

NEWSPACKET

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

September 2025



Yellow-breasted Chat

by Margaret MacKenzie

NONC

North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)**P.O. Box 473****Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4****Email****info@nonc.ca****Website****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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Contact the following if you have questions.

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Speakers	Bruce Tattersall 778-874-4614
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	\$50
Single	\$35

see nonc.ca

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Yellow-breasted Chat*by Margaret MacKenzie*

A FEW Yellow-breasted Chats have been showing up in the Vernon area for the last several years, and sightings of them in various locations containing dense shrubs and thick brush are increasing. In the past we would make spring birding trips to the south Okanagan and find them where they nested in certain known locations in the Oliver-Osoyoos area. Their main breeding territory has been south of the border and across the United States and into the southern parts of the prairie provinces. They winter in Costa Rica. Now, with climate change occurring, Yellow-breasted Chats may be a species that is moving north. At any rate, we welcome these rather elusive birds with their strange songs of hoots, whistles, chatters, and rattles. They are entertaining just to sit and listen to even if you seldom get to see them. However, like this one, sooner or later, they will make an appearance at the top of a bare branch to show off their bright lemony coloured fronts and eye spectacles while they hoot and holler their way to some female's heart. She, the female, is silent, and apparently down there hidden in the shrubbery, where she spends almost 100 percent of her time. Not surprisingly, I haven't seen a female yet.

There has long been uncertainty as to which family to place the Yellow-breasted Chat. Is it a thrush, sparrow, warbler, or blackbird? It is different looking, being larger than a warbler with a very long tail, large thick tanager type bill, olive brownish back, white distinctive eye spectacles and a vivid yellow throat and breast. However, recently it has been moved to a family of its own (Icteriidae), and

out of the family of blackbirds (Icteridae). Note the spelling difference of two "i's" versus one "i" in the genus words!

We need to protect more thick shrubbery covered areas such as gullies with trickling streams and ponds that are favourable for attracting these interesting and handsome birds.

This particular chat was finally caught by my camera after several trips to the Commonage where we could hear him 'singing' at a small pond with the required dense shrubbery. He sang and sang with no sightings each time we stopped. And so, becoming convinced there was only a recording of the bird that



someone had stuck down there in an almost impossible position to do so, I took my tea and arrived at the spot at dawn determined to wait it out! Well, using my car as a blind, and sitting comfortably sipping tea, I waited an hour and a half! Then, there he was, flying straight up into the air and over to a far off tree top. Then miracle of miracles, he almost immediately flew back and landed on the top of these shrubs in front of me. He stayed 'out' no more than 5 minutes, then shot back down into the depths from whence he'd come! 🌿

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Plants You Don't Want to Touch!*by Harold Sellers***Myrtle spurge***Euphorbia myrsinites*

Other names: creeping spurge, donkey tail spurge, broad-leaved glaucous spurge, blue spurge

Myrtle spurge is toxic to humans, livestock and wildlife when consumed, or when its sap (latex) contacts skin. The sap causes nausea, vomiting and diarrhea when eaten. It can cause blindness if it gets in people's eyes and skin contact causes redness, swelling and blisters. This plant is recognized as invasive and toxic in BC.

*above: Myrtle spurge*

Unfortunately some garden centres have sold it and people have planted it as a green ground cover. However, it spreads easily, often outside of a homeowner's garden or yard. And it can then be very difficult to control.

Such an infestation has been on the Grey Canal Trail, west Turtle Mountain, for a number of years. The Regional District has made valiant efforts to spray it with herbicide, and this has killed it. But

remnants remain and it continues to spread from the private yard where it originated.

*above: Mezereon***Mezereon***Daphne mezereum*

Other names: mezereum, February daphne, spurge laurel, spurge olive

Daphne mezereum is very toxic because of the compounds mezerein and daphnin present especially in the berries and twigs. All parts of the plant are to be handled with caution, as the sap and juice contain the toxins. If poisoned, victims experience a choking sensation. Handling the fresh twigs can cause rashes and eczema in sensitive individuals.

Daphne is listed as a poisonous plant by the Canadian Poisonous Plants Information System, and as a toxic plant by Worksafe BC. Its toxic sap can cause skin rashes, nausea, swelling of the tongue, and coma.

Daphne (Spurge-Laurel) was a popular ornamental in gardens at one time due to its glossy, rhododendron-like leaves and fragrant flowers. It was introduced from its native range of Europe, and

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Don't Touch Plants continued

a small portion of Northern Africa. It is tolerant of both sun and shade and rapidly takes over native vegetation by forming dense thickets in a range of ecosystems. It is especially suited to take over forest understories where it can form dense monocultures and outcompete native vegetations. It can spread through seed or vegetative shoots and its red berries are loved by birds.

