

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



YFBTA Seeking Program Facilitator

YFBTA member Walter Farquharson

Several area schools and a wide variety of community groups have become familiar with the popular summer program offered by YFBTA.

During May and June the facilitator works with teachers and students in local schools. In 2016 that included Dr. Brass Scholl in Yorkton, Saltcoats, Churchbridge and Calder schools. During July and August the facilitator works with and plans activities for groups from Daycares to Seniors, including some area special care homes. All of this is at no cost to schools, individuals and groups participating.

Through fundraising and using available grants the YFBTA has offered this outreach and service to fulfill their purpose which is to be a group engaged in learning about, advocating on behalf of and celebrating the natural world. The mission of the YFBTA is to attract people of all ages to the organization, its programs and trails within our geographic area.

Fewer than 150 Adults Remain in Canada



Photo of Sage Grouse: Branimir Gjetvaj

The area of the YFBTA extends from the Manitoba border west to #9 Highway. The Southern part of the area begins with the Qu'Appelle Valley and its northern boundary lies north of # 10 Highway.

The 2017 program is planned to run from April 22 to August 28. The facilitator must be a person enrolling in a post secondary education program in the fall.

During the summer, work will be based on a 40 hour week with flexible hours depending on programming planned and groups to be involved. An active support committee from YFBTA works with the facilitator in planning, contacting and supporting weekly activities.

Martin Phillips, YFBTA president, states that the organization needs a young person with a passion for working with people of all ages but especially youth, and motivated by a love of nature and concern for protecting the environment.

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Rob Wilson and Gerri Knudsen who have both worked with students in past years agree, "Each student we have had brings unique gifts, styles of operating, knowledge and interests. It's exciting to see how they have related to people of all ages."

With more than six years of offering the program to build on, YFBTA looks forward to sponsoring it again this summer. "But," says group's secretary-treasurer Monique Smith, "we need a person with imagination and initiative who's looking for a summer experience that will stretch their abilities and powerfully add to their experience and job-readiness."

Dark-eyed Junco YFBTA member Bob Holtkamp

Information taken from: The Boreal Songbird Initiative and iBird Canada.

The Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) has 15 subspecies in 5 groups. The junco I see most is the Slate-coloured as it is an eastern bird. The Oregon is a western bird. All subspecies vary greatly in size, song, colour and range. Each was once considered its own species.

Juncos breed mostly in the Boreal Forest of North America. This lively territorial bird is a ground dweller. It feeds on seeds and fruit in the open but also gleans through tangled brush and spruce boughs for food and shelter. It responds favourably to forest fires and logging. These are events that restart forest succession because of the increased thickness of young trees, shrubs for safer nesting areas and more cover for feeding.

The Junco really spreads out during migration and winter. It is a familiar visitor at bird feeders even on the prairies. Most juncos are migratory although some birds in the south and west stay year round.

Adults, especially females, tend to migrate farther and begin migration earlier. Female mortality is probably higher than males during migration because they travel farther south but lower in winter because of milder southern weather. That is why survival and sex ratios on the breeding grounds are equal.

You won't catch them migrating because they do that at night. Flock makeup changes day to day during migration. Individuals seek one another out for group foraging and roosting and then depart in large flocks at night but don't stay together in flight.

Oregon Junco



Photo: YFBTA member Bob Holtkamp

The Dark-eyed Junco breeding system is a social monogamy. Birds of both sexes have only one social mate with which they nest and defend a territory but they frequently copulate with neighbouring birds. As a result males raise many young that are not their own.

The nest is usually on the ground on a sloping bank, under a protruding rock, among roots, under a log or at the stem of a spreading plant (occasionally but rarely in a tree). It contains three to six pale bluish or greenish eggs with variegated blotches concentrated on the larger end. The young can run before they can fly, if necessary, because their legs develop quickly. Nest predation by rodents is quite significant and productivity correlates highly with rodent density.

The Dark-eyed Junco is like other sparrows in its diet and foraging. Its winter diet is mainly native seeds, some fruit and waste grain. During breeding season the diet is mainly insects and spiders. A yearly proportion is $\frac{3}{4}$ seeds to $\frac{1}{4}$ arthropods. Foraging includes gleaning, pecking and scratching.

They form large flocks in the fall which are extremely hierarchical with adults dominating over the young, males dominating over females, and larger birds over smaller birds.

A Thing or Two About Turtles YFBTA member Jack Dawes

University of Regina masters student, Kelsey Marchand, says that by the time she paid a visit to the Kelsey Ecological Society group at Preeceville Oct. 23, 2016, most of our native turtle population would have been settled into their winter homes – known to most of us as mud!

It turns out that Saskatchewan can claim two native turtle varieties – the Snapping Turtle of southern Saskatchewan regions and the Painted Turtle, found throughout south central Saskatchewan (as far north only as Saskatoon).

