# NEWSPACKET

**September 2026**

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

**1951-2026 — 75 Years for Nature**



Greater Yellowlegs
photographed by
Jack VanDyk



**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<br>604-600-6725 |
| Vice-President | Michelle Gregoire<br>250-308-2838 |
| Past President | Harold Sellers<br>250-307-3543 |
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## LIFE MEMBERS

Ray Arlt, Kay Bartholomew, Joan Heriot, Phil Jones, Peter Legg, Malcolm Martin, Frank & Mary Paul, Harold Sellers

Newspacket is printed by Wayside Printing in Vernon. Thank you Wayside!

## PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Contact the following if you have questions.

| | |
|---|---|
| BC Nature | Eric Kowalski<br>604-600-6725 |
| Bluebird Trails | Margaret Mackenzie<br>250-542-2712 |
| Botany | Margaret Mackenzie<br>250-542-2712 |
| Christmas Bird Count | Don Cecile |
| Conservation | Harold Sellers<br>250-307-3543 |
| Cools Pond | Rod Drennan<br>250-545-4999 |
| Hummingbird Banding | Louise Breneman<br>250-542-4050 |
| Nature Walks | Coreen Jenner<br>250-306-8827 |
| Newsletter | Harold Sellers<br>250-307-3543 |
| Speakers | Bruce Tattersall<br>778-874-4614 |
| Swan Lake | Michelle Gregoire, Joyce Heard, Robert Hettler, Eric Kowalski, Laurel MacDonald, Margaret MacKenzie, Marnie Williamson |
| Swan & Eagle Count | Rod Drennan<br>250-545-4999 |
| Watershed Stewardship | Eric Kowalski & Marnie Williamson |
| Website & Social Media | Laura Barker<br>519-532-6600 |

Annual Membership Dues:

