

# NEWSPACKET

December 2024

Journal of the  
North Okanagan Naturalists' Club



Steller's Jay  
photographed by Jack VanDyk

NONC



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

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**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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**Annual Membership Dues:**

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

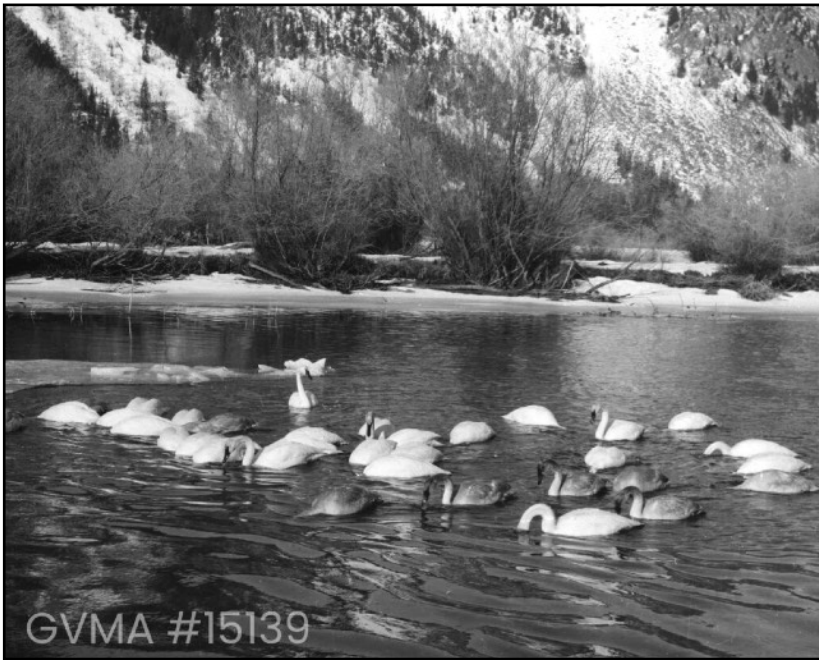
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## The Christmas Bird Count: A History

by Harold Sellers

**STARTED** in 1900, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is North America's longest-running Citizen Science project. People in more than 2,000 locations throughout the Western Hemisphere participate in the CBC each year.

The information collected by thousands of CBC volunteer participants forms one of the world's largest sets of wildlife survey data. The results are used by conservation biologists, environmental planners, and naturalists to assess the population trends and distribution of birds.



above: an undated photo from the Vernon Museum and Archives

The CBC in each Count Circle is planned on a day between December 14 and January 5. A Count Circle is 15 miles or 24 km in diameter. Effort for

each circle is organized by a Compiler, who is a fellow volunteer (or team of volunteers) at the local level, often supported by a birding club or naturalist organization.

Join us in counting birds this holiday season to add to our understanding of population trends and distribution of birds across the country. Birds Canada oversees the Christmas Bird Count program nationally, in partnership with National Audubon Society. The program is driven by volunteer effort and supporter donations.

### History

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 Christmas Bird Counts were held that day.

The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centres of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

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## *Christmas Bird Count continued*

The data collected by observers over the years allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The long term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

## **The Okanagan**

From *Christmas bird count has a long history in southern Interior*, Pentiction News, by Steve Arstad, December 21, 2018 — Author Steve Cannings wrote about the bird counts in the 1987 Okanagan Historical Society Annual Report. He noted the earliest Okanagan bird count occurred in 1905, only five years after the very first event was held in 25 locations throughout Canada and the U.S. in 1900.

Notable bird count pioneers included such names as Major Allan Brooks of Okanagan

Landing in Vernon, who recorded 27 species and 137 wintering birds in the early 1900s. Naramata pioneer fruit grower J.M. Schreck organized several Christmas bird counts in the 1920s, as did Eric Tait, Herbert Simpson and Joe Liddell in the Pentiction-Summerland area. Vernon resident Jim Grant organized many of the counts in that city in the 1950s.



above: NONC CBCers

Cannings also noted in the report that Canada Geese were once scarce in the first days of the count in the 1920s, with only five geese counted in 1929. Counts in the 1980s saw increases in the number of ring-billed gulls, mourning doves, Anna's hummingbirds, American robins, Steller's jays, house finches and house sparrows.