Ms. Marchand says turtles seek out relatively deep stretches of water (which won't freeze to the bottom) – to bed down for winter. "They just hunker down, go under the mud, hang out there and just ride out the winter." During the spring 2016, turtle movement began about the end of April, she says.

As with all reptile/amphibian species, retention of habitat is a matter of concern.

Road and highway development can be a major threat – in her case, Kelsey studies more or less "urban-based" turtles – in and near Wascana Lake. In Regina transportation routes are not a major turtle threat at present (turtle encounters with cars in more populous Ontario, appear to be a serious turtle-issue).

Western Painted Turtles are a "listed" species in B.C., she explains but in Saskatchewan right now, "we don't know a lot about the species". Having some numbers recorded now will be a starting point for study if, in the future, the populations here appear to be declining.

Turtles, she explains are a "generalist species" and will eat almost "anything they can wrap their mouths around", which may include vegetation, mosquito larvae, small fish species and/or minnows.

April through September, finds Kelsey literally turtle-tracking "on the water" daily. Through the winter months she makes monthly check-stops.

Kelsey does use electronic tracking to monitor turtle movement. She has documented a record-sized painted turtle – 271 millimetres – over 10 inches neck to tail. This record-breaking (for size) turtle was captured in Regina.

During 2016 Kelsey tracked three turtle groups. According to her blog post of February 2016, 13 of these turtles over-wintered in a line parallel to shore – about 7m from shore (likely other untracked critters there too!).

Kelsey is asking herself, "Why are these turtles over-wintering together? Why don't they spread out?"

Saskatchewan turtle sightings are most common in June, she says, which is when the females will be looking for a "nest" site. And, it turns out they display a degree of "nest fidelity". This means that they may return to a previously selected site in future years (not necessarily the exact spot – but in the same area).

Martian: "rover" or "transmitter?"



Photo: Kelsey Marchand

Aparrotly not lost in translation

Be careful with the sounds that you make in the vicinity of this creature.

<http://www.youtube.com/embed/nbrTOcUnjNY>

Seems like our land-bound turtles aren't quite as long-lived as sea turtles but up to fifty years is possible for Saskatchewan Painted Turtles (Longer is possible, of course, but for now we don't have the studies to prove it).

Now, should you, like our prime minister, like to take "selfies" – a reminder from Kelsey Marchand that these critters are, after all, wild animals with the ability to scratch or bite! So... maybe just snap a ground shot, and, if you wish, contact the Royal Saskatchewan Museum who gather turtle sightings.

We may follow Kelsey's turtle studies at her blog spot:
<https://www.royalsaskmuseum.ca/blog/cat?id=9>

Editor's note:

Kelsey will be one of four presenters at an April "Celebrate Earth Day with the YFBTA" program.

**Architects can help Control Lyme Disease:
YFBTA member Robert Brown**

On a sunny afternoon in May a few years ago my brother-in-law, Rob, and I paddled our canoe across a northern Saskatchewan lake to a wilderness area. We set up a temporary campsite, cooked our lunch, photographed wildlife, and paddled back across the lake. That evening as we were sitting down to dinner my sister-in-law said "What's that little black dot on your neck?" I tried to remove it, but it was stuck to my skin. On closer inspection I realized it was a tiny wood tick. I got a pair of tweezers and pulled it off. Relief!

But then the penny dropped. Maybe I had more ticks. I pulled off my shirt and sure enough I found a tick in my underarm, then one on my side, and before long I had found twenty-six ticks on my-body! But Rob beat that record with a total of thirty-two ticks on him. We had all these ticks on us, yet we hadn't felt a thing. Fortunately for us, wood ticks (*Dermacentor variabilis*) don't transmit Lyme disease.

Yet thousands of people in the US and Canada every year aren't so fortunate.

The ticks that they encounter are the Black-legged Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) that can carry the Lyme disease bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) almost 30,000 people are confirmed to have Lyme disease each year, but they estimate that the number of infections is likely 10 times higher than reported - nearly 300,000 new cases per year! A lot of people apparently don't get too sick from Lyme disease, but some people get very sick and every year some people die.

