NEWSPACKET

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

October 2025

Western Bluebird

by Harold Sellers

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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Swan Lake	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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Nest Box Program Summary 2025

by Margaret MacKenzie

WEATHER had little to do with nesting success this summer. The earlier part of summer had some hot days, pretty normal for the Okanagan, also some rainy days, but there was no significant or out of the ordinary weather patterns playing a role in nesting success. Climate change may be playing a part as to an available insect supply at the times needed to feed arriving Tree Swallows as well as later in the season as newly fledged young of all species require great numbers of insects for their survival. As well, insect populations appear to be declining yearly. Comparisons in this regard could be addressed in future years.

Comparisons of Western Bluebird numbers since 2009 show that for nearly all the years until 2025, numbers of boxes used have remained constant with an average of 51 boxes per year. Or, to put it another way, an average of 51 pairs of Western Bluebirds used 51 boxes. There has been a slight shift in the location of nesting Western Bluebirds with some trails showing more WEBL than others. Vernon Hill, French Farm, Allan Brooks Nature Centre, and Lone Pine Ranch trails have had fewer WEBL nesting in recent years. The Commonage as a whole still has good numbers and Adventure Bay has increased with a high this year of 15 pairs of Western Bluebirds using 15 nestboxes.

Comparisons of Mountain Bluebirds since 2009 show that after 2016 until present day, the numbers have dropped by half. Although numbers of MOBL nesting here were never high, they dropped from approximately 20 pairs nesting here (2009-2016), to a consistent 9 or 10 pairs between 2017 and 2024. This year was the lowest ever with 4 pairs nesting only at Lone Pine Ranch. The overall increase in temperature in our area may be an important factor in them migrating further to where temperatures are cooler.

Comparisons of Tree Swallow nestings since 2009 have remained fairly constant with a slight downward drop this year of boxes used. However, more TRSW had nesting success and fledged more young than many previous years. Sometimes less is more!

Comparisons of House Wrens shows their numbers dropped significantly in the last 2 years. This is not bad for bluebirds and swallows as HOWR often cause havoc with devastating results for the other bird species. They are still to be found at Carlson Park and Lone Pine Ranch to the detriment of the Tree Swallows and Bluebirds there. In fact, the trail in Carlson Park has been completely revamped in the last couple of years, moving boxes completely to new areas of the park. At Lone Pine Ranch, the lower trail is being partially dismantled this fall as well.

The Nest Box Trails at Swan Lake Nature Reserve are used by Tree Swallows with good nesting

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Nest Boxes continued

success and 2 boxes have been used successfully by Black-capped Chickadees. No House Sparrows bothered the nest boxes on the west side of the creek this year. This may be because we are trying a new method of hanging clear fishline in front of the next boxes. This was done for the first several boxes where HOSPs had attempted to take over last year. We will continue to try out this method to see if it works as a deterrent to HOSP box invasions. The TRSW entered and exited the box without paying any attention to the hanging fishing lines. The highest number of Tree Swallows successfully nesting were at Swan Lake East and West trails with 51 pairs of TRSW fledging 182 young. The Anderson Ranch also had excellent nesting success with 22 pairs of TRSW fledging 89 young.

Adventure Bay has the only White-breasted Nuthatch nesting in a box on our trails. It is interesting to note that the same box has been occupied for the past 7 years by a pair of WBNU and in all but one year the WBNU successfully fledged young. Adventure Bay also has the greatest number of Western Bluebirds nesting on the property with 15 pairs producing 83 fledglings.

Bears were a problem at Adventure Bay this year and the monitors had their hands full trying to protect one box in the monitor's yard that had a Western Bluebird nesting inside. Dana sprayed the box and tree with lysol daily and the bear was seen walking right by the box on more than one occasion. It would be great to think Lysol or Pinesol with their strong smells could be a deterrent to bears.

The sunroofs were used quite successfully in the hotter part of summer and I'm sure the birds were also 'happy' to have the added shade over their boxes. If a nesting bird had eggs or young, it was fast and easy to remove a sunroof from an empty box and add it to the box needing one.

We had 3 1/2 by 3 1/2 inch "Do Not Disturb Nest Boxes " labels (see image below) made as there had been possible tampering with a box or two in more public areas where we have the nest boxes. The labels are useful on trails accessible by the public and explain clearly that nesting birds have legal protection and should be left alone.

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Nest Boxes continued

The Nestbox program depends on volunteer monitors. We desperately need volunteers to assist on trails. As more and more people travel in the summers, we often now have "teams" that look after a trail. If a trail has 4-6 persons with a leader, only 2-3 need to go weekly which lessens the commitment. This is working well for several trails making it more feasible for persons to volunteer as they don't feel pressured to go out every week from May until August.