| | |
|---|---|
| Couple/Family | $55 |
| Single | $38 |

see nonc.ca

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## Club News & Notes



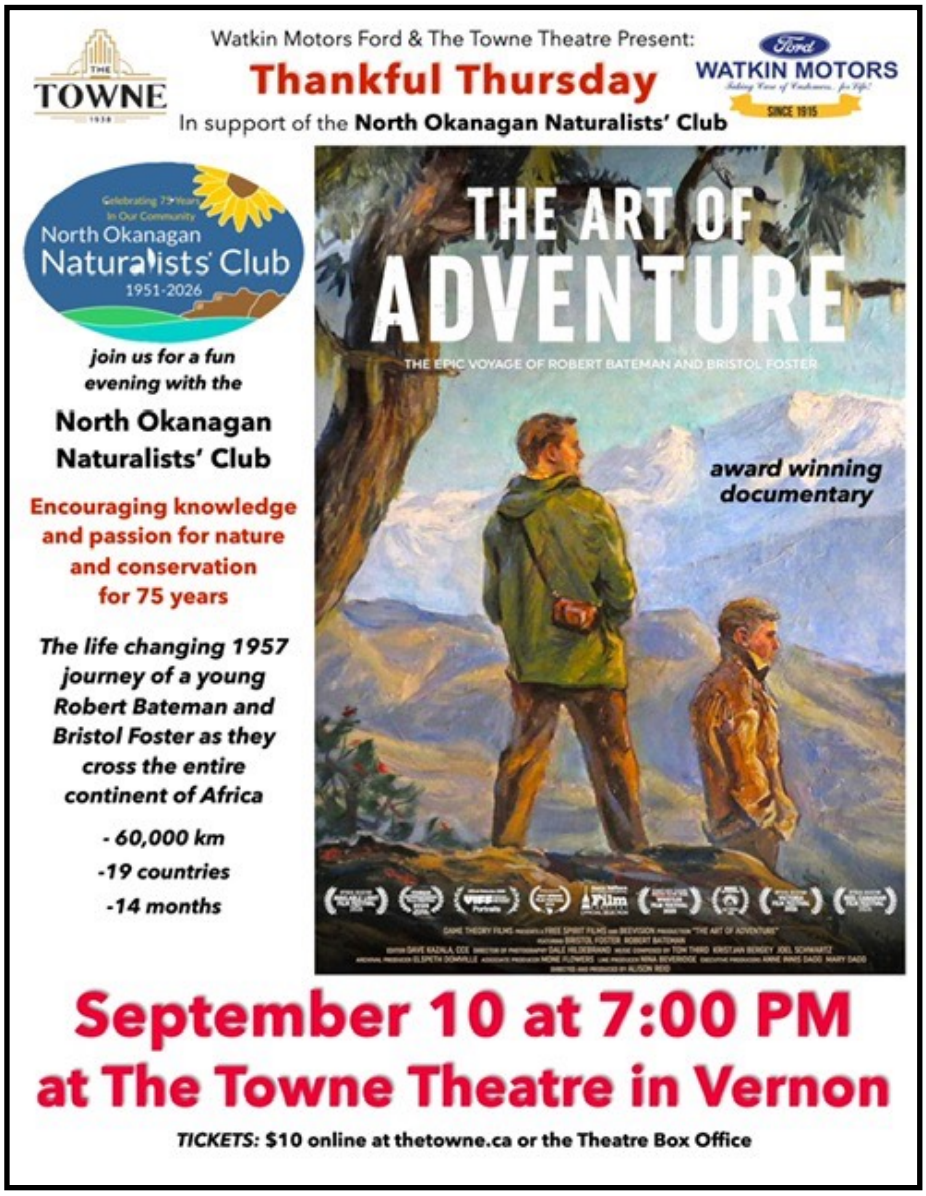

Our latest new members are Fred & Esther Hizsa, Shirley Roadhouse, Deb Thrall, and Henry Weber. Welcome to all of you!

On Saturday, June 20th the club had a booth at the annual Vernon Sunshine Festival. We had the opportunity to speak to many residents and visitors about the programs and projects of NONC. People also shared stories and observations with us. Thank you to the club volunteers who took shifts throughout the day.

At the right is a poster for a big event coming up for NONC. On September 10th the Vernon Towne Theatre is holding a Thankful Thursday presentation. As the award winning film is shown about Robert Bateman's and Bristol Foster's trip across Africa years ago, NONC will have a display and will also be the recipient of the ticket revenue.

Tickets are only $10. To ensure one, purchase it online…and soon! We look forward to seeing you there. Bring a friend and support the club.

Finally, note our monthly meetings at the Schubert Centre have moved from the first Wednesday of the month to the first Thursday. The next few dates will be September 3, October 1, and November 5. The change was necessitated by a scheduling conflict at Schubert in September, but it provides us with an opportunity to avoid the lack of parking there on Wednesday nights. We hope you can adjust your schedule.



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# The Ways of Our Water

***Then, Now, and…stuff we don't know***

**PART 4 — Swan Lake**
*by Harold Sellers*
*photos as attributed*

**THIS** is the fourth instalment of The Ways of Our Water series and this time we look at the third major lake of the North Okanagan: Swan Lake.

**The Lake**

Swan Lake was connected to Okanagan Lake in ancient times. An estimated eleven thousand years ago, the ancestral BX Creek deposited an alluvial fan, damming the southern end of Swan Lake. [1]

Swan Lake has a perimeter of 11.5 km and lies at an elevation of 390 m. Its surface area is 438.3 hectares, its maximum depth is 9.1 m, and its mean depth is 5.6 m (Fisheries Information Summary System FISS, 2013).

The main inflow, BX Creek (or Upper BX Creek), flows into the south-east corner of the lake. The lake also has ephemeral inflow at the north end. The outflow, also BX Creek (sometimes referred to as Lower BX Creek or in the past as Swan Lake Creek), flows out of the southern end of Swan Lake, eventually joining Vernon Creek in the centre of the City of Vernon.

At the north end of the lake there are minor inflows, seasonally, from Malysh Creek and Greenhow Creek. Historically, these, and other small creeks drained from the hills around the lake into Swan Lake. There are several small lakes and ponds to the west, including Goose Lake and others on the OKIB reserve, that once sent spring overflow to the lake. Even Cools Pond in the BX area to the east, once drained into Swan Lake when it had an excess of water.

This hydrology gives the lake, when viewed from high above, a shape similar to a tall, narrow balloon, with Lower BX Creek being the tether.

Today the major inflow to the lake is ground water from those same hills, particularly Silver Star Mountain.

image below : Google Earth

*continued on page 5*



*Swan Lake continued*

**Origin of the Name**

We don't know when the lake was originally given its name, or by whom. It seems obvious that the presence of swans on the lake would be the reason. Ornithologist Dick Cannings believes there was once a population of swans using the lake, but they left as human disturbance increased. It's also possible they may have been driven out by hunting (see below). Publications in the late 1890s referred to the lake as Swan Lake. [2]

**Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park**

As far back as 1922 J.A. Munro, Chief Migratory Bird Officer, wrote in the *Canadian Field Naturalist* "..Swan Lake has been proposed as a bird sanctuary."