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## *Christmas Bird Count continued*

Cannings says the Thompson-Okanagan bird counts are important in the national data gathering process, which requires a country-wide count because birds can, and do move around a lot. The bird counts are a good way to monitor the state of the environment because birds as a species are easy to count and there is a vast network of birders set up to do it.

The Vernon Christmas Bird Count will be on Sunday, December 15th. Volunteers are still needed to cover some areas. Contact Don Cecile, Coordinator <dcecile@shaw.ca>.

Birds Canada reports that in 2023 a total of 475 CBC circles submitted results for the 124th in Canada, which is consistent with the average in recent years. The most counts took place in Ontario (131), followed by British Columbia (90), and Alberta (54).

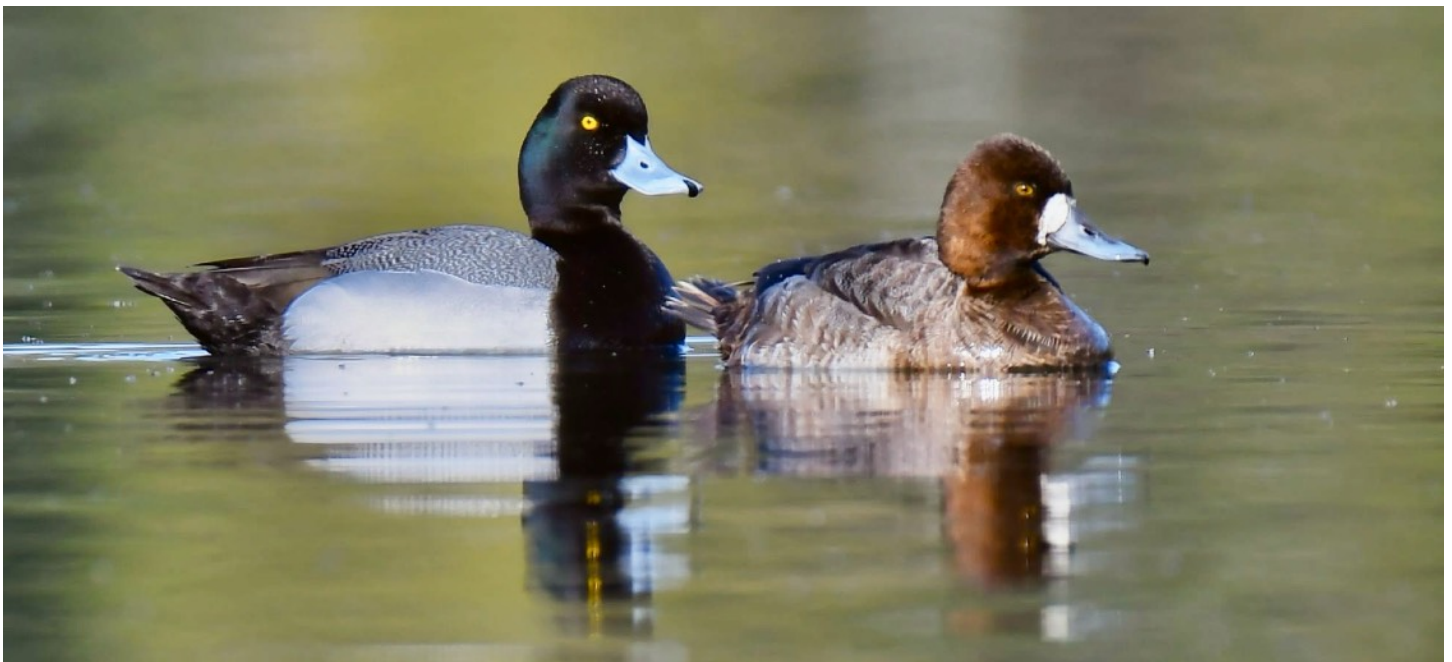
A total of 292 species were reported on the 124th CBC, an increase of thirteen species compared to 2022. Four species (Gray Heron, Limpkin, Philadelphia Vireo, and Pinyon Jay) were new for the all-time Canada list, bringing the total to 442 species.

