NEWSPACKET

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

April 2025

Spotted Towhee
by Charlie Peti

North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)
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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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Annual Membership Dues:

Couple/Family	$50
Single	$35

see nonc.ca

The Rarest Birds Recorded in the North Okanagan

by Chris Siddle, photos courtesy of All About Birds, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

PART ONE : Geese, Swans, and Ducks to Plovers and Sandpipers

THIS paper is a summary of birds that are considered most rare, and, more importantly, out-of-range for the North Okanagan region. This summary is not comprehensive. Locating historical sightings of an area's rarest birds is difficult; finding ALL the sightings of each species is very time consuming. Instead, I have collected what I consider to be enough records that the list can be termed representative of each bird's status rather than a complete collection of every sighting.

My main sources of recent records were eBird files, as well as eBird's 'illustrated checklist" for the North Okanagan. For comparative purposes, records for the Central Okanagan and Okanagan-Similkameen eBird regions were also searched. For recent Central and Okanagan/Similkameen records the "Okanagan/Similkameen Checklist of Birds" by Don Cecile and Kalin Ocala (2023) was frequently consulted. For historic records the Cannings brothers' outstanding study, Birds of the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia (1987) was an invaluable collection of sightings prior to its publication. Thereafter, sightings of rare birds were not collected in any systematic way except for various checklists which gave only bare phenological details.

Each account begins with a summary statement of the species' usual range that is closest to the North Okanagan.

Abbreviations used throughout the text:

BOKVBC = *Birds of the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia* by Robert A. Cannings, Richard J. Cannings and Sydney G. Cannings. 1987. Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria.
Mobs = many observers
N Ok = North Okanagan Regional District
c = central
e = eastern
n = north
w = west

and combinations
PDF = Photo Duplicate File. A file of photographs of rare vertebrates documenting their presence in BC, maintained by the vertebrate zoology branch of the Royal B.C. Museum, Victoria in the 1970-90s. Observers throughout the province were encouraged to contribute to the file.
* = asterisk appears in Birds of the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia to indicate a specimen was collected. The locations of the stored specimens are given in Appendix 3.
Ph = photo

Waterfowl:

Ross's Goose- Winters in California and breeds on Canada's c arctic coast and arctic islands. Occasionally individuals stray westwards into interior B.C. from their prairie province migration. Records include 1 in spring at Rawlings L 1921 (Brooks and Swarth 1925); 1 at Swan L 27 Apr.-1 May 1985 (BOKVBC); 1 Swan L- Okanagan L. – 13 Sept.-20 Dec. 1992 (PRa; CS; m. ob.); and two at Rawlings L 7 May 2009 (CS) and 8 May 2009 (RuC).

Brant- Breeds w and n coastal Alaska and Yukon, and Canadian arctic islands. Pacific races winter

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Rarest Birds continued

along Pacific coast. Rarely strays to fresh water. The only verified N Ok record is of a single bird at Rawlings L (ST; later mobs) 30 Sept. 2021 which remained in the area for several days. BOKVBC lists 4 sightings for the Central and South Okanagan.

above: Brandt

Tufted Duck- A Eurasian species, casual along the west coast of North America, very rare on inland waters. A male wintered along the Kelowna waterfront for a few years in the 1990s, providing the first record for the Okanagan Valley. A male on O'Keefe's Pond 23 March 2008 is the only N Ok record (GSD-ph; CS).

Black Scoter- A coastal winterer, more common on Atlantic Coast than Pacific, very rarely straying to inland waters except the Great Lakes. Two sight records for the N Ok, both female types, 1 at Okanagan Landing 10 Oct. 1992 (MC, mobs.) and 1 at Otter L 11 Nov. 2018 (CS).

Band-tailed Pigeon- Prior to the 1980-1990s, the BC coastal population was substantial with sightings of small numbers "pushing" eastwards into the s

above: Black Scoter

interior along Highway 1 and both national railways. During the pigeon's provincial decline sightings in the Okanagan also declined. One historical record in BOKVBC for Lavington 20 May 1972 (TC, MC, PDF No. 264). The most recent N Ok sighting appears to be a single at Bishop Bird Sanctuary 26 May 2001 (MC; m. obs.)