For many years NONC advocated for a nature reserve at the south end of the lake, and in 2005 Ducks Unlimited Canada and Greater Vernon Services (RDNO), with substantial donations from the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club and Bishop Wild Bird Trust Foundation, took title on 125 acres of the Anderson property at the south end of Swan Lake to create a nature reserve. The North Okanagan Naturalists' Club became responsible for the environmental stewardship of the property. Livestock were permanently removed from the property.

**Bird Life**

The following quotation is from *Recent Surveys of the Bird Life of Swan Lake, Vernon*, by Christopher Siddle, 1991-1993.

"Swan Lake is an important migratory stopover point for up to 40 species of migratory waterfowl including loons, grebes, herons, swans, geese, dabbling ducks, diving ducks, mergansers, coots, gulls, and terns. Surveys of waterfowl reveal that up to at least 6,000 may be found per day during the height of migration. Over 40 other species also occur seasonally including at least 15 species of diurnal and nocturnal raptors, several of which winter in fields around the lake. Historic surveys have found at least 152 bird species have occurred (with an additional 8 probable prior to deforestation) and 22 species have bred at the lake. Long term habitat changes (deforestation for agriculture and industrialization of the surrounding lands) have resulted in a major decline or extirpation of virtually all riparian songbirds, two owls and at least three tree cavity breeding waterfowl. Human intrusion and disturbance from power boats have likely resulted in the extirpation of two breeding waterfowl — Common Loon and Western Grebe — and possibly the decline of another two breeding grebes, Red-necked Grebe and Pied-billed Grebe. The Black Tern has disappeared as a breeding species for unknown reasons, as has the American Bittern which has never been documented as breeding. The Bobolink has also disappeared as a breeding species, perhaps because of cattle grazing or haying operations."

Today Swan Lake is still recognized as an important location for migrating, breeding and resident birdlife. "Swan Lake is a haven for waterfowl of all kinds". — *The New B.C. Roadside Naturalist: A Guide to Nature along B.C. Highways*, by Sydney Cannings and Richard Cannings.

Given the name of the lake, one would expect to see swans, especially the more common Trumpeter Swan, on the lake.

Historically, Trumpeter Swans were nearly wiped out across North America due to aggressive hunting

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# NONC

*Swan Lake continued*

for the quill and feather trade. By 1933, only 77 wild individuals were known to remain in Canada. From a remnant population at Lonesome Lake, British Columbia, translocations were made by the Canadian Wildlife Service to various lakes around the province. One site chosen was our Swan Lake. NONC records indicate that our club had concerns about how these swans were housed, and in 1965 the CWS relocated them.

As stated above by Chris Siddle, many bird species used to be present on or around the lake, but are no longer present. Fortunately there are others that draw birders from all over to observe them. This would include Great Blue Herons, American White Pelican, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Sora, Virginia Rail, Wilson's Snipe, American Bittern, as well as swallows and songbirds.

Swan Lake was checked for Zebra and Quagga mussels in 2024, with none found, fortunately.

Fish species include Sucker, Burbot, Carp, Northern Pikeminnow, Pumpkinseed, Rainbow Trout, Redside Shiner, and Yellow Perch. There might still be some Lake Whitefish. Trout are native to BC waters, and the lake is stocked with them annually. Carp, Perch, and Pumpkinseed are all introduced.



right: Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park (by Harold Sellers)
below: Western Painted Turtles (by Eric Kowalski)

**Lake Life**

Swan Lake has a large population of Western Painted Turtles. With an ancient connection to Okanagan Lake it would be interesting to know if any mollusks or crayfish are to found in the lake. Please report sightings.



A variety of mammals have been seen around the lake regularly or at least in the past couple of decades. Mule Deer and Coyotes are regulars, but Black Bear, Bobcat, Mink, and Weasel have also been seen. Of course mice and voles are abundant, particularly in the nature reserve's grasslands and meadows.

Beaver have been at the north end for some years and in the past two years, beaver have built a lodge and dam in the creek at the south end.

*continued on page 7*

*Swan Lake continued*

**Wildlife Management Area**

In 2018 the province gave Wildlife Management Area status to Swan Lake. The purpose of wildlife management areas is to protect significant fish or wildlife species and their habitats, while accommodating compatible land uses.