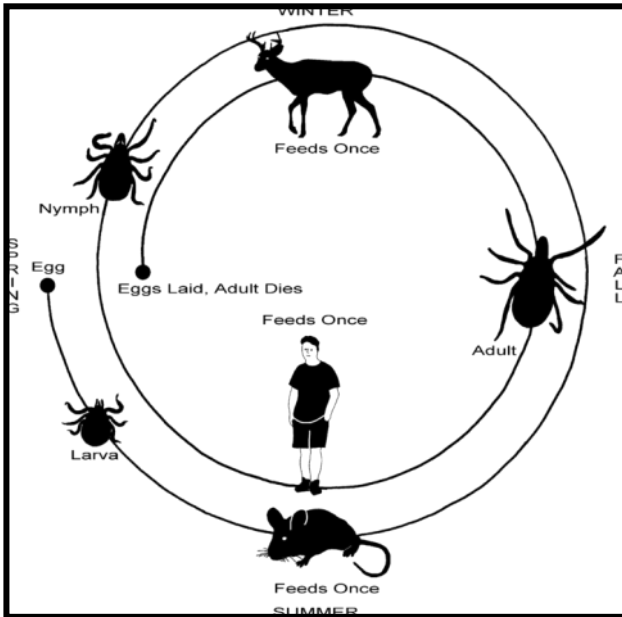
If you don't have Lyme disease in your area, it might not be long before you do. The CDC has reported that Lyme disease has spread tremendously over the past fifteen years and they expect that trend to continue. It's not clear why, but global climate change might be partly to blame. Whatever is causing its range to expand... it might soon be appearing in a landscape near you.

The CDC provides good advice for people on how to avoid coming in contact with the Blacklegged Tick, but of course not everyone is likely to read and follow the CDCs advice.

That's where landscape architects can help. There are things that can be done to minimize the potential for people to come into contact with the ticks that cause Lyme disease.

A few years ago one of my Master of Landscape Architecture advisees, Sarah Ward, studied Lyme disease in the landscape. She investigated the ecology of Lyme disease so that she could identify critical interactions between people and the Black-legged Tick. She was able to identify times of year, locations, and landscape conditions where people are most likely to come in contact with ticks.

It turns out that humans are 'accidental' hosts of the Black-legged Tick. Two of its preferred hosts are white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and white-footed mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*). The ticks can't move more than about 3 metres on their own, and rely on hosts to carry and disperse them. This is a critical point. Ticks will tend to occur in habitats that favour their hosts – deciduous woodlands.



But don't think that removing deer and mice from the landscape will solve anything. The Blacklegged Tick is equally willing to feed on at least 27 other mammals and 36 species of birds.

A better approach is to identify where and when the ticks will be looking for a host and design the environment so that the host is not likely to be a human.

Sarah and I published a paper called "A framework for incorporating the prevention of Lyme disease transmission into the landscape planning and design process" in *Landscape and Urban Planning*. You can access it through the journal website but I've also put an open-access copy of the paper on the University of Guelph Atrium. You can download a PDF at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10214/4615>

I'll summarize four of the key points here.

1. Blacklegged ticks are extremely sensitive to desiccation so they are found almost exclusively in moist habitats with a minimum of direct sunlight. Path surfaces can be made inhospitable to ticks by constructing them of gravel or other xeric material. Ticks will tend to avoid these dry barriers.
2. Ticks can't jump and don't drop out of trees. They crawl along stems of plants and wait at the tip for a host to come along and then they grab on.

That means that paths should be wide enough to allow people to walk along the path without brushing against adjacent vegetation.

3. Seating should be located at least 3 metres from dense brush, wooded areas and heavy groundcovers. It should be installed on a bed of gravel or other xeric material.

4. A metre-wide strip of xeric material should be installed between lawns and wooded areas and around play areas and patios. Ticks will tend to avoid these dry areas.

These are pretty simple things to incorporate into your site-scale designs, and while they won't eliminate the threat of Lyme disease, they will reduce the potential for people to come into contact with the tick that carries the bacterium.

Reference:

Ward, S. E. and R. D. Brown. 2004. A framework for incorporating the prevention of Lyme disease transmission into the landscape planning and design process. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 66: 91–106



Submitted by YFBTA member Ron Samuluk

Thin as a Rail
YFBTA member Don Weidl

Did you know that there are three species of rails that have ranges within the YFBTA area? The most common is the Sora Rail and the least common is the Yellow Rail, a “species of concern”. Few people have heard or seen the third species, the largest species, the Virginia Rail (below).



Photo: YFBTA member Don Weidl

The Virginia Rail is 21.6 cm to 26.7cm (8 ½ to 10 ½ in.) long; has a long orange bill and short tail. The breast is pale rusty; cheeks gray; flanks barred with black. At dawn along the edge of the cattails it is a delight to watch a Virginia Rail slip into view through the reeds – its slender body adding another sense to the English idiom “as thin as a rail.”

However, rails are more often heard than seen. The Virginia rail’s voice is described as a wheezy, pig-like, descending and usually accelerating series of grunts *wep wep wep wepwep-wepwepppprr*. Males give a hard mechanical *gik gik gik gidik gidik gidik*.

In the *Birds of the Yorkton-Duck Mountain* (2003), Houston and Anaka describe the Virginia Rail as an uncommon summer resident. Birds have been reported at Horseshoe Lake and Rousay Lake. David Hatch and Don Weidl heard one calling near the west boundary of Duck Mountain Provincial Park on June 1, 1981.