Two locations have been found by NONC members in recent years. A small one near the Coldstream Cemetery has been targeted for removal (digging it out) over the past two years and we're hopeful we will eradicate it.

The second location is Carlson Park on Bench Row Road where it is very abundant; at least scores, maybe hundreds, of plants. No doubt a berry was once dropped here by a bird and then this "mother plant" had many offspring.

NONC and ISCBC members dug out many plants two years ago, but much more effort is needed.

Poison Hemlock

Conium maculatum

Other names: hemlock, wild hemlock, spotted hemlock, deadly hemlock, poison parsley, and fool's-parsley

Native to Europe, west Asia, and North Africa, Poison hemlock has found a home in many parts of Canada, and unfortunately in Vernon too.

It can grow up to 3 m in height. Hollow, hairless stems have distinctive purplish-red blotching. A plant can produce tens of thousands of seeds, which can remain viable for years.

All plant parts are highly toxic to humans, livestock, and wildlife if consumed. Ingestion can cause

respiratory failure, renal failure, or even death! The sap can cause swelling and rashes on the skin.



above: Poison hemlock

The plant can appear attractive; its fern-like branches and leaves might be tempting to pick for greenery. The small white flower stalks of Spring might also tempt some.

The North Vernon Natural Area (corner of 20th Street and Deleenheer Road in Vernon) has had a large infestation for quite a few years. It appears to have started beside the trail, but has spread to a broader area. The Regional District North Okanagan, which owns this park, is aware of its presence.

Poison Ivy

Toxicodendron rydbergii

Other names: Western poison ivy

T. rydbergii is a shrub that can grow to 1 m (3 ft) tall, rarely up to 3 m (10 ft). Or, it might be only a few inches tall; depending upon its environment.

The leaves are in groups of three, turning yellow, orange and red in autumn. The fruits are small, round, and yellowish-white. Like other members of its genus, all parts of this plant contain urushiol.

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Don't Touch Plants

Poison ivy is native to most of Canada from the Maritimes to British Columbia, and most of the contiguous United States. It can be found growing in many habitats in both forests and open areas. It is very widespread in the North Okanagan, including in parks, ditches, beside roads, etc. There is a lot growing beside the Okanagan Rail Trail.

Because it contains urushiol, contact with the plant can cause severe contact dermatitis (rashes, blisters) in most individuals. All parts of the plant contain this oil and it can get onto your skin at any time of the year, even in the winter. Burning poison ivy plants can result in the oil being inhaled with the smoke!

It is a native plant and control of Poison ivy is not widely practiced. Remember the phrase "Leaves of three, let it be. Berries white, take flight."



Conclusion

These are but four toxic plants to be aware of and to avoid contact with. There are many others, of which, fortunately, most are less toxic. Naturalists seek knowledge and education, and we can share these with others, for their protection. Ever be vigilant! 🌿

Rainbow Trout in BX Creek

from the NONC Facebook Group

illustration courtesy of the UBC Zoology website

I was exploring around B.X. Creek yesterday, and saw some small 2-5 inch minnows in one of the deeper pools above the falls.

They were difficult to see, but they had alternating olive and dark green backs and a lighter stripe down the side and belly.

I was just wondering if anyone had an ID on these little guys. This was the first time I've seen any fish above the falls.

Mandy Minarik, July 13



Some responses from others:

Lots of resident rainbow trout in the creek.

Seen them upstream of the falls for quite a ways. You saw the fry/juveniles.

In the case of BX Creek, the rainbows are resident creek fish and live there from egg to adult. Probably move up and down the system randomly but of course once go below the falls stay below the falls...know some breeding pools.

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Have you looked at your calendar!?

by Roseanne Van Ee

AH September!

Kids go back to school and we prepare our yards and freezers for winter. Okanagan wildlife tend to migrate, estivate or spawn.

Some people think that hummingbirds catch rides on the backs of geese for their migratory trip down south. Truth is; hummingbirds are well on their way to Mexico when the geese are just taking their “practice flights” for migration to the coast or just into the warmer U.S. Physics gives hummingbirds an advantage with a smaller, light body weight. They just need to refuel all along the way to maintain their energy. That’s why all hummingbird feeders should be taken down by mid August. If the “hummers” stay too late, they could succumb to freezing. Big Canada Geese, on the other hand, store fat for their trip. That’s why they’ve adopted the energy efficient “V” flight formation.

Our Great Blue Herons (that nest on 24th St.) have already been dispersing to various open-water lakes for the winter. Some may migrate to the coast to winter on good fishing grounds.