**Lake Uses & Access**

Besides nature observation, Swan Lake is enjoyed by many who live along its shores. There are RV parks and a campgrounds, and Canadian Airboat. Land at the north end is I.R. #4, but is unoccupied. The Vernon Rowing & Dragon Boat Club has used the lake form many years from their facility on the east side.

Lake access for recreational boating and fishing is from the Meadowlark Road launch.

**Where Naturalists Go**

The Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park is, of course, a favourite destination for nature observers and those looking for a peaceful, convenient place for a walk. Pets are prohibited from the park.

Three public-owned parcels of land are on the east side of the lake. To the south is the Nature Trust of BC Swan Lake (or Kaminski) property, which is not publicly accessible. Further north, immediately south of the canoeing club is the Jordan Nature Reserve and the Crane Road Park. A short trail runs through these two adjacent properties.

Many go kayaking and canoeing on the lake, exploring the shoreline and BX Creek. Birds and other wildlife are often best seen this way. Some birders also make good observations from the shore at Meadowlark Road or the canoeing club.

We are so fortunate to have this excellent nature spot so close to Vernon and so easily accessible. Enjoy it, but remain alert for its protection.

References:

*Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park Management Plan for 2020-2030*, by NONC, 2019

Footnotes:

[1] *Vernon: A Geological Guide*, by Jamie Kidston. Self-published, 1993

[2] *The O'Keefes of O'Kanagan*, by Ken Mather, Heritage House Publishing, 2025

below: sunrise over the lake (H. Sellers)



## Black Bears are big eaters!

*by Roseanne Van Ee*

**RIGHTLY** so; these lumbering, yet agile hulks lose up to 40% of their body weight while hibernating up to six months each winter (Nov.-Apr.). So their waking time is spent foraging for food. Thankfully, these omnivorous opportunists - who eat everything from insect larvae, dandelions and berries to any small animal that they can easily catch, rotten fish and carrion (dead animals) - don't have people on their menu.



Bears have fairly good eyesight and hearing, but it's their **acute sense of smell that helps them find food.** They can sniff out fresh plant bulbs and roots or rodents underground as they walk by, or ripe berry patches and rotting fish kms away if the wind is right.

Bears are good diggers and are strong enough to push aside massive boulders, rip apart tree snags and can break into cabins or vehicles to get at food. Bears store their food as fat and will aggressively defend their food sources. Boars (male bears) have established territories that they'll savagely defend from other males. Sows (female bears) may be permitted to dine and pass through, but cubs venturing away from mom may be attacked. But when food is abundant – such as during salmon spawning – territories are ignored.

**Black Bears inhabit all parts of BC's forested lands.** "Black" is a misleading name as their hair colour varies from black to brown, cinnamon (reddish), blond or even white like the Kermodes or Spirit Bears.

Once snow starts blanketing the earth, bears head uphill for hibernation. Boars den alone, often meandering around in ever-deepening snow until they can't easily move. Then they'll flop down beside a log or under a tree and their body heat will create a snowcave-like air space.

left: Black Bears are great climbers. Roseanne Van Ee photo

Sows enter rocky dens, large hollow stumps or under log piles in late fall to hibernate. An adult sow (at least 3-4 yrs old) may give birth to two squirrel-size cubs in January to February every second year while she snoozes. They crawl up mom's thick fur and settle into suckling until she awakes. Her previous year's cubs may still be with her hibernating. The little ones are puppy dog size when they saunter out from their dens with mom in spring.

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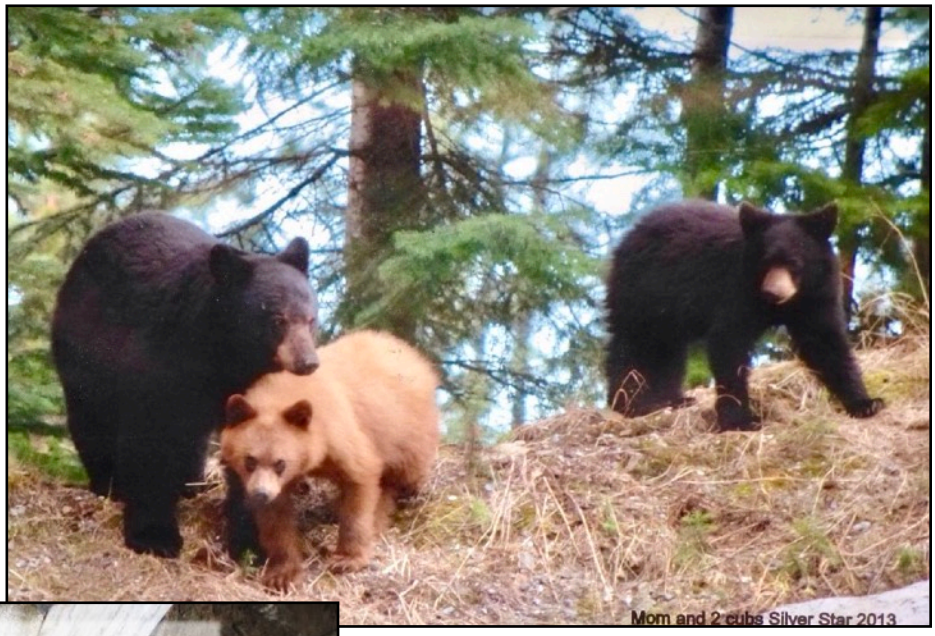
*Black Bears continued*

