

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

Rob Wilson

Recently I encountered the phrase “nature deficit disorder”. This I understand to be a reference to a state of being such that one is unaware of one’s natural surroundings. This is due to our having become separated from nature. I have previously written about disturbing aspects of this phenomenon as it pertains to children.

Here is how I have been medicating myself in an effort to minimize nature deficit disorder (NDD):

- Rising prior to dawn to witness the ascent of the sun over the horizon. I also note the steady southward progression of the point of rise each fall morning.
- Attempting to identify the secretive warblers and sparrows darting among the trees and shrubs in my community.
- Ceasing whatever activity is occurring in order to acknowledge and contemplate the large flocks of geese temporarily sharing Anderson Lake in Saltcoats.
- Noticing the newly-revealed pigments in the leaves.



Cormorant - Photo by Rob Wilson

- Taking the time to enjoy walking without the encumbrance of snow.
- Dodging fall migrants attempting to cross roads - snakes during the day; frogs and salamanders that are searching for secure places to outwait the winter.
- Loading my bird feeder in order that “the locals” will be aware of a place to find an easy meal when needed.
- Sitting or standing in sheltered spots where the heat of the sun can still abrogate the need of a jacket.
- Photographing browns, golds and grays in the reflection of roadside ponds and sloughs.
- Even trying a little howling for wolves in the Duck Mountains.
- Thinking about the mystery of the migration instinct as it exerts its power over many of our local creatures.
- Standing in a dark place in awe of the night sky.

As I experience the unbuckling of summer and contemplate the approach of winter, I am feeling good about my efforts to combat NDD. Are you suffering symptoms of Nature Deficit Disorder? If you answer yes, what are you going to do about it?

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<http://www.yfbta.com>

A Tale of Mother Goose By Kathy Morrell



Swans and Cygnets - Photo by Lou Baudru

Just one year ago, two unsuspecting Canada Geese set up housekeeping on one of the fresh water ponds at the Patience Lake Potash Mine. It was a lovely place to raise a family. There was abundant clean water that the mine folks maintained and monitored for quality. There was abundant vegetation along the edge of the pond and there was even an island in the middle of the water to build a nest safe from coyotes and raccoons. There were other ducks and birds for company – the Mallards with their green heads, the Goldeneyes with their shiny yellow eyes, the Avocets with their curly upturned bills, and a whole flock of Canada Geese families.

One day in mid-April, one of the two-legged non-bird types came sneaking closer to the shoreline for a better look – if sneaking was the correct word for the noisy progress typical of the human species. Mother Goose turned her head to stare down the intruder. The human being seemed harmless enough even though he was carrying that peculiar object he held up to one eye – an object with a long cylindrical piece that moved slowly outward and back again and then made a clicking sound.

“Oh well, it wasn’t a shotgun blast,” Mother Goose decided and went back to gathering dry grasses for the nest she was building a short distance from the shore.

Late the next afternoon, Mother Goose saw the arrival of two peculiar large white birds with long black legs and feet. They circled the pond as if surveying their domain and came to

a landing in the water just a short distance from the island.

“Now, what can they want?” thought Mother Goose. “They act as if they own the place and we were here first.” She honked a little anxiously at Papa Goose realizing that her mate was not nearly a match in size for the intruders.

From the edge of the pond, Mother Goose then heard the noise from three of the two-legged non-bird species. They were clicking madly with those peculiar eyepiece objects and calling excitedly to one another. Mother Goose craned her long neck forward to have another look. Those long cylindrical things, usually pointed in her direction, were aimed this time at the intruders as if they were worthy of all the attention. Mother Goose hissed in derision and then decided that the pond world was big enough for all and went back to building her nest.

The next day, Mother Goose set off on a short flight to another pond, just adjacent, to visit her good friend, Gertrude Goose.

“What do you know about those two,” Mother Goose asked turning her head and nodding skeptically towards her own pond.

“Well,” said her older and wiser friend. “They’re called Tundra Swans.”

“Really,” replied Mother Goose. “And where are their friends and extended family?”

“It is peculiar,” Gertrude responded. “Usually, the swans set up house on the tundra, a barren and cold place in the North, but these two have been returning here for five years now.”

“Is that why the two-legged non-bird species get so excited?” Mother Goose queried.

“Yes, that’s it,” came the reply. “They can’t figure out why the swans are here. That’s why every spring there’s so much activity on the human side and so much photography.”

