

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



Sage Thoughts

YFBTA member Rob Wilson

Would you like to have your child/children or grand children see a creature that may disappear from Saskatchewan's Crown Lands? You had best take a road trip before it is too late. Travel to the Shaunavon area to search for a Greater Sage Grouse.

I have found some information about Saskatchewan Sage Grouse. A document published in January of 2014 (reference provided below) states that Sage Grouse populations in Canada "have declined 98% in the past 25 – 45 years"(93-138 adults were observed). It stated that "this critical situation calls for immediate attention to prevent further decline and extinction" (Note: If Sage Grouse can no longer be found in Saskatchewan but continue to be found in the United States, they are said to be extirpated, as was once the case with the Black-footed Ferret, rather than extinct).

A Great Egret near Calder, Sask.



Photo: YFBTA member Raymond Lacusta

It stated that "this critical situation calls for immediate attention to prevent further decline and extinction".

Further, "Canada's Greater Sage Grouse are rapidly declining due to high mortality rates and low reproductive success. Without significant intervention, the Greater Sage Grouse may go extinct in Canada in the next 2-5 years"

The report continues, "Habitat conservation, enhancement and stewardship should be the top priority for conserving the species" and that "as an interim measure population management scenarios could be considered in an attempt to offset losses in the wild population". A response to this report warns that if reverses in habitat quantity and quality are not achieved, a population management effort will be futile.

The report contains a model referred to as a "Vortex baseline model" which attempts to predict how long mitigation measures might be expected to defer an expected extirpation in Canada. Sadly, it concludes that "the Canadian population has a 100% probability of extinction within 30 years".

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Information (where Sage Grouse may yet be seen) is provided in the reference document following: "Greater Sage-Grouse in Canada. Population and Habitat Viability Assessment Workshop" (workshop conducted January 14 – 17, 2014 at the Calgary Zoo).

I have requested current information from the Government of Saskatchewan on the status of Sage Grouse on Crown Lands in our province. I hope to be able to report in the 2016 Issue #1 newsletter.

Volunteers are not paid - not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless (taken from Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan: Yorkton Chapter Newsletter: 2014).

Glinda's Life List

YFBTA members Kenn and Nancy Wood

The main reason bird watching has become such a popular hobby in North America is because it is easy to do. Birds are everywhere. You can attract even more with an inexpensive feeder. They readily provide auditory prompts. A pair of binoculars and a field guide and you are easily on your way to a lifetime of fascination and enrichment.

Observations on tiny mammals are much more challenging. Their secretive and frequently nocturnal nature makes every addition to one's life list extremely rewarding. We are lucky to have a feline companion who delights in helping us expand that list.

"Glinda", a ginger tabby, is a consummate hunter. She invariably brings the fruits of her nightly forays home to share. In her early days she was a shrew specialist. Thus we have discovered that a grey, white-bellied [pygmy?] shrew is very common and a black [water] shrew also lives around us. As Glinda matured she branched out to other species and added voles, red squirrels, gophers, varying hares and even a flying squirrel to her life list. We may be imaging this but it seems to us she is much more celebratory when she brings home a new species as recently when she brought in a Jumping Mouse.

Jumping Mouse



Photo: YFBTA member Kenn Wood

Does she want to make sure we add it to her list? [She has recently computerized the list and Kenn is the I.T. guy.]

We are on the northeastern edge of Jumping Mouse ranges. The Meadow Jumping Mouse also occurs in Saskatchewan and the Woodland Jumping Mouse can be found in eastern Canada.

"What's Flying Around": Update

YFBTA member Jim McCallum

I have decided to continue with the distribution and mailing of YFBTA newsletters as Phyllis and I have done in the past. I now have the help of my grand-son, Jace McCallum, who put the labels on mailing envelopes.

In July, one hundred fifteen newsletters were mailed. Sixty-three members received pdf newsletters. In addition, twenty newsletters were hand-delivered to Saltcoats members (this helped to cut expenses as the mailing cost was \$1.18/newsletter, a cost which does not account for the cost of envelopes).

A thank you goes out to Dr. Wilkinson who donated the stamps which were used in the mail-out of the Issue #2 newsletter.

What's Flying Around?

YFBTA members Paula and Morley Maier

It was a beautiful July day - sunny, not too hot, with a breeze in the air. We went for a drive with friends and were heading down the road to McBride Lake. There was lots to observe. There were wildflowers blooming. Along the road the Dogbane was in its prime, dangling its pink and white blooms and giving off a lovely scent.