Once mom ventures out from hibernation with her newborn cubs, she's hungry from weight loss and nursing, and ornery. She tries to get rid of the previous youngsters – now 16-17 months old - by ignoring them, chasing or shoving them away, and if that's not enough of a hint, she'll forcefully whack them. These poor critters then meander around trying to find food to fatten up. Heaven help them if they enter a boar's territory! It's the two-year-old bears that usually get into trouble with people. This is when careless campers who've left food out, or ruralites with garbage out, fall victim to the youngsters' search for an easy meal. Do these youngsters a favour by keeping enticing edibles secured away, banging on pots and pans and yelling to scare them away from our territories. We create the "problem bears" that get shot by the conservation officers

Any time we venture into the wilderness, be it a park, mountain resort or forest, we enter bear territory.

Avoid areas frequented by bears. Learn to identify their tracks, which can look much like chubby human tracks as they lumber flat-footed (who would be walking in bare feet in the bush?) and scats which often resembles the food they've been eating all mushed up in black piles. Walk in groups.

below: Black Bear siblings with different hair colours
Roseanne Van Ee photo, Silver Star, 2013







left: hibernating bear
Roseanne Van Ee photo

Seeing a bear in the wild is a memorable experience. Let's keep it that way by learning about our BC wildlife and wilderness safety precautions to keep both them and us safe from harm.

*Watch for The Bear Facts in November's issue.*

## Swallowtail Butterfly

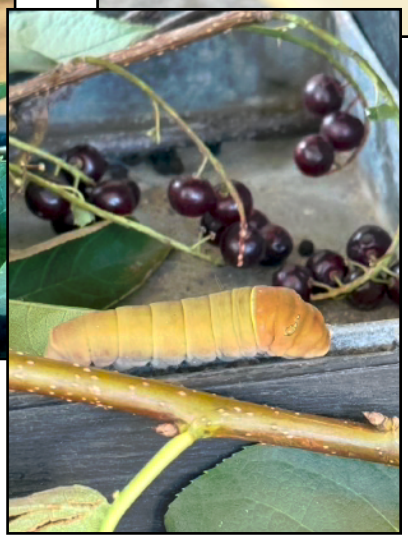
*by Pat McAllister*

**ON** Saturday, 18th of July, I had to deal with a 23 foot high chokecherry which was threatening the telephone communication lines into the house. Rather than developing pages and pages of story I will shorten it and list the facts:

- The tree was cut (assistant Joyce Heard).
- Clearing up the branches I came upon a treasure - a large lime green caterpillar.
- Carefully made a new home for it in my vintage terrarium.
- Saved chokecherry branches in a bucket of water to feed it.
- Spent that afternoon with 12 reference books and concluded it was a Two-tailed Swallowtail (5 species of Swallowtails are in the North Okanagan). Significant fieldmark is the white and black transverse line on the thoracic segment, only visible when disturbed.







- The larva only settled down and chewed new food at 10:30 Sunday night.
- Early Monday morning it was hiding in a curled up leaf. No interest in new food.
- By 3:30 Monday it was in the wandering phase and had developed a brown head.
- Its posture on the box edge and additional body colour change told me by Tuesday morning it wanted a place to form its chrysalis. It was all chestnut-honey brown.
- Found another chokecherry Tuesday morning and released it into the wild.
- It will probably overwinter as a pupa.

The Two-tailed Swallowtail is the largest butterfly in North America and soars in the tops of trees. I was first fascinated by an emerging butterfly at age 10 when I read a book called '*Girl of the Limberlost*'.