The Birds of the Qu’Appelle 1857-1979 (Callin 1980) describe the Virginia Rail as probably a regular and fairly common, occasionally common, summer resident in marshy areas at the lakes and larger sloughs. As this most elusive species is seldom seen and the song or calls are not widely known, it is undoubtedly much more prevalent throughout the province than the records would indicate.

I first heard this species on May 26, 1968 during a bird outing with Manley Callin at the east end of Ekapo Lake, southeast of Broadview. A single bird was heard again during a Callin outing at the same marsh on May 31, 1970. Since that time, the Virginia Rail appears to have become more common in the Broadview area. Birds were heard sporadically during outings in the area between 1970 and 2010. During the spring and early summer of 2015 and 2016, Virginia Rails were heard calling from five different locations during visits to wetlands south of Broadview.

Although this species is known to be mostly nocturnal, calls were heard during the morning and afternoon periods. Taped playback calls were used to entice a response from the birds, with the occasional sighting and a lucky photo.

So when you are enjoying a spring visit to a local marsh, listening to the calls of Marsh Wrens and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, give your best imitation of the Virginia Rail “grunt” or “gidik” call. You might be treated with a glimpse of a “not so often seen” beautiful marsh species.

If you have internet access, you can, if you wish, receive email messages from YFBTA. You can also receive an electronic copy of the 2017 newsletters upon request.

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

A wolf lived for eight years interacting with citizens and their dogs in Juneau. When the wolf died the community set up a plaque to commemorate this relationship:

<https://goo.gl/HQ1Ud6>

Young Readers' Corner

I Like Learning About Nature

My name is alex morrison and In the spring we learned alot about nature from Mrs.Blender. One time we got to take our nets to a big skew by the school and we caught minnows,tadpoles and even frogs. It was very cool! We also learned about animal habitats which is where an animal lives. For example a puma lives in the mountains,a fish lives in the water and a wolf lives

in the forest. I really liked to learn about nature and hope we get to do more classes like this soon.

byo

Alex morrison

Did you receive the three 2016 newsletters?

YFBTA sends Issue #1 of the 2017 newsletters to all of the 2016 members who have provided us with contact information. 2016 members should have received 3 issues. If you did not please contact me.

If you have forgotten to renew this will be the last newsletter that you receive from YFBTA.

If you have chosen to not renew, YFBTA thanks you for the interest and support you have provided. As editor I welcome feedback if you care to share your reason for not renewing.

As members of an association, together, our advocacy on behalf of nature is stronger and our voices, speaking out on behalf of Nature, are louder.

You are a valued supporter of YFBTA.

Come Celebrate Earth Day with YFBTA

April 22, St. Gerard Parish Hall: Yorkton

- 4 presenters
- Silent Auction/Raffle
- Digital photos of nature
- Banquet

To register: yfbta.com

Letters to the Editor

Dec. 07, 2016

Today, we have **hundreds** of waxwings showing up. We have a Crab Apple tree in our back yard that has always been a favourite of Robins and Waxwings. Never had this many before. The tree had a very good production this year and most of the apples were intact until today. They will probably empty it today. Even picking up ones on ground.

YFBTA members Thom Carnahan/Oney Pollock.

January 28, 2017

I had an Oregon Junco alongside a Slate-coloured Junco in my yard yesterday.

YFBTA member Gloria Rathgeber

Rare Saskatchewan Sighting: Varied Thrush
Submitted by Don Smith

Dec. 08, 2016 I saw a Varied Thrush under my bird feeder yesterday then again today. They are from the west coast it says in my bird book. I did see one here many years ago, so it has happened before.



Photo: Michael Duncan

Editor's Note: No Laughing Matter

Apologies to three of our contributors with regard to some humorous items in 2016 Issue 3:

The pigeon cartoon was submitted by YFBTA member Dave Romanchuk, not by Betty Malo (However, Betty did submit a cute anecdote about a young child).

The "sparrow" cartoon was submitted by YFBTA member Darryl Stevenson (this was not acknowledged in Issue 3).

Sharp-shinned Hawk Versus Cooper's Hawk

Submitted by YFBTA member Kathleen Pitt (taken from "FeederWatch").

An interesting and helpful site. Click on the Tricky ID page: <https://goo.gl/HSUcUI>



Caption: "Darn paparazzi"

Submitted by Claire Bullaro
(taken from Saskatoon Nature Society newsletter)

Happy 65th Anniversary Mary and Stuart Houston!



Mary and Stuart Houston's complete family, including children, grandchildren, spouses and fiancés
65th wedding anniversary photo courtesy David Stobbe
Photography, Saskatoon.
The wedding took place August 12, 1951 in St. Lucy's Church, Dilke SK

Submitted by YFBTA member Howard Derksen
Photo taken from Saskatoon Star Phoenix

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