We found many patches to be alive with butterflies which were a delight. Travelling a little further we had to, once again, stop the vehicle. It was a sight to behold! An early blooming purple Bergamot was covered with more of these orange butterflies.

Research tells us that these are Great Spangled Fritillary butterflies. The botanical name is *Speyeria Cybele*. They are orange with black crescents and spots, 3 to 4 inches. The under wings have silver spots. Females are a darker orange and slightly larger than males. Females lay their eggs on or near wild violets, host plants of the larvae. The caterpillars are charcoal black with orange-tipped spines. Once hatched they immediately hibernate. They emerge the following spring to dine on violet leaves. The pupae are dark and spiral shaped.

Fritillaries are a common butterfly. They are seen in our gardens and yards. Never have we seen them in such abundance, all along our route, as they were that day.

Have you received 2015 Issues #1 and #2?

YFBTA sends Issue #1 of the 2015 newsletters to all of the 2014 members who have provided us with contact information. 2015 members should have received Issue #2. If you have not received these two issues, please contact YFBTA.

Please consider supporting our ongoing initiatives with a renewal. Memberships can serve well as Christmas gifts. Together, our advocacy is stronger and our voices are louder. You are a valued supporter of YFBTA. Consider remaining with us in 2016.



Photo: Morley Maier

Chaplin Hosts Shore Bird Festival in 2015 Submitted by Clem Miller

Our festival day was devoted to youth. We hosted 54 children from 3 schools. They were mostly grades 4 and 5 students. Also attending were 6 senior students from Hodgeville. They spent the day with Jared Clark banding some young hawks. They certainly enjoyed their day.

We set up 6 stations for the younger ones at the Nature Centre. Students were divided into 6 groups.

Stations focused on native plants, water larvae, Brine Shrimp, Saskatchewan minerals, face painting and a tour of Chaplin Lake. In addition each child built a bird house.

The festival was very well received. The teachers said they would certainly be willing to come back again.

Will you consider helping?

Interested in:

Contact Rob Wilson

Writing?

Editing?

Formatting?

Seeking contributors?

Gleaning from Nest Box House Cleaning YFBTA member Barb Elsasser

I find out what has gone on in my bluebird houses when I do my spring cleaning. I am referring to the cleaning of twenty-eight bird houses that my husband and I maintain in the general vicinity of Togo.

The houses are set out in adjacent pairs at fourteen selected sites. One of the pair of nesting boxes will nearly always quickly come under the control of a pair of Tree Swallows. The second house may be used by either Eastern or Mountain Blue Birds (I see the Eastern Blue Birds much more frequently than Mountain Blue Birds).

My contribution to blue birds is a commitment to repair or re-locate the box-pairs and to annually clean each house. My busy life style precludes my monitoring of the birds in the summer although I frequently see them flying about and also often hear their song. The necessary cleaning, to reduce parasite levels in the boxes, happens in early April. Males can be seen as early as late March but I find that they do not take possession of a nest box until April. I ensure that the boxes are ready for occupancy.

Below are observations made during my spring cleaning done April, 2015:

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	
	blue bird	blue bird	* house down	blue bird	swallow	blue bird	*swallow	
	Empty	swallow	empty	swallow	empty	swallow	blue bird	

	Site 8	Site 9	Site 10	Site 11	Site 12	Site 13	Site 14	
	Wren	*blue bird	swallow	swallow	*empty	*blue bird	blue bird	
	blue bird	blue bird	blue bird	blue bird	*wren	*blue bird	swallow	

Notes

The chart above provides evidence of nesting by the species indicated. It summarizes what I found when each box was cleaned.

Site 3. One house knocked down. This, on occasion, happens. Usually caused by a bear (house will be “trashed”) or a cow. In this instance I believe it resulted during grass cutting in adjacent ditch.

Site 7. Found a mouse nest on top of the Tree Swallow nest. Don’t know whether that happened during Tree Swallow rearing or after.

Site 9. Found a wren nest on top of the blue bird nest. Don’t know specifics.

Site 12. Have re-located both boxes to a new location. I believe that the original site was too close to a treed area, this encouraging invasion by wrens.