## **Canada**

In her book *Stewards of Splendour*, author Jennifer Bonnell states: “some of the earliest were in Okanagan Landing, Vernon and Naramata between 1905 and 1908 and at Comox and Courtenay on Vancouver Island beginning in the 1920s.”

The top five most abundant species in terms of individuals reported on Canadian counts during the 124th CBC season, listed from highest to lowest, were: American Crow, Canada Goose, European Starling, Dark-eyed Junco and Mallard. 🌿

below: Greater Scaup, by Matt Boos



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## Chickadee Species in the Vernon Area

*Story & photos by Margaret MacKenzie*

**THERE** are seven North American species of chickadees. When I realized we had four species in Vernon, I decided to find out more about them and take a photo of each of them.

Well, that has taken a while, as chickadees are very active and not easy to photograph. Mountain Chickadees tend to dart about non-stop.....gone the second you press the camera shutter! Boreal Chickadees are only found at the top of Silver Star Mountain. I often see and hear them in winter but leave my camera behind while skiing. They too, tend to move about erratically making photographing difficult. Chestnut-backed Chickadees are rare in our area and often flitting about through the tops of trees. Black-capped Chickadees are the friendliest. It always amazes me how they seem to purposefully come skipping down to us from somewhere above, and talk away with their chick-a-dee calls as though saying, "hello, how are you?" Although I can see Black-capped, Mountain and Chestnut-backed chickadees at feeders, I really wanted to take photos of them in their own habitats and so kept up my searching.

The Chestnut-backed Chickadee is found in the coastal forests from south-eastern Alaska to California and are the only chickadee species on Vancouver Island. They also occur in some areas of the interior Douglas-fir wet belt, and in small numbers in the Vernon area. A

striking small songbird with their bright rufous back and side patches, they still resemble chickadees having black caps and black throats (bibs). They prefer dense coniferous-forest habitat with shade and cool temperatures. Years ago, we had friends that lived part way up Silver Star with the BX creek just below them and the Chestnut-backed Chickadees came to their feeder. This summer while hiking the new BX Creek Trail beginning at Forsberg Road, I realized they were still here in our area. Following the trail from Forsberg up along BX Creek takes you through dense old growth fir and cedar woods where you can find them calling and foraging in the higher canopy. Their vocal repertoire consists of a wide set of buzzy notes and chick-a-dee calls, but they lack the whistled "fee-bee" song of the Black-capped Chickadee.



Chestnut-backed Chickadee

You will only see the Boreal Chickadee in the boreal forests of Canada, adjacent US states, and Alaska. With a brown back and dark brown cap, a black bib,  
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## *Chickadees continued*

and rufous flanks, in Vernon it lives year round in the sub-alpine firs and spruces at Silver Star Mountain. Like the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, it lacks a whistled song, but has a wide variety of vocalizations, many which are scratchy or wheezy sounding dee-dee dees. It's difficult to see, often scurrying into the middle of a dense conifer. Mixed flocks of Boreal, Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees are often together in winter and non-breeding times.



mountain ranges from southern Yukon and BC south into the western USA interior mountain ranges, their calls are closer to Black-capped Chickadees but wheezier. Their whistled song is similar to the Black-capped but consists of three notes, rather than two, and sounds like "Three blind Mice". In winter they sometimes come to our town feeders.