Most birds migrate at night, following the stars (like sailors) along migratory pathways (usually air currents of least resistance). Some of our birds migrate all the way down to South America. I love sitting back on mosquitoless, moonlit September and October nights with binoculars in hand to spot flocks passing in the night sky. If you’re in a quiet spot; listen. Could it be the calls of migrating flocks or the rustle of dry leaves in the breeze? You might even see bats migrating to their winter colonies

further south. Their “flutter” of wings distinguishes them from birds.

Don’t go to the Allan Brooks Nature Centre looking for the Yellow-bellied Marmots, now. These large rodents, like the Columbian Ground Squirrels, have gone underground for an early rest to “estivate” while they’re still fat from summer’s bounty. They remerge with young in April.



*Columbia Ground Squirrel
photo by Harold Sellers*

Snakes, frogs, and other reptiles and amphibians are moving towards their wintering grounds now, too.

Watch for late emerging Mourning Cloak and Tortoiseshell butterflies in the fall. They’ll overwinter tucked behind bark or in tree grooves. The large yellow and black butterflies are non-migrating Swallowtails, often mistaken for the orange and black migrating Monarchs.

Don’t miss watching the Kokanee spawn on Coldstream Creek in late September to early October. The best spawning beds for viewing are in Creekside and Coldstream Parks (behind Coldstream

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School). These Sockeye Salmon descendants became “land-locked” as the glacial-produced massive waterways, which once connected to the Pacific, drained and evaporated into separate lakes. For thousands of years Kokanee annually spawned to lay eggs in gravel creekbeds and shorelines. Until the early 1900’s, almost every major creek flowing into Okanagan Lake supported thousands of spawning Kokanee each fall. I’ve seen a sharp decline in spawning numbers in the last 25 years. Get out there with your children and friends to enjoy this miraculous phenomena before it dies out (or can we save the Kokanee?). Leave your pets at home!

Fall’s a great time to observe nature. Thankfully Vernon has many opportunities to enjoy it.

Visit the Allan Brooks Nature Centre.

www.abnc.ca

The North Okanagan Naturalist Club welcomes anyone interested to join their free Saturday morning nature hikes.

www.nonc.ca

Join the Vernon Outdoors Club for a variety of great fall hikes and cycles. And there are many hiking groups on Facebook.

Fortunately we’re surrounded by spectacular provincial



parks: Camp and/or hike Kalamalka Lake, Ellison, Kekuli Bay, Sovereign Lake, Mabel Lake, Fintry and Bear Creek. 🌿

Photos, this page, by Roseanne: left - Roseanne watching Kokanee spawn at Coldstream Creek

above - Bats migrate to warmer climates for winter



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Funerary Dagger Moth

In August NONC member Marilyn Anions posted this picture of a caterpillar on the NONC Facebook Group. This led to attempts to identify the amazing looking creature.

iNaturalist's Seek app identified it as the caterpillar of the Funerary Dagger moth.

Wikipedia provided the following:

Acronicta funeralis, the funerary dagger moth or paddle caterpillar, is a moth of the family *Noctuidae*. The species was first described by

Augustus Radcliffe Grote and Coleman Townsend Robinson in 1866. It has a scattered distribution. It is found in North America from Manitoba to Nova Scotia, south to Maryland. It is also found in Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, and along the west-coast from California to British Columbia.

The wingspan is 32–40 mm. Adults are on wing from May to August depending on the location. It has two or more generations per year in the south and one or two in the north.

The larvae feed on leaves of alder, apple, birch, blueberry and huckleberry, cottonwood, dogwood, elm, hazel, hickory, maple, oak and willow.

Google then provided this:

The funerary dagger moth (*Acronicta funeralis*) gets its name from the dark, dagger-shaped markings on its forewings, which some entomologists have likened to the colors of funeral clothing. The "dagger" part of the name refers to the distinct black markings on the forewings of many moths in the *Acronicta* genus, which are shaped like daggers. The

"funerary" aspect likely comes from the dark gray and black coloration of the moth, which can resemble mourning attire. 🌿



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Joe-pye Weed*by Margaret MacKenzie and Harold Sellers*

This Summer Margaret noticed an uncommon plant growing across the road from the Swan Lake Garden and a Market parking lot. Margaret and Harold spent some effort to identify the plant.



SPOTTED Joe-pye Weed, *Eupatorium maculatum*, is not a BC native. In the past, however, it has been available from nurseries, because of its appearance and attractiveness to butterflies and other insects. No doubt Swan Lake once sold it.

Here are some interesting details on how it got its name.