Thank you to all of our dedicated NONC monitors who take on the responsibility of looking after the trails, the boxes, and the nesting birds.

2025-2026 Co-ordinators Vernon Bluebird Nest Box Program:

Margaret Mackenzie
Joyce Heard
Ruth Drennan

above right: Tree Swallows

above: male Western Bluebird; box with sun shield

right: Bluebird with insect meal in its beak

NONC's Gail Loughridge Receives the BC Nature Education Award

Gail Loughridge and Jim Bodkin moved to Vernon in 2002 and soon put up hummingbird feeders. Gail has more than 20 years of involvement with hummingbirds, starting even before Cam Finley through the BC Hummingbird Project, taught her how to identify and band them, and later certifying her for a banding permit. Gail produced reference sheets for each species to help with identification of adults and juveniles. As the only certified bander in the North Okanagan area, in 2007 she started to train interested members to help under her permit, to increase the numbers of hummers banded.

In 2010, a site in Lumby was chosen to participate in The Hummingbird Monitoring Network of North America, which studies hummingbird populations to support their conservation. In 2013 a site on Okanagan Lake became a secondary site for trap counts. Both sites continue to provide important information on fluctuations of bird numbers over the banding season. Gail has organized and hosted several hummingbird banding workshops in Vernon. She has volunteered more than 1,000 hours banding hummingbirds in both Victoria and in the North Okanagan, retiring as banding leader in 2024.

Walkingstick Insect Observed at Kaledon

from Facebook
illustration courtesy of Dick Cannings

Report by Dick Cannings, September 25

Surprised to find that there are wild native stick insects in the Okanagan! My friend Mitch Guilderson pointed this out to me and yesterday we found this one in Kaleden. If anyone out there has seen these elsewhere in BC please let me know! Note: these are not the same as the relatively common European Praying Mantis we see every summer. These are the Western Short-horned Walkingstick, *Parabacillus hesperus.*

Editor's Note: There are only 4 sightings on iNaturalists for BC and all were made in August-September 2025 near Kaleden. Watch for this insect and report it to NONC, as well as iNaturalist.

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Look Up: The Disappearing Night Sky

by Roseanne Van Ee

HEAD outside tonight and gaze at the sky. Can you see thousands of stars? The Milky Way? A shooting star? Do you remember seeing them as a child? If you still can, you're among a lucky minority. I was captivated by the night sky while growing up in Edmonton during the 1960s-70s, and later from my acreage on Silver Star Road. But as the resort and city of Vernon grew, the stars slowly disappeared.

For most of human history, our ancestors could look up and see the Milky Way — a brilliant band of light stretching across the heavens. Today, light pollution has erased that view for much of the world. In fact, 80% of Canadians have never seen the Milky Way at all. Since the spread of electric lighting in the 1870s, outdoor illumination has grown at an accelerating pace. Astronomers first raised alarms in the 1970s, when skyglow began interfering with telescopic research.

Since the 1990s, excess artificial light has been increasing by about 10% every year. While truly dark skies can still be found in remote regions, even those places are threatened. In a typical Canadian suburb, only a few hundred stars are visible out of the roughly 2,500 that should be seen. In cities, more than 95% of stars vanish under the glow of artificial lights.

What Is Light Pollution?

Light pollution occurs when artificial lighting is excessive, misdirected, or unnecessary. Light that shines upward scatters in the atmosphere, creating a haze known as skyglow. Other sources include glaring streetlights, illuminated billboards, office towers, and over-lit residential areas. Communities often believe brighter lights mean safer streets, but research does not support this. In fact, excessive glare can reduce night vision, obscure hazards, and lower overall safety for drivers and pedestrians.

above: stars in a night sky
https://kelowna.com/articles/stargazing-events-exploring-kelownas-winter-night-sky/

Impacts on Humans and Wildlife

Preserving the night sky isn't just an aesthetic issue — it's essential to the health of ecosystems and people alike. Beyond obscuring the stars, it disrupts the biological clocks of all life on Earth which evolved in balance with the natural day-night cycles of light and darkness. Artificial light disrupts human sleep patterns and contributes to health problems linked to circadian rhythm disturbance. For wildlife, the impacts are profound:

- Birds: Millions of migrating birds die each year after becoming disoriented by city lights. They circle illuminated areas until exhausted or collide with buildings. I

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Night Sky continued

witnessed this in Oregon, where dozens of birds lay dead beneath a lighthouse one morning — a startling reminder of light's deadly impact.

