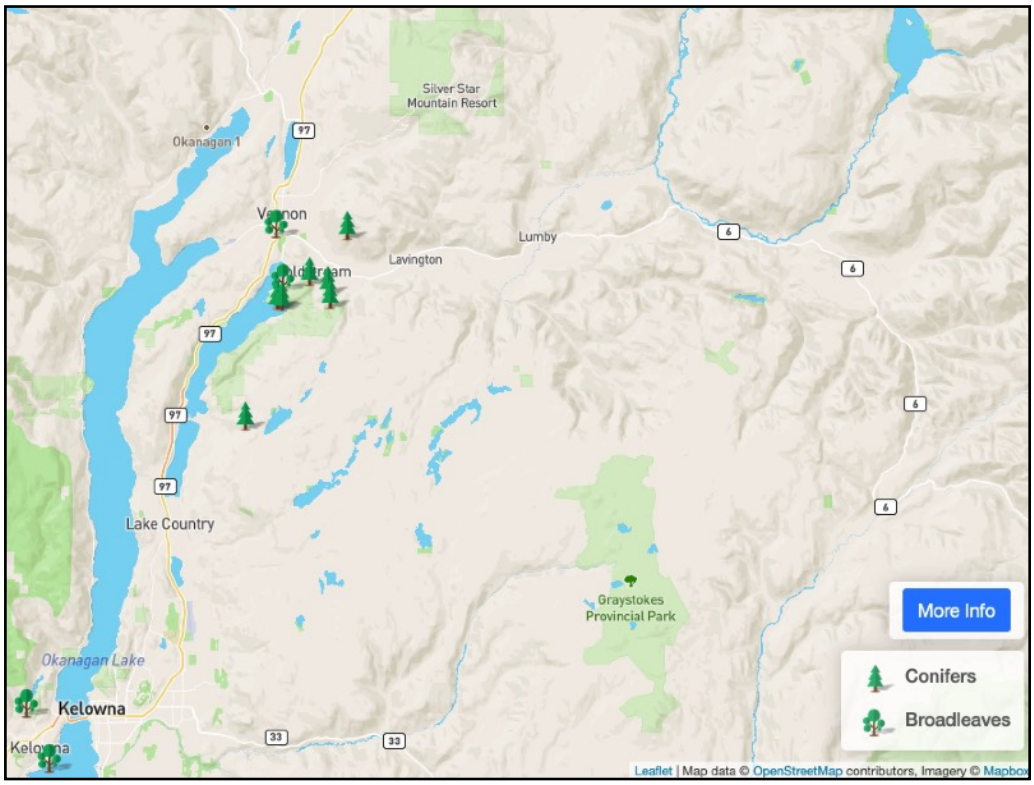
History
The original registry of big trees in BC was initiated by Randy Stoltmann. Many of the registry records are published in his book *Guide to the Record Trees of British Columbia* (Stoltmann 1993). The registry was established in 1986 by the B.C. Forestry Association, which became Forest Education B.C. and most recently FORED BC.

Randy Stoltmann died in a tragic ski-mountaineering accident in May of 1994. Due to capacity constraints and to ensure the important work of the Big Tree Registry legacy continued, FORED BC donated all available files and photo records to the Association of BC Professional Foresters. Shortly before his death, Randy copied most of the registry records into a report for the B.C. Conservation Data Centre (CDC). Using these records, the CDC became the new custodian of the registry until 2009, when it was transferred to the Ministry of Forests and Range. In the Fall of 2010, the BC BigTree Registry found its final home in the Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia.

Many of the trees in the Registry haven't been remeasured or re-located in over a decade. For these trees we are interested in getting updated measurements, access information, tree notes and photos. Of course, we are always interested in new submissions to the database. Many of BC's big trees are yet to be discovered and recorded!

Locally
There are eight trees in Greater Vernon shown on the following map.

Map
https://ngottlieb.github.io/bc-bigtree-registry/



continued on page 8

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Big Trees continued

Here's one local example, with an accompanying picture.

Tree: Shining willow
Height: 17.1
DBH: 1.89
Crown Spread: 17.5
Last Measured: 10/23/2012
Location: Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary
Nearest Town: Coldstream
Land Status: Parks/reserves
Elevation: 394
Additional info: Dead top
Lat/lng: 50.219417,-119.26425





That's Aaron Deans posing with the willow tree.