In 2017, Richard B. Pearce and James S. Pringle published their findings in *The Great Lakes Botanist* journal. They concluded that the plant was likely named for Joseph Shauquethqueat, a highly-respected Mohican sachem or paramount chief, also known to white neighbors as Joe Pye, who lived in the Mohican community in Stockbridge, Massachusetts in the late 1700's to early

1800's. Although there is no evidence that he was an herbalist or ever used or recommended the plant medicinally, many members of the First Nations did know of the medicinal properties of the plant. Pearce and Pringle speculate that since Joseph Shauquethqueat was also a selectman in Stockbridge, well-known and respected by his white neighbors, "it would not have taken many observations of his collecting the plants now called Joe-Pye-weed for medicinal use, or suggestions from him that they use those plants for the treatment of fevers...before someone, when referring to those plants, associated them with the man they knew as Joe Pye." 🌿

The Narwhal
presents

TROUBLE IN THE HEADWATERS

A FILM BY DANIEL J. PIERCE

FILM SCREENING | BY DONATION
FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSION ON LOCAL ISSUES

VERNON LIBRARY
2800 30TH AVE.
VERNON, BC

TUES. SEPT. 9TH
DOORS OPEN - 6:30 PM
FILM SCREENING - 7:00 PM
PANEL DISCUSSION - 7:30 PM

FEATURED SPEAKERS

DR. YOUNES ALILA
PROFESSOR OF FOREST HYDROLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

DANIEL J. PIERCE
FILM DIRECTOR

HOSTED BY



FEATURING
DR. YOUNES ALILA, P.ENG

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Save The Commonage!*by Harold Sellers*

ONCE again the Vernon Commonage is threatened by residential development.

Kerkhoff Develop-Build bought the land from the Aquiline group (who bought it from the Armstrongs). They are proposing to build up to 4,000 homes on about 1,000 acres on the west side of Commonage Road, between Bench Row Road and Rose's Pond.

NONC has spoken out against this development, known as 580 Commonage, arguing that it is urban sprawl, which is bad for nature, the climate, the taxpayer, etc.

Read much more at www.nonc.ca/advocacy

What can you do?

E-MAIL the mayor and members of Vernon City Council at these addresses:

mayer@vernon.ca
tdurning@vernon.ca
kfehr@vernon.ca
kgares@vernon.ca
bguy@vernon.ca
amund@vernon.ca
bquiring@vernon.ca

SEND A LETTER to Mayor Victor Cumming, City of Vernon, 3400 - 30 St. Vernon, BC. V1T 5E6

ATTEND A COUNCIL MEETING : Watch for the

date and opportunity.

WATCH THE WEB PAGE : We'll do our best to post dates, news, and opportunities.

Illustrations below:

top - the hill and slopes as they are today, looking south, and which are proposed to be developed for housing

bottom - how they see it, from Kerkhoff website



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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, September 3rd. Margaret MacKenzie will be speaking on Bring Back the Bluebirds.

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.

September 6 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Longacre Trail, Okanagan Landing. Meet at the small parking lot at east end of trail on Apollo Rd near Longacre Dr. Take Apollo Rd south off Okanagan Landing Rd. Contact Rod/Ruth at wereadquilt@gmail.com

September 13 – 9am DR 1

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk from Marshall Field to Vernon Creek to Kin Beach, Okanagan Landing. Meet in the Marshall Field parking lot near the tennis courts and ball diamond. Contact Susan at supepghat@hotmail.com

September 20 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Crystal Waters Trail, from Bailey Road to Crystal Waters Road. 7 km, 3 hour hike, there and back. Meet in the trail parking lot at Bailey Road. Take Hwy 97 south from Vernon and instead of a right turn on Bailey Road towards Predator Ridge, turn left and the parking lot is then on your left. Be careful crossing the highway! Contact Norbert at nmaer10s@gmail.com

September 27 – 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a walk on the Raptor Loop Trail (Spion Kop) located in Lake Country. Distance about a 4 km or 1.5 hour walk along a well travelled path with some rough terrain and short accents/descents. Trail head starts in a parking lot at end of Old Mission Road which is off of Pelmewash Parkway. Directions from Vernon - Turn South onto Pelmewash Parkway from Hwy 97, then turn right on Ponderosa Dr, turn right onto Old Mission Rd and follow to the end to a gravel parking lot. Trail parallels Hwy 97 with great views of Wood Lake. Trail passes under the hwy through a walking tunnel to the other side of the hwy, then loops back eventually connecting back to the parking lot through a second tunnel. NOTE: trail marking can be confusing especially for those trails on the west side of the hwy. Car pooling from Vernon is encouraged. Contact Marnie/Paul at mpw660@telus.net

More at www.nonc.ca under Calendar.