Black-billed Cuckoo- Nearest breeding range is s Alberta. Two undocumented historical records: "probable" at Okanagan Landing 26 June 1926 (ACB); heard only at Vernon late May-early June 1957 (KG). Two flying overhead at Wye Lake 13 July 1980 (KG), a sighting considered good by Cannings, Cannings, and Cannings 1987. One was seen and heard at Goose L 21 June 2007 (CS).

Pacific Golden-Plover- Breeds in the nw Alaska and migrates trans-Pacific to winter in South Pacific and Australia, with fewer birds occurring along the w coast of North America. BOKVBC gives a sight record of one with two American Golden-Plovers 7 Oct. 1984 at Swan L (RJC, MH).

Upland Sandpiper – Nearest breeding populations

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Rarest Birds continued

occur in n B.C. and possibly c Washington State. Probably bred in the S Ok on Anarchist Mountain (BOKVBC). The same source mentions without details "a few sight records …for the Vernon area." Two were seen at Middleton Mountain 17 Aug. 1993 (CS; mobs).

Whimbrel- Breeds on tundra in n and nw Alaska, n Yukon and Hudson's Bay. Very rare migrant through BC's interior. One seen at Crystal Pond on the Bella Vista Range 31 Jul 2002 (CS). One at Otter L 8 June 2018 (CS). One photographed at the mouth of Whiteman Creek, Okanagan L 28 May 2023 (EA fide ST).

above: Wimbrell

Hudsonian Godwit- A rapidly declining New World shorebird, breeding very locally in coastal Alaska, NWT, and w Hudson's Bay and wintering in s South America Migrates across N America using the Central Flyway. A single lingered at Otter L 21-22 Aug. 2012 (CS). One was foraging with dowitchers in a flooded field near Deep Creek, Larkin Cross Rd. 7 May 2018 CS -ph).

Marbled Godwit- Breeds in the s parts of the Prairie Provinces and the n Great Plains. Small population in sw Alaska. Winters along the west coast and Gulf states. BOKVBC gives one record for the valley: one at Okanagan Landing 7 Aug. 1910 (ACB).

Ruddy Turnstone- Breeds in Canada's and Alaska's n arctic, and migrates along the e and w coasts and along the Central Flyway. Rare on inland waters in the west. BOKVBC lists two sightings for the N Ok: 1 on 14 Sept. 1983 at Swan L (MC; BCr: ACr) and photographed the next day (TC, PDF No. 862) and 1 at the same site 23 Aug 1984 (PRa) and 24 Aug 1984 (MC). There have been no recent records.

Red Phalarope- Breeds across n arctic and migrates across Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Rare at inland locations. BOKVBC lists 4 N Ok records: 29 Oct 1934 – 3 immatures Swan L (AB); 28 Sept 1939*; 5 Oct 1955*; and 26 Oct 1963 (KG).

Ruff- Breeds across n Eurasia, wintering in Africa and s Asia. Has nested at least once in Alaska. A scattering of individuals appear during spring and fall migration annually along North America coasts and far less so at inland points. One at MacKay Reservoir, Vernon Commonage, 2 Aug 1994 (CS) and photographed (CC). The bird lingered for 2-3 days.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper- No recent sightings for the N Ok; however, one at Robert L, C Ok, shows the potential for this rare and declining shorebird to appear as a late summer vagrant. Breeds on the high arctic islands of Canada and n-e coast of Alaska. Migrates to Argentina through the Great Plains with vagrants seen both e and w of its main route most years. BOOKVBC gives 5 records, all from near Vernon. A juvenile female was collected on the

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Rarest Birds continued

Commonage on 22 Aug. 1932* (ACB), 1 was at O'Keefe Pond 4 Sept 1970 (SGC; RJC; SRC), 1 at Vernon 25 Aug 1978 (JGr; FC), 1 at Swan L 3 Sept. 1985 (MC; PRa) and finally 1 on the Commonage 15 Sept. 1985 MC; BCr; PRa; PBM).