- Bats: Artificial lighting alters their feeding and flight patterns, sometimes dramatically reducing their activity.
- Insects: Moths, fireflies, and countless other insects are drawn to lamps where they become easy prey. Light interferes with moth reproduction, reduces caterpillar abundance (a vital food source for young birds), and disrupts fireflies' bioluminescent mating signals.
- Fish: Juvenile salmon are lured into lit areas where predators await, and adults may even rely on star/moonlight for navigation to spawning grounds.
- Turtles: Adult females avoid bright beaches, leaving eggs unlaid. Hatchlings often crawl inland toward artificial lights instead of the water, with fatal results.
- Plants: Artificial light alters plant growth cycles, triggering early budding or flowering. This creates mismatches with the animals that depend on them, disrupting entire ecosystems.

Light pollution can even function as a form of habitat loss. Many animals simply avoid brightly lit areas, shrinking the spaces they can safely inhabit.

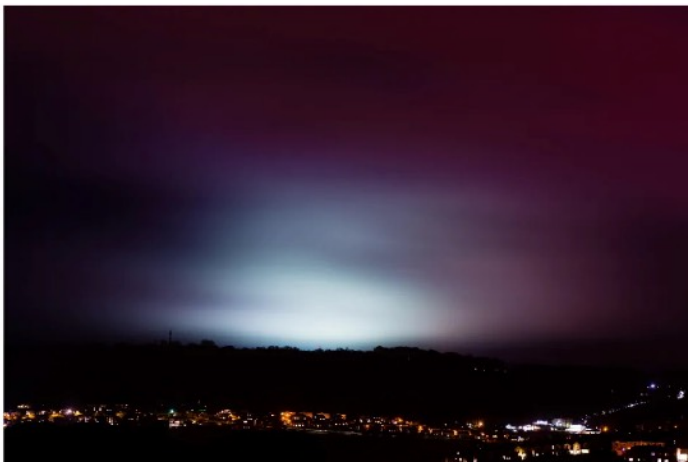
Environmental and Climate Costs

Beyond ecological harm, light pollution wastes vast amounts of energy and money. When powered by fossil fuels, this waste also worsens climate change. Unlike air or water pollution, however, light pollution is unique: once lights are turned off, their harmful effects vanish quickly.

Simple Solutions

Light pollution removal is fairly easy, straightforward and highly effective:

- Responsible Lighting: Choose fixtures designed to minimize glare and light spray. Support manufacturers that prioritize dark-sky–friendly designs.
- Shielding: Use downward-facing, shielded lights that illuminate only where needed.
- Dimmers, Timers & Motion Sensors: Control lighting so it's only on when necessary.
- Color Temperature: Opt for warm-toned lights (such as amber), which are far less disruptive than harsh blue-white LEDs.
- Awareness: Educate others about light pollution and advocate for better lighting practices in your community.



above: skyglow
https://www.sciencefocus.com/news/light-pollution-view-night-sky

A dark night sky inspires wonder, sustains healthy life and the delicate balances of ecology. Protecting it is not only possible but surprisingly simple: all it takes is less light. Take steps to help out.

Saving the Night by Stephen Aitken is an amazing, short but impressive starter book on the importance of night darkness for all life on Earth. Everyone should read this! Our library has it.

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Species Spotlight: Yellow-rumped Warbler

from Birds Canada
photos by Harold Sellers

KEEP your eye out – Yellow-rumped Warblers are the most abundant warbler in the country, with approximately 130 million individuals breeding in forests across Canada (except southernmost Ontario). From mid-September, these warblers migrate to their non-breeding grounds, primarily in the southern United States, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Both sexes have a yellow rump, along with yellow wingpits and a streak of yellow in the crown.

Yellow-rumped Warblers, found west of the Canadian Rockies, are typically darker with a yellow throat and a less contrasting cheek, which marks them as a different subspecies, "Audubon's". These western individuals are quite distinct compared to the more widespread "Myrtle" subspecies with white throats and black cheeks.

As their name suggests, the Yellow-rumped Warbler sports a yellow patch at the base of its tail, the flashy feature that earned the bird its playful nickname "butter butt" among birders.

Chances are if you're out in your local park or well-vegetated yard, you will see one of these amazing little fireballs looking for insects and small berries. And here's a tip: listen for the Yellow-rumped Warbler's rich "chep" call note (you can listen to it here). It is quite distinctive, and once you learn it, you will find them just about everywhere over the next month.