“Photography?”

“Oh yes, the noisy sneaking through the grass and the clicking of the eyepiece – that’s photography,” said the older and wiser Gertrude.

“But where’s the rest of the family – the young ones they’ve raised in the last four years?”

“They haven’t managed to raise any young to migrate south. The raccoons and coyotes got some of them. They’ve lost some of their young – cygnets they’re called - moving them from one pond to another through the tall grass.”

Mother Goose took some time to consider.

“Perhaps, you’d like to move to our pond,” Gertrude suggested. “Those swans may look beautiful, but they can be vicious, too.”

“No,” Mother Goose replied. “We’ve nearly finished out nest now. And besides, Papa Goose thinks he’s afraid of nothing.”

And with that, Mother Goose lifted off the water and made her way back to the pond.

The next day, Mother Goose settled in on the nest and over the next week, she laid six eggs. Papa Goose strutted the shoreline as if he'd accomplished something of tremendous import. And the two waited for the day the eggs would hatch.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the little island, the two Tundra Swans were also preparing their nest and peering with hostility as the geese settled in for gosling rearing.

A few days later, the swans, too, had a clutch of eggs to care for. And the hostility spilled over into attack. The male swan would swoop over the nest of Mother Goose and buzz down nearly on top of her, the whistling sound of his wings sounding to the parent geese like the scream of a bomber in attack.

Then, six little goslings appeared in the nest and the battle intensified – daily dive attacks, constant harassment. A flock of goose friends decided one afternoon to take a little nap perching on the rail lines that lead to the potash mine. “Such effrontery” the swans decided and wings outspread, they railroaded the unsuspecting geese out of town.

Mother Goose and Papa Goose became more anxious as the goslings readied to leave the nest for the wider world of the pond. What would become of their little ones? What would the bullies of the pond do next?

Two days later, the little goslings struggled down to the water and sailed away happy to bask in the sunshine. Mother Goose and Papa Goose kept careful watch and for a few days, all went well. And then could be heard the sounds coming from the nest of the Tundra Swans. Six new cygnets were hungry and the two swans were becoming more vicious in their attacks on the family of Mother Goose and Papa Goose. Sharing territory was not in the swan's lexicon of bird behaviour.

The next day it happened. The male swan attacked one of the goslings and killed it. Mother Goose and Papa Goose screamed out their protest and grief and then took action. The two geese moved their five remaining goslings along the railway track to the waters of their friend, Gertrude. The Tundra Swans had the pond to themselves.

That summer the swans lost one of their six cygnets to a coyote and another in the tall grass as they attempted to move their family from one pond to another. As fall approached, the swans prepared for the long migration south. Five of the birds – two adults and three juveniles - took flight and then, realizing they were missing one of the family, returned to the island in the middle where the fourth cygnet stood stranded on the shore. He was unable to fly. The next day, the five left knowing that further postponement was pointless and probably dangerous.

Now it is spring 2008 and Mother Goose can spy once again the two-legged non-bird species with the eyepiece things called photography. She knows they're waiting for the mysterious appearance of the Tundra Swans. She knows, too, that the adults and some of the offspring are likely to return to her perfect world of the pond. But this year, Mother Goose is wiser. She has decided to

move to a new place with her good friend, Gertrude. She will leave last year's pond for the Tundra Swans and the human species that seem to be so excited by their appearance.

FACTS ABOUT THE PATIENCE LAKE TUNDRA SWANS

- The Tundra Swans were first spotted at Patience Lake on Mother's Day 2003.
- Their usual breeding ground is the tundra of northern Canada.
- Theories have been suggested for the unusual appearance of these birds at Patience Lake, but to date, there has been no definitive answer.
- 2007 was the first year some of their young migrated south with the adults.
- In 2008, only one of the Tundra Swans returned to Patience Lake.
- The Tundra Swan may protect a territory of up to two square kilometers. An aroused adult Tundra Swan is quite a formidable opponent, and a pair can usually fend off most predators.



Prior to the YFBTA meeting held at Cherrydale on September 3, 2008, some members walked the Cherrydale Trails.