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# 2026 North Okanagan Scotch Thistle Bash Summary Report

*by Heidi Wismath*

**THE** inaugural North Okanagan Scotch Thistle Bash brought together volunteers, community organizations, stewardship groups, First Nations partners, schools, and individuals with a shared goal: reducing the spread of Scotch thistle before it could set seed.

As a first-year initiative, participation exceeded expectations. Throughout the spring, volunteers organized community work bees, incorporated thistle removal into existing stewardship events, and tackled infestations independently in neighbourhoods, parks, trails, wetlands, and natural areas across the region.
Because reporting was voluntary and not every event submitted final numbers, the results presented here represent **minimum confirmed totals**. Several organized events did not return removal numbers, and many individuals removed Scotch thistle on their own without reporting their efforts. As such, the true impact of the 2026 Scotch Thistle Bash was almost certainly substantially greater than the numbers presented here.

Confirmed Outcomes:

| | |
|---|---|
| Volunteers | 201 |
| Youth Participants (under 30) | 120 |
| Community Organizers | 18 |
| Partner Organizations | 11 |
| Stewardship Sites | 20 |
| Bags of Plants Removed | 37 |
| Rosettes Removed | 6,363 |

These efforts removed thousands of Scotch thistles before they could mature and produce seed, helping protect native grasslands, wetlands, parks, trails, and community greenspaces throughout the North Okanagan.

In addition to the 6,363 first-year rosettes removed, volunteers collected 37+ bags of flowering and seeding plants before seeds could disperse. A single mature Scotch thistle can produce thousands of seeds, meaning **this effort likely prevented hundreds of thousands—and potentially well over one million—new seeds from entering the landscape**



**Education & Resources**
To support volunteers before and throughout the inaugural Scotch Thistle Bash, the Grasslands Conservation Council of BC partnered with the Invasive Species Council of BC to develop educational resources that introduced the initiative and demonstrated effective management techniques.

These resources remain available for future volunteers and communities interested in organizing their own Scotch Thistle Bash events.

- Scotch Thistle Bash Overview: *https://youtube.com/shorts/eEJJiB4jwS8?feature=share*

*continued on page 12*

*Scotch Thistle continued*

- Scotch Thistle Management Techniques: https://youtu.be/deIET5nSQBQ

Together with promotional materials, social media outreach, and guidance from local organizers, these resources helped ensure volunteers could participate confidently while using effective, responsible management practices.

**Stewardship Areas**

Confirmed Scotch Thistle Bash activities took place at sites throughout the North Okanagan, including:

- Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park (north of Comin' Round the Mountain Trail; Braeburn Trail and Beach Trail; multiple satellite sites)
- Above 15th Avenue
- South Otter Lake to O'Keefe Ranch Marshall Fields
- Grey Canal (McLennan Road to Rugg Road; Cypress Drive to Warren Road)
- BX Ranchlands Park
- Allan Brooks Nature Centre
- Thomas Hayes Ecological Park
- Adventure Bay
- Kilometre 0 of the Okanagan Rail Trail
- Point Sage Drive
- North BX
- McKergow Meadows
- Middleton Mountain
- College Way / Kickwillie
- Graystone Park
- Swan Lake Nature Reserve
- Crane Road–Jordan Park Reserve
- Cools Pond
- Goose Lake (Okanagan Indian Band)
- Conservation covenant at 7203 Coldstream Creek Road
- Black Rock and 39th Avenue

**Community Organizers**

The success of the inaugural Scotch Thistle Bash was made possible through the dedication of local volunteers who organized events, recruited participants, coordinated logistics, identified treatment sites, and reported results. We gratefully acknowledge the leadership of:
Greig Crockett, Brenda Couture, Linda Ensing, Kim Fulton, Sue Ghattas, Eric Kowalski, Kathy Jenkins, David Lilly, Bev Lyons, Ainsley Mutrie, Judy Mossat, Daryl Nolan, Melanie Piorecky, Marge Sidney, Sharell Watts, Pam Van Kleeck, and Marnie Williamson
*(Alphabetized by last name)*

**Partner Organizations**

The Scotch Thistle Bash was strengthened through collaboration among community groups, non-profit organizations, local stewardship organizations, educational institutions, and government partners, including:

- Allan Brooks Nature Centre
- Armstrong Spallumcheen Trails Society
- BX/Swan Lake Community Association
- Friends of Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park
- Friends of the Okanagan Rail Trail
- Grasslands Conservation Council of BC
- Invasive Species Council of BC
- Kalamalka High School
- Nature Conservancy of North Okanagan
- North Okanagan Naturalists' Club
- UBC Okanagan Sustainability
- Vernon Outdoor Club

**Looking Ahead**

The enthusiasm surrounding the inaugural North Okanagan Scotch Thistle Bash was inspiring. What began as a wish that "someone would do something about the thistles" quickly grew into a network of stewardship events spanning parks, neighbourhoods,

*continued on page 13*

*Scotch Thistle continued*

trails, conservation lands, and wetlands across the region.