Site 13. First box contained an unhatched blue bird egg. The second box contained three dead blue bird chicks. Don’t have a theory as to what happened to these two boxes. Also don’t know why there were blue birds in both boxes (same parents?)

Eastern Bluebird



Mountain Bluebird



Photos: YFBTA member Don Weidl

Did You See/Hear What I Saw?

YFBTA member Frank Roy

One of the real joys of our twice a year province-wide meetings is sampling the wildlife and flowers in various regions of Saskatchewan. This June we had the opportunity once again to visit and enjoy the beauty of Eastern Saskatchewan with its abundance of lakes, marshes and forested areas. I always know that we'll find some species of birds less common farther west or south.

I came from Saskatoon this year with the MacKenzies, Audrey and Bill. On Saturday (June 20) Bill and I took YFBTA's Number 1 Bus Trip, largely south and west of Saltcoats, and Audrey took Number 2, a more northerly route.

To add to the fun, members of the Saskatoon Natural History Society nearly always bet on the number of bird species we'll encounter on a trip. The MacKenzies and I tallied 84 species and Audrey won the \$3.00 pool! Sightings have to be verified by at least one other person.

Highlights? We'll start in the marshes. There we heard and/or saw three sparrows, always elusive, always worthwhile.

The Swamp Sparrow, heard on the east side of Anderson Lake, with a song something like that of a Chipping Sparrow, nests in the marshes.

Just back from a marsh we heard and saw a Nelson's Sparrow. Not known for beauty of voice, the song sounds like a hot poker being plunged into water. Fun to hear. YFBTA folks are lucky to have them south of the boreal forest.

Further back from the marsh, but still in high grass, we found Le Conte's Sparrow, another shy sparrow with a thin, high-pitched song. You can listen to these three sparrows on DVD's or on Google. Knowing their song assists in finding and identifying them.

In moist areas we also saw Bobolinks, Forster's Terns and Alder Flycatchers, all birds that prefer to nest near water. Farther afield, in bushes and trees, we were lucky indeed to hear and see a male Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, a beautiful bird with a song much like a Robin.

We also heard a Black-billed Cuckoo, more common this year than usual because of an abundance of Tent Caterpillars in many parts of the province.

To members of YFBTA: You folks are lucky to live where you do – even if you have a fair number of ticks – because your birdlife is varied and abundant. Thank you for a superbly-organized meet and for your hospitality.

Black-billed Cuckoo



Photo: YFBTA member Morley Maier

Submissions to *Writers' Corner*

YFBTA member Kathy Morrell

The Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association (YFBTA) publishes *Writers' Corner* on our website. We would like to invite members of Nature Saskatchewan to submit writing to our little online publication. Writing submitted to *Writers' Corner* must correspond to our vision. That vision (stated on website): "the vision of the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association is to be a group engaged in learning about, advocating on behalf of and celebrating the natural world."

1. Writers seeking publication in *Writers' Corner* must be members of the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association and/or Nature Saskatchewan or one of the affiliate organizations of Nature Saskatchewan, or a past presenter of a YFBTA EVENT.
2. All writing that fits within a wide purview of the YFBTA vision will be accepted for publication. The work will not be edited.
3. *Writers' Corner* will not publish material that has already appeared in the YFBTA newsletter (previously published YFBTA newsletters may be viewed at www.yfbta.com).
4. Writing may be of any genre including non-fiction, fiction and poetry.

5. Fiction and non-fiction pieces are limited to a length of 2500 words. Poetry is limited to 100 lines.
6. Writing will be removed from *Writers' Corner* periodically.
7. Submit your writing to Kathy Morrell, kmorrell@sasktel.net

Letter to the Editor

Thank you to Saltcoats/Bredenbury Students

Submitted by Ardythe McMaster

I am writing to thank you for a most interesting and informative display of work in the Saltcoats hall.

What a variety of topics! Sports, history, animal and bird studies and all the rest. I wonder how you chose those topics?

Good research takes time and trouble. All of you have taken both time and trouble. Then came the fun part ... arranging data and finding attractive ways to present that data.

Such clever drawings! Such lively colours! Such impressive posters! Such a colourful display.

Students: Thank you for sharing your work.

Teachers: Thank you for your skill and leadership.

Editor's note: Ardythe, who lives in Rossendale Manitoba, attended the Spring Meet of Nature Saskatchewan hosted by the YFBTA in the Saltcoats and District Community Hall, June 20. Ardythe was impressed by student work on display in the hall. She wrote the above note to students of the school.