Bradford Farm Tours

Well folks we had our annual farm tour on Sat. June 21 and we couldn't have picked a better day to tour the farm. We would like to thank those who were at the farm for their enthusiasm and their generosity. We toured from 7:30 to 10:30 and identified a long list of birds and plants and a swallow-tailed butterfly. At 11:00 a.m. we joined Lauretta at the Stirling room in Saltcoats for a presentation on pelicans and cormorants and their impact on fish stocks by Professor Chris Somers of the University of Regina. All who were present enjoyed the presentation and found it very informative

Plants and Birds Identified

<i>Heart-leaved alexanders</i>	<i>Black Tern</i>
<i>Common dandelion</i>	<i>Ruddy Duck</i>
<i>Cream-colored vetchling</i>	<i>Gadwall</i>
<i>Arrow-leaved colt's foot</i>	<i>Mallard with 6 ducklings</i>
<i>Canada anemone</i>	<i>Northern Pintail (female)</i>
<i>Yellow lady's slipper</i>	<i>American Coot</i>
<i>Hedysarum</i>	<i>Blue-winged Teal</i>
<i>Wild licorice</i>	<i>Bobolink</i>
<i>Hoary puccoon (cowslips)</i>	<i>Baird's Sparrow</i>
<i>Bluets</i>	<i>White-throated Sparrow</i>
<i>Fleabane spp.</i>	<i>Savannah Sparrow</i>
<i>Cut-leaved anemone</i>	<i>Yellow-headed Blackbird</i>
<i>Saline shootingstar</i>	<i>American Robin</i>
<i>Pale comandra</i>	<i>Barn Swallow</i>
<i>Prairie buttercup</i>	<i>Red-winged Blackbird</i>
<i>Sea milkwort</i>	<i>Eastern Kingbird</i>
<i>Gaillardia</i>	<i>Tree Swallow</i>
<i>Western red lily (bud stage)</i>	<i>Red-tailed Hawk</i>
<i>Saline plantain</i>	<i>Mourning Dove</i>
<i>Wild blue flax</i>	<i>Red-necked Grebe</i>
<i>Black medick</i>	<i>Black-billed Magpie</i>
<i>Showy locoweed</i>	<i>Common Raven</i>
<i>Wolf willow</i>	<i>Gray Partridge</i>
<i>Large-flowered false dandelion</i>	
<i>Wild vetch</i>	
<i>Purple milk-vetch</i>	
<i>Seaside arrow-grass</i>	
<i>Pussytoes</i>	
<i>Chickweed spp.</i>	
<i>Seaside buttercups</i>	
<i>Silverweed</i>	
<i>Toad flax</i>	

We had a good time and will tour again next year.

-Arden and Donna Bradford

Loss of bird species points to environmental crisis: Report

Hanneke Brooymans , Canwest News Service

Published: Monday, September 22, 2008

EDMONTON - Common birds are in decline across the world, sending a clear signal there is something very wrong with the basic health of our environment, says a new report.

Twenty of North America's most common bird species have declined more than 50 per cent over the last 40 years, says The State of the World's Birds, released Monday at Bird Life International's World Conference in Buenos Aires.

Around the world, one in eight bird species - 1,226 species in total - face extinction, largely due to loss of habitat and climate change.



Twenty of North America's most common bird species have declined more than 50 per cent over the last 40 years, including the population of evening grosbeaks, above, down 78 per cent.—Ducks Unlimited

Birds breeding in grasslands are fading fast: 15 of 25 species showed significant declines between 1980 and 1999, and an average decline of 1.1 per cent per year.

Even species familiar to every Canadian, such as the red-winged blackbird, are in trouble. "This species has declined at rates of 1 per cent per year in eastern and central U.S.A. - with even greater declines observed in Canada," said the report.

On the Prairies, one of the heralds of spring is quietly disappearing. The killdeer, a white, brown and black bird with a famous distracting broken-wing act, is suffering a sharp drop in numbers.

The killdeer count has dropped an annual average of 2.5 per cent since 1968, said Jon McCracken, director of national programs for Bird Studies Canada, a non-profit organization

dedicated to bird research and conservation.

There also have been strong declines in swallows, nighthawks, martins and others that feed on aerial insects, he added.

"Declines were present probably from four decades ago, but then all of a sudden, you're seeing a much more pronounced decline, especially in the last decade or two," McCracken said. "So whatever is happening out there is accelerating, which is not a good thing."

A likely cause is changes to habitat, both in the breeding grounds here in Canada and in the wintering grounds further south.