The response from the community exceeded expectations—not only in volunteer participation, but in the excitement generated around the initiative. Throughout the season, members of the Scotch Thistle Bash working group received inquiries from individuals and organizations in the North and Central Okanagan interested in organizing similar events in their own communities.

Building on the success of this first season, the Grasslands Conservation Council of BC plans to continue supporting and coordinating the Scotch Thistle Bash in 2027. By strengthening partnerships, sharing resources, and expanding the network of local organizers, we hope to see even more communities working together to reduce the spread of Scotch thistle and care for the landscapes we share.

The inaugural Scotch Thistle Bash demonstrated that invasive species management is about more than removing plants—it is about cultivating stewardship. Every volunteer, every organizer, and every conversation helped grow a community committed to caring for the places we call home. We look forward to seeing that community continue to grow in the years ahead.

**Report Compiled by:**
Heidi Wismath, Education & Outreach Coordinator, Grasslands Conservation Council of BC
*Thank you to every single person who gave their time, energy, and care to this project. Each rosette removed and each seed head collected is so much more than a number in a column — it represents someone who paused to notice, a neighbour who chose to help (maybe for the first time!), and a community coming together to care for the landscapes we rely on.*

*The numbers in this report reflect only what was recorded and returned to us; we all know that the true impact extends far beyond what can be captured in a single spreadsheet for a few good (but short!) months of great work. It lives in the conversations sparked, the understanding grown, the laughter shared, the connections nurtured, and in each of the untallied acts of care that continue across the life-giving North Okanagan, year-round!*

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NOWS is currently planning recurring, consistent, water quality testing and analysis on BX, Coldstream and Vernon Creeks to develop baselines and to monitor trends.
After decades of effort to reconnect salmon with their historic migration route through the Columbia River system, sockeye have once again returned to Okanagan Lake and are gradually expanding into their former spawning habitats.
No one knows exactly how many returning adults may eventually choose Vernon Creek, but establishing today's baseline means tomorrow's changes can be measured scientifically.
The survey also supports a much broader restoration effort. NOWS volunteers continue to work with community partners on improving riparian habitat, controlling invasive species, monitoring water quality, increasing spawning habitat, and engaging local schools and residents in stewardship activities.

# Blackcap

*story compiled by Harold Sellers*
*photos by Margaret MacKenzie*

**BLACK** raspberry (*Rubus leucodermis*), also known as Whitebark raspberry or Blackcap, is a western North American shrub.

According to iNaturalist it is present throughout the Thompson-Okanagan, but not especially abundant. Around Vernon there seem to be clusters at Predator Ridge, Cosens Bay, in or near the Campbell-Brown Ecological Reserve, and at the south end of Cougar Canyon.

The more common cousin is the Red raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*).



above: unripe berries



above right: a black, ripe berry

The berries were eaten fresh or dried by natives. They were also used to make a purple dye. In fact, when grown commercially, the soft berries are more often used to make a dye, such as is used on meat packages, than for food. Many people, however, love the flavour and use them to make pies, jams, jellies, or syrups. A tea, high in vitamin C can be made from the leaves. Young shoots can be peeled, eaten raw, or cooked like asparagus.

The brambles rank at the very top of summer foods for wildlife, especially birds: grouse, pigeons, quail, grosbeaks, jays, robins, thrushes, towhees, waxwings, sparrows, to name just a few. The berries are also popular with raccoons, skunks, foxes, squirrels, chipmunks and other rodents. The leaves and stems are eaten extensively by deer and rabbits. Bear, beaver and marmots eat fruit, bark and twigs. Flowers are usually pollinated by insects. These usually prickly plants make impenetrable thickets where small animals find secure cover.

Sources:
iNaturalist
Native Plants Pacific Northwest https://nativeplantspnw.com

# North Okanagan Watershed Stewards (NOWS)

*NOWS is a committee of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club.*
*This article first appeared in The Morning Star newspaper, July 5, 2026*

**Stewards study minnows in Vernon Creek for signs of salmon-suitable ecosystem**

A group of water stewards got to work counting minnows in Vernon Creek, with the purpose of studying the ecosystem as salmon prepare to make a historic return to local waters.