If you have internet access, you can, if you wish, receive email messages from YFBTA. You can also receive an electronic copy of the 2015 newsletters upon request.

Internet communication with members is not without glitches. Unless contacted we have no way of knowing if you are receiving electronic items. If you want the emails and you suspect that you are not receiving them, please contact YFBTA. (see bottom of page 8).

Young Readers' Corner

Owls In Our tree Submitted by Charlie Szabo

Owls In Our Tree

Last summer we found two owls in our pine tree. They were really hard to see. They had big eyes and blended into the trees. One looked grey and one looked Black. We think they were looking for a nest. We watched them and they would stare at us. We were sad when they left. We think they were scared of our dad who was fascinated with them.

Charlie Szabo

Long-eared Owl



Photo: Submitted by Krystal Szabo

Thank you, Sara YFBTA President Martin Phillips

On behalf of the YFBTA., I would like to express appreciation for the tremendous job that you have done for our association. I have had time to read your reports (I used them while working on 2015 grant reports and 2016 grants applications). Stating that I am impressed is an understatement. Your reports, combined with the positive feedback YFBTA has received from any and all who interacted with you over your time with us, means that YFBTA has VERY large shoes to fill as we endeavour to, again, find a Summer Program Facilitator for 2016. Also, your reports will prove to be indispensable to whomever we hire next year.

If you are in need of a reference, feel free to give YFBTA a holler. We will have nothing but positive comments to pass along.

Thank you for your excellent work and the best of luck in all of your future endeavours.

Editor's Note: *The note above was sent by president Martin to Sara Belontz who worked for YFBTA as a Summer Program Facilitator for four months (May - August) in each of 2014 and 2015.*



There are things in Nature that would speak to us, if we would only slow down, become quiet and truly listen. There's ancient wisdom in the rocks, whispers in the winds, glory in the flowers and guidance in the trees. Our busy self-importance misses out on much, only because we cannot hear Nature over our din. Take time to breathe; take time to hear your heart beat in rhythm with the Earth's pulse; stop talking and really listen to those quiet, small voices that revive your Spirit. This is the grace we all seek. This is the love that we all need. This is the universal power that fulfils our life. This is the blessing we must all share with each other.

Credit: unknown. Andean and Incan Shamanism, submitted by YFBTA member LaVaughn Duxsbury

Your newsletter & YFBTA.COM

There's a reason this publication is called a newsletter and not a news book. While studies have shown that you retain information better if you read it on paper rather than an electronic screen, you do not need a study to understand that you can't retain what you can't read (because it wouldn't fit into the available space).

Our web page has virtually unlimited room for all that deserving stuff that could not be fit into this issue, such as Darryl and Vicki Stevenson's Good Spirit tour last June, Doug Welykholowa's comprehensive 2015 Loon Report, and many new photos of albino hawks and Pileated Woodpeckers and Pelicans and more for you to discover for yourself in "Members' Gallery".

Our lead article also points to an important 92 page report on the state of the Greater-Sage Grouse that couldn't be shoe-horned into this issue.

Also, with the publication of the last newsletter for this year, copies of all the 2014 newsletters are now added to the previously published online issues (available for download on the site).

Our Writer's Corner has some new guidelines for submissions (page 6). Previously submitted writing is currently on the web site. YFBTA encourages new contributions. Please do not hesitate to share your creativity.

The same goes for Members' Gallery. Figure out how to get that Bald Eagle photo off your new digital camera, and email it in. Right now.

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A Bird Rarely Sighted in Our YFBTA Region

YFBTA member Don Weidl

Yellow-breasted Chat

This bird, largest of the North American warbler species, is more often heard than seen. It is reported as common in southwestern Saskatchewan, but uncommon in southeastern Saskatchewan, preferring thickets and tangles of tall shrubbery beside streams or ponds.

The song is unmusical, a jumble of harsh, chattering clucks, rattles, clear whistles, and squawks. Its large size, bright yellow breast, two white stripes on the side of the head, no wing bars, and longish tail make good field marks. I've been bird watching in the Qu'Appelle Valley for over forty-five years. I finally heard, saw, and photographed this species in "Exner's Coulee" on the north side of Crooked Lake on June 16, 2015.

Yellow-breasted Chat



Photo: YFBTA member Don Weidl

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