"In Alberta, particularly, probably part of the declines may be driven by climate change," McCracken said. "There have been increases in drought years, and climate change can also throw the seasonal timing of bird migration and nesting out of whack with the abundance of insects."

The global population of northern bobwhites, once common in southwestern Ontario, has dropped 82 per cent over the last 40 years. The population of Evening Grosbeaks dropped 78 per cent over the same period and the Boreal Chickadee dropped 73 per cent.

Since the year 1500, the planet has lost over 150 bird species - an extinction rate far higher than the natural background rate, says the report.

• *Reprinted from Canwest News Service*

FATAL ATTRACTION

Jim Huziak

In early September of this year, at least two species of songbirds had their southern migrations interrupted when they chanced upon the two billion candlepower advertising sign beaming skyward above the Painted Hand Casino in downtown Yorkton. Reports described "thousands" of birds circling in the lights, fluttering about confusedly for blocks around, or lying dead in the streets.

While one might find this disturbing, they should not be surprised; fatal night time encounters between birds and lit office towers are well documented. What makes this particular situation unusual is that we here in Saskatchewan

have found a way to knock birds out of the sky without the expense of constructing a skyscraper.



Painted Hand Casino Lights seen 5 kilometers from Yorkton
Photo by Jim Huziak

Although the navigation mechanism used by nocturnally migrating flocks is not fully understood, it is known that bright artificial lights can be disorienting. For example, bright light domes over cities can be confused for sunrise or sunset, diverting birds from their course and increasing the length of their migration. The worst case scenario occurs when birds actually enter into the immediate area of intense artificial light, such as the lit windows of office towers or beams of skyward-pointing fixed spotlights. Once caught in these lights, birds appear to have extreme difficulty leaving, due in part to having lost their dark adaptation.

The consequences are most unfortunate: birds often circle until exhausted, then settle to the ground where they become easy prey, or fall victim to traffic. Those breaking out of the lights blindly collide with buildings or other obstacles, with equally fatal results.

As bad as the scene was in downtown Yorkton in September, it is only a harbinger of things to come. In 2009, the Painted Hand will be moving to its new site overlooking the Ravine Ecological Preserve. From there, its fan of spotlights and parking lot lighting will shine down upon the Ravine from dusk 'til dawn all summer, not just during migrations. The adaptability of countless ecosystems to the lack of a true day-night cycle will be put to the test.

The Painted Hand is the second Saskatchewan casino to erect its trademark 'light teepee'; the first was the Dakota Dunes Casino a few kilometers east of Pike Lake Provincial Park south of Saskatoon. Plans call for four more light teepees to be installed, including atop the Bear Claw Casino a few kilometers directly south of Moose Mountain Provincial Park.

Please note that I have nothing against casinos; my problem is simply with the fact that their new advertising sign is perhaps our province's most blatant example of both energy waste and light pollution. If I have a problem with anything, it would be with Saskatchewan's non-existent policies with respect to light pollution; if light is not considered a pollutant, then its effects are never considered as part of any environmental impact assessment.

As if we have not done enough to reduce the areas of natural habitat on the surface of the Earth, we have now found a way to do so in our 'Living Skies' as well. The unfortunate result will be that we will witness many more "Yorktons" before legislators finally see the light.



Warbler - Crash Victim?
Photo by Eunice Off

Jim Huziak
Yorkton, SK.

Member: Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association
Member: Saskatchewan Light Pollution Abatement Committee
(www.myotherlife.net/slpac)
Member: Rural Environment Preservation Association of Saskatchewan (www.repas-inc.ca)
Member: Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (www.rasc.ca)
More info: www.darks skies.ca/yorkton

Being a Bird Watcher

Jim and Shirley Jowsey

Bird watching has come to occupy the thoughts and activities of many people. There are organized groups of bird watchers throughout North America. Here in Saskatchewan YFBTA and other interested groups do a "Christmas Bird Count", usually some day between December 15 and January 6. Instructions and forms to complete can be obtained from

Alan R. Smith
Box 154
Avonlea, Sask.
S0H 0C0

Phone: (306) 868-4554
Email: alansandi@sasktel.net

A count is usually set up on a fifteen mile diameter and ours is centered in Saltcoats. We count birds and mammals in the circle defined thus. As we all know birds don't read maps so the outside edges of the circle are not sharply defined.