Grey overall with a black cap, white cheek and black bib, who doesn't know the Black-capped Chickadee? I'm sure it's everyone's favourite, so cute and friendly and at most of our feeders all year if we allow it. They

Mountain Chickadees are the little impish looking chickadees, rather rakish looking, I think. Their black cap is separated by a white stripe above the eye giving them a 'bandit' look. Found in interior

are not happy if I don't give in and feed them a bit of sunflower seeds in the summer. They will scold me each day with loud dee dee dees when I venture into

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## *Chickadees continued*

the backyard. So, I usually give in.....

Our chickadees are not on a threatened list at this time, partly being non-migratory may help keep populations stable, and they also seem to be able to adapt to climatic and habitat changes quite well. Protection of BX creek and the old growth forests found along it is important to keep the small population of Chestnut-backed Chickadees here viable. They do well in the lower mainland and can be often seen in the parks and backyards of Vancouver. Hopefully, we will continue to have the

**Black-capped Chickadee**



four species of chickadees to enjoy in the years ahead. 🌱

**North Okanagan Naturalists' Club**

*GIVE A GIFT OF A NONC MEMBERSHIP THIS CHRISTMAS*

**\$35**  
Visit [www.nonc.ca](http://www.nonc.ca)



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## Let's protect and enjoy our lovely lakes

by Roseanne Van Ee

**ONE** look at our lovely, large valley bottom lakes here in the Okanagan and you think there's so much water. But did you know that more water evaporates from our lakes every year due to our semi-arid

climate than is replaced with rain or snow? Our lake water started during the last ice age melt and is annually replenished from higher upland snowpacks, then passes through creeks and ground water. Per capita, we use much more water than most other Canadians, because of our hot climate and landscaping, golf courses, orchards, ranches, wineries, etc., and wildfire fighting.

Thank goodness we have the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB). In the 1960s, the Okanagan had water pollution problems from poorly treated sewage effluent released into the lake, runoff from cattle yards, and toxins from insecticides. Thus the OBWB ([obwb.ca](http://obwb.ca)) was instituted valley wide enabling water quality studies, monitoring and best water management practices.



We really need to take care of our water. Now that we're nestled snug in our warm homes this winter, it's a great time to think about caring for our lakes from home. You probably already know to turn off the tap to prevent clean water from going down the drain while brushing teeth or washing. I even turn off the shower while I scrub, then back on to rinse -

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## NONO

*Our lakes continued*

no problem. I wash my dishes by hand, saving water as if I'm backpacking - again no problem. No clean water is wasted down the drain. I catch rinse water in jugs in the sink or shower water as it's warming up - this waters my houseplants. All this gives me a cheery sense of accomplishment by helping our environment. Water conservation is waterwise. Check out [okwaterwise.ca](http://okwaterwise.ca) - tips, and [home-water-works.org](http://home-water-works.org) for easy, helpful practices that you can implement.

Now we're challenged with new chemicals that can escape our water treatment facilities which still pumps effluent into our lakes. Per and poly fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), AKA "forever chemicals" are highly toxic chemicals found in hundreds of everyday household products. These chemicals don't decompose and can flow through the water cycle to soil, air, and even us. PFAS in drinking water may increase cholesterol levels, change liver enzymes, and disrupt hormones. PFAS make products like food packaging, paper plates, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, dental floss, clothing and fire-fighting foams water-, stain-, and oil-repellent. Go to [obwb.ca](http://obwb.ca)- choose Water Quality, then Endocrine Disruptors - read the sidebar for: [Easy tips to greatly reduce unwanted chemicals in our lakes and our bodies](#). This is just a beginning. You can find more online.

Microplastics are hitting the news and being studied in Okanagan Lake. Like forever chemicals, plastics don't decompose; they become microplastics. Check out <https://microplasticsokanagan.com/>. Help prevent microplastics from entering our lakes by avoiding synthetic clothing which sheds microplastic fibres when washed. Chose natural fibres and install microplastic-capturing devices for your washing

machine. And of course avoid single-use disposable plastics like bags, straws, cutlery, foam food packaging, etc.