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper- This n Asian species breeds in Siberia and winters in Australasia. Some juveniles pass west through Alaska and turn up each autumn usually as singles at favoured w coast shorebird sites like Vancouver's Iona Island. Records for BC's interior are very infrequent. BOKVBC gives a single record for the N Ok: 1 at Swan L 12 Sept. 1982 (HMo; PBM; MC, JGr).

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In March two new stone benches were added at the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. These were funded by donations from several NONC members and a grant from the Regional District North Okanagan. Immediately they were appreciated by park users, such as this family. 😀

Endemic Species of BC

British Columbia's Treasures: 5 Endemic Species and Their Ecological Importance

Published by Nature Trust BC, 7 August 2023

BRITISH Columbia's diverse landscapes and plentiful waters are a sanctuary for rich biodiversity. Among its many natural treasures, BC boasts numerous endemic species. Endemism refers to the ecological phenomenon where a species is native, restricted to a specific geographic area, and not found anywhere else in the world. These unique species have evolved and adapted to the specific environmental conditions, ecological niches, and geographical boundaries of their range.

Endemic species play a crucial role in maintaining the delicate balance of the province's ecosystems, showcasing the importance of preserving and protecting their habitats. This article will introduce you to five remarkable creatures and explore why they are vital to British Columbia's ecological well-being.

Vancouver Island Black Bear (*Ursis americanus vancouveri)*

Discover the Vancouver Island black bear, a unique subspecies of the mainland black bear found only within the forests of Vancouver Island and its adjacent islands. As compared to their mainland counterparts, this subspecies is distinguished by their consistently darker colouring and larger skulls. These bears have a fascinating origin; evidence suggests their arrival on the island shortly after the last glaciation around 10,000 years ago, as indicated by ancient skeletons found in caves.

Embodying BC's natural heritage, this endemic species holds deep cultural significance for several Indigenous communities, symbolizing strength,

wisdom, and protection. As expert seed dispersers, they also play a pivotal role in shaping the island's diverse plant communities, supporting the growth of vital flora. Their affinity for salmon during the spawning season also benefits their ecosystems, as leftover carcasses provide a nutrient-rich food source for other wildlife and help fertilize soils.

Raspberry Hydroid (*Zyzzyzus rubusidaeus*)

Meet the extraordinary raspberry hydroid, a marine species found uniquely in BC's coastal waters near the northern tip of Vancouver Island. True to its name, these hydroids resemble clusters of raspberries adorned with vivid colours, from deep reds to purples and pinks. Interestingly, they were only described as a distinct species in 2013, thanks to the research efforts of Anita Brinkmann-Voss, a scientist from northern Vancouver Island.

This species of hydroid belongs to the phylum Cnidaria, which includes jellyfish, corals, and sea anemones. These marine creatures have a long evolutionary history, with some fossil evidence dating back over 500 million years. Equipped with specialized tentacles containing nematocysts, the raspberry hydroid exhibits a remarkable adaptation in capturing tiny planktonic organisms that drift in the water. Upon contact, the stinging cells immobilize and consume their prey.

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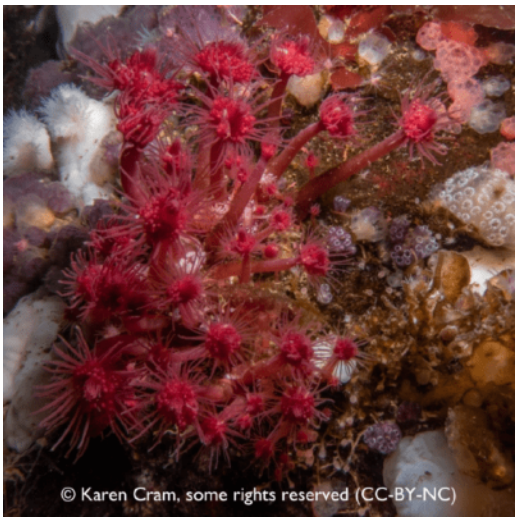
Endemic continued

In BC's marine ecosystem, the raspberry hydroid (pictured at right) plays a vital ecological role, providing essential shelter and habitat for diverse marine organisms. Its intricate structures transform its surroundings into a bustling microenvironment, acting as a nursery for juvenile fish and invertebrates.