And another, pictured at left:
Tree: Ponderosa pine
Height: 44.2
DBH: 1.29
Crown Spread: 14.3
Last Measured: 10/22/2000
Location: Coldstream
Land Status: Private land
Access: Private land - please respect private property and view from a distance. Tree is near the cemetery.
Additional info: Healthy. IDFxh1a.
Lat/lng: 50.216397,-119.212864

What the Kal Park BirdWeather Station is Revealing

by Rob Buchanan

A BIRDWEATHER acoustic station beside Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park has been quietly building a fascinating picture of the valley's birdlife.

In just a few months, it has detected over 120 species, from familiar winter residents like chickadees, juncos, finches, and flickers to harder-to-spot visitors such as Northern Pygmy-Owls, Saw-whet Owls, and a very vocal Great Horned Owl. The station has also picked up irruptive finches like redpolls and crossbills, along with occasional flyovers of swans and migrating warblers .. reminders of how much movement passes through the Okanagan even when we don't see it.



What stands out most is how the station reveals layers of activity that would otherwise go unnoticed. Nighttime owl calls, shifting winter flock patterns, and migration pulses become much clearer when the data is displayed in real time. It's shown me just how lively the park remains through the year and how much there is to discover simply by listening.

With BirdWeather anyone can explore live detections and follow the changing soundscape day by day. My hope is that it inspires people to step outside with fresh curiosity and feel even more connected to the place we call home.

From https://www.birdweather.com/

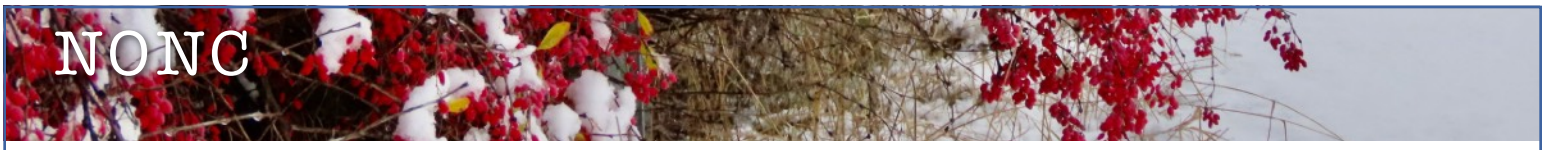
What is BirdWeather?

BirdWeather is a pioneering visualization platform that harnesses the **BirdNET** artificial neural network to monitor bird vocalizations globally through 2000 active audio stations (and growing). The platform acts as a comprehensive, evolving digital repository, accessible via a user-friendly map interface that showcases real-time data integration. Equipped with advanced bioacoustic technologies such as the BirdWeather PUC—featuring environmental sensors and a neural engine in a weatherproof enclosure—BirdWeather facilitates easy recording and automatic cloud processing of bird sounds, aiding conservation efforts and ecological studies. By analyzing bird population behaviors and changes, BirdWeather provides valuable insights into environmental shifts, engaging the public in global citizen science initiatives through its web dashboard and mobile app

What is BirdNET?

BirdNET is a joint research project between The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Chemnitz

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BirdWeather continued

University of Technology that is "mainly focused on the detection and classification of avian sounds using machine learning … [with the aim to] assist experts and citizen scientist in their work of monitoring and protecting our birds.

BirdNET is a research platform that aims at recognizing birds by sound at scale. We support various hardware and operating systems such as Arduino microcontrollers, the Raspberry Pi, smartphones, web browsers, workstation PCs, and even cloud services. **BirdNET is a citizen science platform** as well as an analysis software for extremely large collections of audio. BirdNET aims to provide **innovative tools** for conservationists, biologists, and birders alike."Read more about **BirdNET** at: https://birdnet.cornell.edu/

Using the Live Map at the BirdWeather website, you will find Rob's station and be able to read what has been detected.