You don't need to be an expert to get involved in bird watching. Start with birds you know- robins, juncos, house sparrows, etc. Remember however that house sparrows are not really sparrows, they are a variety of finch. There are numerous varieties of native sparrows such as White-throated, Vesper, White-crowned, Chipping. Bird watching trains us to be accurate observers. Those involved often find that they have to defend their observation with specific facts about the bird involved. For example: a Red-breasted or a White-breasted Nuthatch?

So get out your binoculars and a bird book and join us or form your own group and do a "Christmas Bird Count".

WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU

You are reminded that your YFBTA membership will expire at the end of December 2008.

Your membership in YFBTA is a unique thread in a tapestry of personalities that defines our organization. Through this membership you become an advocate for wildlife and the spaces that wildlife require. With our significant membership our organization has become a voice that is heard throughout our region. Our newsletters allow us to provide reminders about the importance of our natural areas. Our trails provide opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with nature.

Please stay with us in 2009 as we continue to build awareness and as we promote our region to interested visitors. Please do this by renewing your subscription. Currently our membership stands at just under one hundred individuals and twelve corporate members.

Annual Memberships: Fees changed at AGM Feb. 13, 2008

Friend (receives only one newsletter)	- \$10.00
Individual	- \$15.00
Family	- \$25.00
Corporate	- \$50.00

For information call Rob at 744-8140 or check YFBTA's website www.yfbta.com for membership form download.

Mail cheques to:

Martha Karau
Box 403
Churchbridge, Saskatchewan
S0A 0M0

YFBTA RAFFLE

During the past two years the YFBTA received items to be raffled that were created by two of our members. Ann Tatham of Churchbridge has donated an afghan and Martha Karau a patchwork quilt. Ann and Martha have donated exceptional pieces of work to be raffled at our AGM to be held in February in 2009. Raffle tickets will be sold until the draw which will be made at the annual meeting and bird symposium. Proceeds from this raffle will be used to support YFBTA projects in the coming year. In the past, several hundred dollars have been raised each year.

The YFBTA would like to thank Ann Tatham and Martha Karau for their generous donations which involved a lot of work and skill in their creations. We are featuring these two individuals in photos and their donations.

Ann has been a great neighbour and friend who lived three miles from the Sawkey farm until she and her husband Bill (now deceased) moved to Churchbridge.

I have had the pleasure knowing and working with Martha who has been the treasurer for the YFBTA for several years.



Ann Tatham at her home in Churchbridge with afghan



Martha Karau and quilt displaying bird scenes

You can help the YFBTA and perhaps become a lucky winner of one or both of these prizes by purchasing tickets.

John Sawkey

The YFBTA is seeking items for the Silent Auction which is held at the Annual General Meeting and Bird Symposium in February. If you have an item you can donate, please contact Martha Karau (306 896 2660) - or Laretta Ritchie-McInnes, President of the YFBTA, at (306 782 0057).

YFBTA 2009 AGM and Bird Symposium
Saturday February 28, 2009
Churchbridge Town Hall

Symposium sessions include:

Things That Go Bump in the Night: Goatsuckers, Nightjars and Bats with Mark Brigham,
University of Regina

Basics of Bird Identification with Public Educator
Oak Hammock Marsh, Manitoba

Debut Screening of a Ray Lacusta
Video Production ***Loons***

Supper Guest Speaker from the Provincial Government.

Cost is \$35.00/per person includes noon lunch and supper.

Registration deadline: Noon - February 25, 2009

To register or for more information contact:
Martha marwal@sasktel.net 896-2660
Joan farq.blueheron@sasktel.net 744-2214
Rob rjwilson@sasktel.net 744-8140
Lauretta laurmer@sasktel.net 782-0057

Become active in the YFBTA

1. Plan to attend the YFBTA AGM and Bird Symposium in Churchbridge, Saskatchewan on February 28, 2008.
2. Purchase tickets for the afghan and quilt raffle.
3. Donate an item for the Silent Auction.
4. Contribute a photograph and/or article for consideration for future newsletters. (Email: Rob Wilson)
5. Contribute an item for consideration for the YFBTA website. (Email: John Sawkey john.s@imagewireless.ca)



John Simpson

Photo by Kathy Morrell

The Kaposvar Trails were developed by local interests to provide the opportunity to see our local flora and fauna. Land owner John Nightingale has allowed these trails on his property. Please respect his generosity and the native setting of wildlife and remain on the trails.

Over 70 species of birds have been identified on these

Memberships and Renewals

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