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Large Caterpillar = Large Moth

Recently NONC member Marilyn Anions shared the following on the NONC Facebook Group.

White-lined sphinx caterpillar (black form), Hyles lineata. Quite a large caterpillar!

As we investigate this further, we learn the following from from Wikipedia.

Hyles lineata, also known as the white-lined sphinx, is a moth of the family Sphingidae. They are sometimes known as a "hummingbird moth" because of their bird-like size (2–3 inch wingspan) and flight patterns.

As caterpillars, they have a wide range of colour phenotypes but show consistent adult coloration. With a wide geographic range throughout Central and North America, *H. lineata* is known to feed on many different host plants as caterpillars and pollinate a variety of flowers as adults.

Larvae are powerful eaters and are known to form massive groupings capable of damaging crops and gardens. As adults, they use both visual and olfactory perception to locate plants from which they collect nectar.

Larvae show wide variation in colour. The larvae are black with orange spots arranged in lines down the whole body. Their head's prothoracic shield, and the anal plate, are one color, either green or orange with small black dots. A tail-like spine protruding from the back of the body is a typical for sphingid moth caterpillars, known as "hornworms". This horn, which may sometimes be yellow and have a black tip, is not a stinger, and the caterpillars are not harmful to humans. The larvae can also sometimes be lime green and black.

Hyles lineata is one of the most abundant hawk moths in North America and has a very wide geographic range. This range extends from Central America to southern Canada through Mexico and most of the United States.

moth photo above:
By FlightEditor - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=149348049

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Visit the Osoyoos Desert Centre

by Harold & Linda Sellers

IN late September we took a short trip to the South Okanagan. One of our objectives was to visit and tour the Osoyoos Desert Centre [www.desert.org].

The Centre is a 67-acre nature interpretive facility that offered its first tour in July 1999. There you can enjoy a guided or self-guided tour along a 1.5 km boardwalk, explore hands-on displays in the interpretive building, and stroll through a native plant garden.

Through its conservation, restoration and education efforts, the Osoyoos Desert Centre strives to generate public knowledge, respect and active concern for these fragile and endangered ecosystems.

On our walk around the property we enjoyed seeing Common Rabbit-brush in bloom, as well as Big Sagebrush, both of which are familiar to us in the North Okanagan. However, the most common shrub is the Antelope-brush; plentiful in the south, but of which there are only a few in the Vernon area, all having been brought here and planted.

Bluebirds nest at the Centre in the Spring and Summer. There are coyotes, Black widow spiders, iridescent beetles, Brittle prickly-pear cactus, and many other plants, birds, animals, and invertebrates, which you might spot.

The Osoyoos Desert Centre is open Wednesday to Sunday 10 am to 2 pm (admission to boardwalk cuts

off at 1 pm). However, since the last day of the 2025 season is Sunday October 5th, you might have to put a visit on your 2026 to-do list.

Admission for seniors is only $10. Check out the website for other admission fees and much more information.

photos by Harold

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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, October 1st. Guest speaker: Daryl Nolan (Friends of Kal Park) on invasive species in the park and also iNaturalist.

Wednesday, November 5: This meeting will include the club's annual general meeting with reports and elections.

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.

October 4 - 9am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Tree Plantation on Bench Row Road. From Vernon, take Mission Road, turn right onto Bench Row Rd. Park in parking lot on the left side of road. Contact Jean at Jean.amatt@gmail.com

October 11 - 9am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a nature walk on the Grey Canal from 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 Rd). Contact Harold at hikerharold@gmail.com

Wednesday, October 15: Hello Nature lovers.
Our friends Scott and Julia Marmont have a farm in Paxton Valley and are nature and bird lovers.
They have invited us to come for a walkabout at their place. It is about 45 minutes from Vernon and 20 minutes north of Falkland.
The area has multiple ponds and rolling hills.
Good footwear recommended and bring a lunch.
Meet at curling rink parking lot at 8 am to carpool,
Lynn & Aly Aly
RSVP to alyandlynn@gmail.com

October 18 - 9am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Salmon Trail in Lumby. Take Hwy 6 and as you enter Lumby turn right onto Faulkner Ave and then right onto Bessette St to the parking lot at the trail entrance. Contact Norbert at nmaer10s@gmail.com

October 25 - 9am DR 1
Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a nature walk at the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. Walk the loop trail, visit the east side of the creek briefly, and enjoy the viewing tower. From Vernon, take Old Kamloops Road, turning in beside Stawns Honey. Go through gate and follow a gravel road to a parking area at the trail head. Contact Harold at hikerharold@gmail.com