Haida Gwaii Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius carlottae*)

The Haida Gwaii Varied Thrush is a subspecies found nowhere else but on the islands of Haida Gwaii in BC. Its isolated habitat has fostered unique characteristics, setting it apart from other Varied Thrush Populations.

In the dense forests where these birds breed, their sweet, echoing, simple song will be the first clue that they are nearby. Watch for them foraging on the forest floor in small clearings, meanwhile, singing birds will often perch higher in the understory and lower layers of the forest. Catching a glimpse of these elusive birds reveals a stunning combination of slaty gray back and breast band contrasting with a fiery burnt-orange breast and belly. The males are renowned for these vibrant colours, while the females exhibit more subtle hues. Notably, the female Haida Gwaii varied thrush is distinguished by its red tones, as opposed to the mainland thrush's olive-coloured plumage.

Like other varied thrushes, this subspecies has a wild side, often displaying aggressive behaviours towards each other and other bird species. Males have been known to fiercely defend small feeding territories, asserting their dominance over sparrows, blackbirds, cowbirds, towhees, and juncos. As adaptable foragers, these thrushes feed on insects during the bountiful summer months and switch to a diet of berries and seeds in winter.

Macoun's Meadowfoam (*Limnanthes macouni*)

Macoun's meadowfoam, a small herbaceous plant endemic to Southern Vancouver Island and several adjacent islands, is a true botanical treasure. Initially discovered near Victoria in 1875, this species was believed to be extinct for many years until its rediscovery on Trial Island in 1957. From late March

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Invest in the future of the North Okanagan naturalists' club
Donations may be sent by e-transfer to nonc2021@telus.net or sent by mail. All funds received will be spent locally. Please include your name and address in the message portion of the e-transfer.

Endemic continued

to early May, its white petals and vibrant yellow centers grace the landscape.

This species thrives in open areas and light forests, often found near the Pacific Ocean's shores. The key to its survival lies in specific ecological conditions, as it prefers wet or submerged habitats in winter and entirely dry habitats during summer. This plant has evolved specialized adaptations to thrive in this habitat, including leaves that are coated with a waxy later, providing protection and reducing water loss in the salty air.

The Garry Oak ecosystems that Macoun's Meadowfoam relies on would not exist without historical cultural management from Indigenous communities, who have been stewarding the land for time immemorial. These traditional ecological practices include low-severity controlled fires, and other maintenance and cultivation techniques. However, ongoing settler-colonialism has put Macoun's meadowfoam at risk. The natural vegetation of the Garry oak savanna, once abundant in the southern part of Vancouver Island, has significantly diminished due to development pressures. As a result, native plants like Macoun's meadowfoam, which rely on this ecosystem, face extinction. This is mostly due to habitat destruction and invasive species.

Vancouver Island White-tailed Ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucura saxatilis*)

The subspecies of white-tailed ptarmigan, endemic to Vancouver Island, showcases a remarkable adaptation to its environment. Like other North American ptarmigan, they possess cryptic plumage that expertly camouflages them against snowy landscapes in winter, where they are entirely white, and rocky terrain in summer, where they exhibit a mottled brown, grey, and white colouration. As the smallest grouse in North America, the Vancouver Island subspecies of white-tailed ptarmigan has unique characteristics. They have shorter wings, heavier bodies, and a more hooked bill compared to their mainland counterparts.

Thriving in various alpine, subalpine, and upper montane habitats year-round, these ptarmigan have diverse dietary preferences. Their omnivorous diet includes buds, stems, seeds, leaves, fruits, and insects. These foraging habits play a crucial role in seed dispersal, promoting the growth and propagation of alpine plant species and ultimately helping the entire ecosystem to thrive.