Think about the fish, birds, shorebirds, insects and other wildlife that reside in and on our lakes. How's all this affecting their habitat? As naturalists we enjoy seeing and knowing nature, and we have to keep it worth knowing. That's our BC Nature's (The FBCN) mission.

We'll keep our lakes lovely, clean and healthy if we stay aware and take care. And thank goodness for the OBWB. 🌱

The Society for the Protection of Kalamalka Lake (SprKL) is a dedicated group of people from all walks of life who care about the quality of Kalamalka Lake in Coldstream, B.C.



We are a casual bunch and enjoy the time we spend together whether it's cleaning up creeks, planting shrubs or manning a booth. We have a couple of wine and cheese events for our members every year and encourage people to get out and have some fun while they're supporting a good cause.

On the web at [www.spkl.ca](http://www.spkl.ca) and also on Facebook.

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## New to British Columbia... and other changes to species

by Harold Sellers, drawing from the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre, 2024 B.C. Conservation Status Rank Review and Changes

### BIRDS

Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*): was placed on the Red List due to a very limited breeding in the province, but regular migration throughout the province.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*): was placed on the Blue List. It is a relatively widespread migrant in the province but for which there is uncertainty around population sizes and trends but evidence of declines.

Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) including subspecies of *A. g. laingi* and *A. g. atricapillus* have been split from Eurasian Goshawk and are now called American Goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*), with subspecies *A. a. atricapillus* and *A. a. laingi*.

Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) has been lumped with Cordilleran Flycatcher (*E. occidentalis*) and is now known as Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*).

### INSECTS

Heron's Cuckoo Carder Bee, *Stelis heronae*, is a newly described species that is endemic to B.C. (Sheffield 2024).

*Paruroctonus boreus*, Northern Scorpion [pictured above] was added to the list of arachnids in B.C. This is the only species of scorpion found in Canada.

It has been recorded from southern B.C. (Cameron and Buddle 2019).

### VASCULAR PLANTS

Eleven vascular plants were added to the B.C. flora. Of the 11, 3 are native species, with two species, straight-seed mudwort (*Elatine orthosperma*), and clustered burred (*Sparganium glomeratum*) potentially being native species. Six Exotic species were added.



Of those native species, one is an overlooked hybrid, hybrid columbine (*Aquilegia x miniana*), a hybrid between *A. formosa* and *A. flavescens*.

There were also two native species of Erigeron added to the B.C. flora from the Elk Valley, Lackschewitz's fleabane (*E. lackschewitzii*), reidentified from *E. ochroleucus*, and dwarf fleabane (*E. radicans*), both of which are now B.C. CDC Red-listed.

Among the Exotics now included in the B.C. flora are Hjelmqvist's cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster hjelmqvistii*), now known from Ucluelet, Tofino, and an uninhabited island in the Fraser River near Agassiz, and diploid timothy (*Phleum bertolonii*), now established in at least five sites in Metro Vancouver. 🌱

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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 4<sup>th</sup>.** Margaret MacKenzie: Arctic Birding Trip.

### 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.

### 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, Lookout, and Parabola trails to loop back to Red Gate. Two hours-plus and hilly. Meet at the Red Gate parking lot on Kidston Road. Contact Susan at [supepghat@hotmail.com](mailto:supepghat@hotmail.com)

**Dec 14 – No walk. The next day is the Christmas Bird Count!**

**Sunday, December 15 — Christmas Bird Count.**

Contact Don Cecile  
<[dcecile@shaw.ca](mailto:dcecile@shaw.ca)> to participate.

### Dec 21 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Bobcat Trail and others at Predator Ridge. Up to 2 hrs on winding forest trails. Meet at the Trail Parking Hub, on your left as you drive up Birdie Lake Drive, between Birdie Lake and a traffic circle. Contact Harold [hikerharold@gmail.com](mailto:hikerharold@gmail.com)

**January NONC Meeting — Wednesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>:** The Interior Wildlife Rehabilitation Society.