Volunteers from the North Okanagan Watershed Stewards (NOWS) recently completed a systematic minnow enumeration survey of Lower Vernon Creek, from Kalamalka Lake to Okanagan Lake. This was done with a fish collection permit from the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. The Pacific Salmon Foundation helped with funding for equipment.

Four years ago, the Okanagan Nation Alliance released thousands of juvenile sockeye into Vernon Creek as part of the ongoing effort to restore salmon to the Okanagan watershed. Those maturing fish are now reaching the age when they could begin returning from the Pacific Ocean to their natal waters to spawn.

Thousands were released again this year by children who took part in the Fish in Schools program sponsored by the Okanagan Nation Alliance.

"Our goal was to establish a biological baseline before those fish begin returning. If the ecosystem changes over the coming years, we'll have something meaningful to compare it with. We also want a healthy creek for Kokanee which spawn in Vernon Creek every autumn," said a NOWS organizer.

Using non-lethal Gee minnow traps, volunteers sampled five sections of Lower Vernon Creek. Each captured fish was carefully identified, counted, recorded and then released unharmed back into the creek.



The North Okanagan Watershed Stewards enumerated 12 spiny sculpins in Vernon Creek. The group is surveying the creek to establish a biological baseline for when salmon return to the waters. (NOWS photo)

While the survey focused on small fish, these species tell an important story.

Minnows, sculpins, and aquatic invertebrates are strong indicators of stream health. Their abundance and diversity reflect water quality, habitat complexity, food availability, and the overall condition of the aquatic ecosystem.

Future surveys will allow NOWS to detect changes as restoration work continues to be planned and implemented along Vernon Creek.

*continued on page 13*

NONC

# NONC CALENDAR

**MONTHLY MEETINGS**
**Thursday, September 3, 7:00 pm**, in the **Diamond Room for this date ONLY**. Our Speaker for the meeting is Kirstyn Falck, who is with the Wildlife and Ecosystems Branch of the BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, is based in Kelowna, and who will talk about the Chronic Wasting Disease in the Deer population.
Effective this date, our monthly meetings are shifting to the first Thursday of the month. As of October we will be back in the Emerald Room.

**SATURDAY NATURE WALKS**
Join us Saturdays at 9:00 am. Visitors welcome. No dogs please.

**September 5 – 9am DR1**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk on the Bella Vista Section of the Grey Canal Trail. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Crosby and Sierra roads. We will walk west to Okanagan Hills Blvd and return. Contact Harold hikerharold@gmail.com

**September 12 9am DR 2**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club Walk Thomas Hayes Ecological Park in Spallumcheen Township. Take Otter Lake Cross Road exit from Hwy 97, follow this road behind the tolko Mill and turn left onto Thomas Hayes Road. Contact nmaer10s@gmail.com

**September 19 – 9am DR 1**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club Walk Salmon Trail in Lumby. Take Hwy 6 and as you enter Lumby turn right onto Faulkner Avenue and then right on to Bessette St to the parking lot at the trail entrance. Contact nmaer10s@gmail.com

**September 26 – 9am DR3**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club Walk "The Big Tree: in Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park. Meet near the Water Tower Gate roadside parking at the corner of Cunliffe Road and Palfrey Dr in Coldstream. Two hours plus, 6km hilly hike. Contact supeghat@hotmail.com

**Thursday, October 1 :** NONC Monthly Meeting. Schubert Centre, Emerald Room. The speaker will be Rob Buchanan talking about the Birdweather Monitoring System in Kal Park.

**October 3 – 9am DR 2**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk on the top of Middleton Mountain Trails beginning at the Kal Beach parking lot, off Husband Road. Meet at the east end of the parking lot, by the trailhead sign. Walk to include Creed Loop and then return. Contact nmaer10s@gmail.com

**October 10 – 9am DR1**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk on the BX Ranch Trail at the sncecmatqtn Agriculture Park. 4km loop. Meet at the parking lot on East Vernon Road. Contact Harold hikerharold@gmail.com

**October 17 – 9 am DR2**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club Blue Jay to Turtle Mountain. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Blue Jay Road (Old Kamloops Road to Goose Lake Road then left on Blue Jay Road). Contact Jean.amatt@gmail.com

**October 24 - 9am DR1**
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk in Polson Park Birdwalking, Bring Binoculars Meet by the Tennis Courts. Contact mhubble@telus.net