Despite their adaptability, this subspecies faces challenges. They are vulnerable to extinction because they live in low densities within patchy habitats characterized by ever-changing environmental conditions. Ski resort developments and forest harvesting are just a few of the human activities altering their environment.

Let's protect and enjoy our lovely lakes, Part 2

Part 1 on protecting our lakes from our homes was in December'24 NONC Newspacket.
by Roseanne Van Ee

IT'S terribly scary how toxins can leach into our big, beautiful Okanagan lakes destroying their life-giving ecology. Much like the destructive climate changing pollution in our atmosphere; it's unseen and it's changing fast! Most people don't even know what's happening to our water. We look at our lovely Okanagan lakes and can't imagine a problem.

It's empowering to know that we can all make a real difference in preserving water quality by taking simple actions around our homes. Most of our lake water is replenished from higher upland snowpacks which then flow down through the valley in creeks and ground water.

But as our valley population grows, more and more water is consumed before it reaches the lake for orchards and other agricultural activities, landscaping, golf courses, wineries, and our homes and institutions for cleaning, cooking, drinking, watering, etc. Fortunately, our upland water sources, creeks and streams are still relatively clean and healthy.

We all need to do our part, to avoid contaminating the lake with pollution from stormwater. Runoff from our roads, gardens and sidewalks can contain pesticide residues, heavy metals from brake linings, nitrates from fertilizers, oil and grease, antifreeze, and harmful bacteria from pet waste and failing septic systems.

Remember the water cycle! Water molecules continually transfer through air, soil, water, clouds, plants and animals. There's lots of neat illustrations online.

Each residential property is part of a larger landscape in our watershed
So, here's what you can do to help keep our lake water clean:

💧 **Eliminate the use of toxic chemical fertilizers, insecticides, pesticides and herbicides**. Lawns are the worst. Never mow low - let it grow is becoming popular.

💧 **Landscape with native plants** especially in riparian (land next to water) areas. Why? These plants evolved in this hot, dry climate so require less water and no toxic chemicals while providing food

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Lovely Lakes continued

and shelter for our native birds, butterflies, and other pollinators.

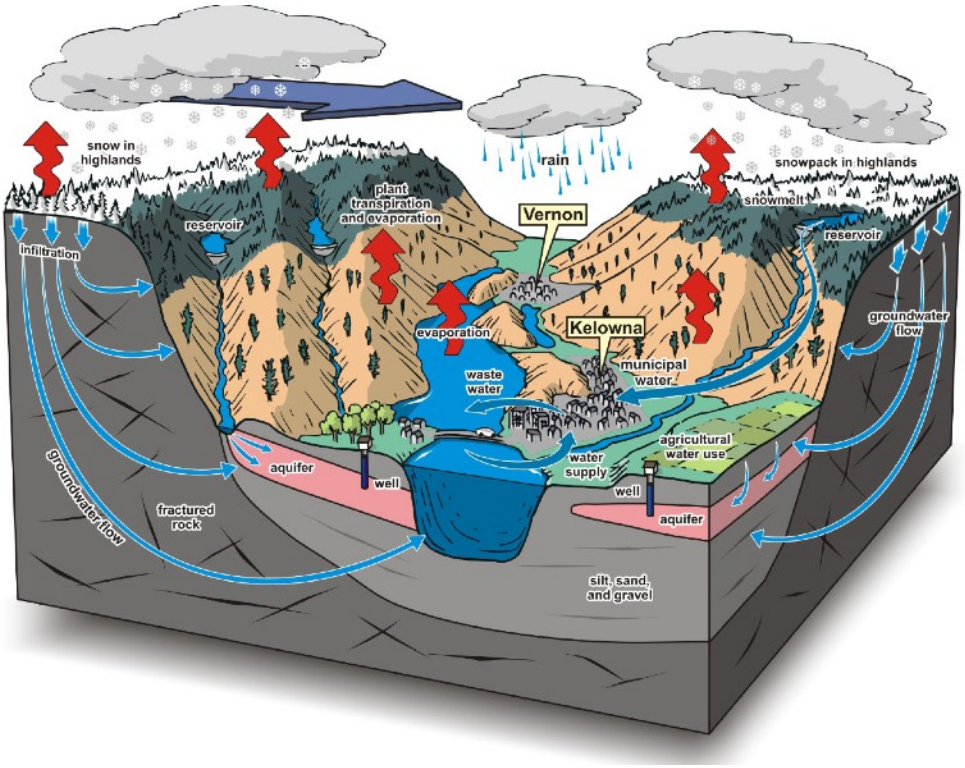
💧 **Use pavers for patios and driveways and gravel for walkways**.
Why? Rainwater that runs along solid impervious surfaces like pavement, asphalt or concrete roads, driveways, sidewalks, etc. picks up and carries chemical pollutants like fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, oil, grease, pet waste, detergents, and more depositing them into our lakes and waterways. Pavers and gravel allow water to filter through the soil to replenish groundwater supplies for plants and eventually streams, and helps prevent flooding.