There is another Vernon-area BirdWeather station too, on Sunset Road, off Eastside Road.



below : Gull Identification…see page 11

Identification Table

This table outlines the six basic physical characteristics that will help you to identify ADULT gulls in the field.*

Species	Relative Size	Leg Colour	Eye Colour	Bill	Mantle (back)	Wing-tips
Glaucous-winged	Large, bulky	Pink	Dark	Large yellow with orange spot, like Herring but usually thicker	Light gray	Gray
Western	Large, bulky	Pink	Palish	Large yellow with orange spot, bulbous, often with orange hue	Dark gray/ slatey	Black
Herring	Large	Pink	Pale	Long, yellow, with orange spot	Light gray	Black
Thayer's	Medium	Deep pink	Darkish	Like Herring but smaller	Light/medium gray	Black, often pale edging
California	Medium	Yellow	Dark	Yellow with black and red spots near tip	Darkish gray	Black
Ring-billed	Small, but larger than Mew	Yellow	Pale	Yellow with black ring	Light gray	Black
Mew	Small	Yellow-green	Dark	Small/slender, unmarked, yellowish-green	Medium gray	Black
Bonaparte's	Smallest	Orange-red	Dark	Dark and thin	Light gray	Black

**In some cases, you will encounter gulls that do not fit comfortably into a single category. These birds may be hybrids.*

Adult Gull ID Sheet • 1

An Introduction to Gulls of the B.C. Interior

Information from Birds Canada with photographs by Harold Sellers

SEVERAL gull species are common in the interior of British Columbia, particularly around lakes, rivers, and landfills. The most frequently observed species include:

top: **California Gull (*Larus californicus*):** A medium-sized, white-headed gull with a distinct yellow bill featuring a black ring and red spot. They have yellow legs and are common in the interior.

middle: **Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*):** A small-medium gull with a yellow bill that has a black ring. It is a very common urban bird in the interior, often found in parks, parking lots, and near garbage dumps.

lower: **Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*):** A large, common gull with a light-grey mantle, pink legs, and a yellow bill with a red spot. They breed on lakes and rivers across northern and central BC.

Identifying Adult Gulls in Coastal British Columbia is a downloadable guide available at https://www.birdscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Adult_Gulls.pdf

A portion of this guide is on page 10. To help identify gulls, pay particular attention to the colour of legs, eyes and bills, plus the colour of bill spots.

Other species of gulls are frequently reported in the Vernon area, giving us a challenge to identify them ourselves. The mouth of Vernon Creek at Okanagan Lake is a year-round hot spot. Good luck!









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 7th: Guest speaker: Jason Webster - Local Fisheries

Wednesday, Feb. 4: Lia McKinnon (Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society) - Snakes of the Okanagan

SATURDAY NATURE WALKS

Join us Saturdays at 10:00 am (Winter start time). Visitors welcome. Dress for the weather. Ice cleats recommended on many trails. We do a lot of birdwatching, so bring binoculars if you have them. No dogs please.

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.

January 10 - 10am DR 2
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk. Meet in the Kekuli Bay Parking Day Use lot. Moderate 1 km uphill, total walk 8 km, approx. 3 hours. We will walk along the Kal Crystal Waters Trail, heading south toward a connection with Rail Trail near Crystal Waters. Return on Rail Trail. Contact Norbert at nmaer10s@gmail.com

January 17 – 10am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists" Club for a walk from Marshall Field to Vernon Creek to Kin Beach, Okanagan Landing. Meet in the Marshall Field parking lot near the tennis courts and ball diamond. Contact Rod at wereadquilt@gmail.com

January 18, Sunday — Annual Swan & Eagle Count in the North Okanagan
Contact Rod Drennan for information or to participate. readwell20150@gmail.com

January 24 – 10am DR
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk at Polson Park. Meet by the tennis courts. Contact Margaret at mhubble@telus.net

January 31 - 10am DR 2
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on top of Middleton Mountain. Meet at the trailhead parking on Mt. Ida Drive, adjacent to Emerald Views Strata, 900 Mt Ida Drive. Note: long steep climb ascending the hill. Hiking poles and ice grippers on your boots are recommended. Contact Harold at hikerharold@gmail.com

February 7 - 10am DR 2
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a nature walk on the Grey Canal Trail in Coldstream, between Buchanan Road and Warren Road. There and back, about 2 hours. Meet at the new laneway access to the trail on the north side of Buchanan Road, east of Grey Road. Enter through an unmarked gate between 8585 and 8467 Buchanan Road. Contact Marnie/Paul at mpw660@telus.net