💧 **Collect roof rainwater from downspouts into barrels for watering**.
Why? Protects erosion and saves on using processed tap water. In one year, you could collect thousands of litres of water from a typical Vernon roof.

💧 **Keep toxic chemical containers like sprayers, farm equipment, old vehicles, etc. away from waterbodies**.

💧 **Support strong penalties for polluting our wasting water and ensure enforcement.**
Establish neighbourhood water watch programs with quick and reliable action. Everyone works together for a safe, clean and healthy water supply. Water between dusk and dawn.

💧 **Let our Mayor and City Council, MLA, and MP know that you care about clean water** and support more interventions and protections for our lakes. For example - nearly all storm drains empty into local streams and our lakes UNTREATED - Yikes! Filter it!
Don't allow dirty or chlorinated water to enter the storm drains (ie. sweep driveways and sidewalks - don't hose down). Also, not all communities are metered - they should be!



Let's care for and enjoy our lovely Okanagan lakes and keep its nature healthy.

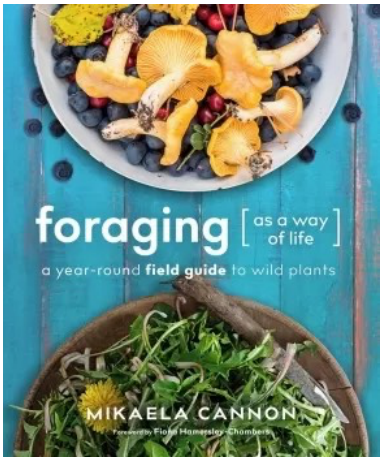
Check out makewaterwork.ca for more great tips

Use any of the photos and please credit to me. The diagram is courtesy of the Okanagan Basin Water Board

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, May 14th: Our guest speaker will be Mikaela Cannon on the subject of foraging. Mikaela is the author of *Foraging as a Way of Life: A Year-Round Field Guide to Wild Plants*.

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.

Apr 5 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk in Kalamalka Lake Provincial 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 Karen at reczuchkm@gmail.com

Apr 12 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Shuswap North Okanagan Rail Trail and the Heritage River Walk in Enderby. About 5 km loop, way, flat. Meet at the parking beside the trail on the south side of Cliff Avenue beside the Shuswap River. If the weather is nice, bring a lunch to enjoy by the river after the walk.
Contact Harold at hikerharold@gmail.com

Apr 19 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a Nature Walk along the Canadian Lakeview Estates Trail. 800 m down a zigzagging hillside slope to the lake, along the shore and trail for ~2 km loop, then back up. Some steep sections. Park beyond the Canadian Lakeview Estates sign on the left side of Tronson Rd. Trail entrance is a short walk further up to 9030 Tronson beside a driveway. Spectacular wildflower blooms! Text Roseanne at 250-308-8826

Apr 26 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on Birdie Lake at Predator Ridge with stop at Rose's Pond after the walk. Meet in the first parking lot after turning right off Predator Ridge Drive onto Village Centre Place. Short, 1 km.
Contact Margaret at Mhubble@telus.net

Our events are also posted at www.nonc.ca