

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

# What's flying around....



## Takin' Care of Business Talia Fawcett

I am so excited to be the YFBTA Summer Program Facilitator. As I was preparing for the summer, I had no idea how different my role would look because of Covid19.

The pandemic required me to conduct all my activities online. It has restricted the type of programs that I will be able to run throughout the summer. However, in spite of these challenges, I am so thankful that the YFBTA decided to rehire me!

I have found that connecting people of all ages to nature is very important in these times. Getting outside is a great way to physically distance, and it is also an effective way to improve our mental health during this unsteady season.

During May and June, I was able to present to 150 students throughout Saltcoats, Yorkton, and Churchbridge using Zoom. This was a very interesting change for me, I like to plan hands-on activities for my class presentations.

I had to find creative ways to teach students about the outdoors... while they sat indoors on a computer!

Though I was worried about how engaging I could be over a screen, one thing that kept striking me as I taught in schools was how interested my students were to learn about nature. The Saskatchewan outdoors is so fascinating, and kids have a hunger and desire to learn about the world around them. This realization has inspired me to continue to connect with kids as best I can through this time.



Photo: YFBTA members: Jessie Baron Family

### Inside this issue:

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Fishy Facts</b><br>Zaiden Evans                                       | <b>2</b> |
| <b>A New Photo for the Sask. Bird Book?</b><br>YFBTA member Bob Holtkamp | <b>3</b> |
| <b>A Labour of Love</b><br>YFBTA member Michelle Easton                  | <b>4</b> |
| <b>An Extraordinary Birder</b><br>Stan Shadick and Lois Wooding          | <b>5</b> |
| <b>Habitat in Perpetuity</b><br>Brian Irving                             | <b>8</b> |

### What's Flying Around: Newsletter Group Volunteers

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## Strike of the Northern Pike

Zaiden Evans (Grade 4)

There it is, the Northern Pike, apex predator. The Pike uses its excellent camouflage to hide from its prey in the weedy, slow current bay. Just then an unlucky perch swims by. "Snap" – the perch didn't even have a second to think before the pike swallowed it whole.

Did you know that *Esox Lucius* is the scientific name for the Northern Pike? Let's dive into some pike facts.

To kick off I will tell you about some of the pike's physical features. A Northern Pike has a long, broad flattened snout and a long slender body. Its body is green with a white/yellow belly. The side of a pike is painted with spots the same colour as the belly. Pike fins are vibrant orange with random black markings on them.

Pike can be as long as 16 to 22 inches and weigh up to 16 kg. The heaviest Northern Pike ever recorded was caught by Peter Dubuc in 1940 and it weighed 46 lbs.

Northern Pike have multiple rows of teeth on both upper and lower jaws. Furthermore, Northern Pike teeth grow up to an inch long and tear fishermen's lines. Luckily, a pike won't attack anything bigger than it is.

Pike are carnivorous fish which means they eat other animals. Pike are on top of the food chain making them apex predators. Apex predator means that they have no natural predator. Pike are not picky fish and they will eat whatever they can catch. Pike eat other fish species including perch, Walleye and bass. They will also eat small land animals that come into the water like frogs, snakes, bugs, rodents and even small water birds like ducklings. Pike will even be cannibals and eat smaller Pike.

The Northern Pike is a freshwater species that lives in deeper and cooler regions of a water body.

They like to hide in water weeds and in slow streams so that they can hide from their prey and not use a lot of energy. Pike can live in saltwater as long as it is brackish enough. Brackish means slightly salty and a mixture of salt water and fresh water. Pike are found in North America, Europe, Asia and Siberia.

## Black-backed Woodpecker: Saltcoats, April 10



Photo: YFBTA member Rob Wilson

## A Beaver Can Be a Poem Brady Kitzul Grade 4/5

- B** uilding lodges as their homes.
- E** ating wood every day.
- A** lways doing work.
- V** ery angry when people go by.
- E** vening comes. The day is done.
- R** esting up for another hard day.

## The Storm Hannah Sears

I feel my heart beating.  
I see the flash of lightning.  
I hear the loud clap of thunder.  
I smell damp leaves.  
I taste thick wet raindrops that fall  
onto my tongue.

### Sighting of a Lifetime

YFBTA member Bob Holtkamp

On the afternoon of April 30<sup>th</sup> I was sitting on the deck sipping on a coffee enjoying the birds at my feeder. Suddenly there was a bright flash of colour in the trees and I saw a tiny yellow and black bird peering at me and then the feeder and back to me. It was a male Lesser Goldfinch checking to see if it was safe to go to the feeder. It graced my backyard for about 40 minutes. It moved from trees to feeder to birdbath and back. I managed to go in and get my camera and go back out and take many photos. I felt like an extremely fortunate individual.

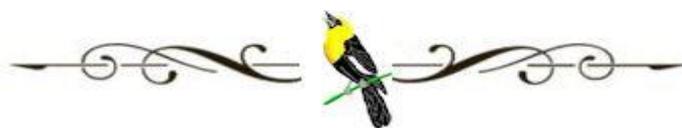
I did some research on several web sites (The Cornell Lab, Wikipedia, What Bird, Audubon). I gleaned the following information:

The Lesser Goldfinch is so named because it is the tiniest of goldfinches at 4.5 inches. Males in the east have black backs, bright yellow below while males in the west have green backs with a black cap and yellow below. The Lesser Goldfinch is most common in California and Texas with pockets in the rest of its US range.

#### Lesser Goldfinch



Photo: YFBTA member Bob Holtkamp



Their habits are much the same as the American Goldfinch, eating the same types of food but they have more intestinal fortitude than their larger cousins. They eat first and will not be intimidated. In fact, while he was at my feeder he sat next to a house sparrow and ate. Its song is more complex than the American Goldfinch and it sometime mimics other bird songs.

Throughout much of its range, Lesser Goldfinches are permanent residents. In the coldest part of their breeding range, they may migrate short distances southward, or from higher elevations into lowlands. The winter range of those that do migrate is not well understood.

I have been keeping an eye out for my tiny little visitor daily.... which is easy with this pandemic... but alas, 40 minutes is all I've gotten thus far.

#### Editor's note

Well known and well respected Saskatchewan birder, Stan Shadick, of Saskatoon sent the note below to a number of birders and birding groups.

In case anyone missed it, Robert Holtkamp photographed a male Lesser Goldfinch yesterday at the Ravine Ecological Reserve in Yorkton. Here is a link to the report with photos.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S68418802>

Birds of Saskatchewan lists this species as hypothetical based upon 2 previous August reports without photos. Robert's photos should be clear enough to add this species to the Saskatchewan list.

I hope any Yorkton area birders check to see if it reappears.

Stan also provided notes on the life and work of Frank Roy (page 5).

Thank you Stan for providing two contributions in consideration of the interests of members of the YFBTA.

## An Old Trail with a New Caretaker

YFBTA member Michelle Easton

Anaka's Bluebird Trail has been home to bluebirds and swallows for many years. At one time 400 birdhouses stretched across the open plains of the community pasture grasslands west of Good Spirit Lake. Many folks have helped the Anakas through the years, but even after reducing the number of houses to 200, they eventually needed assistance with maintenance of the trail. They found a willing replacement caretaker in a local resident and friend, Val Edwards of Buchanan. Val, with the assistance of her husband Bob, was soon trekking along the familiar path making sure the houses were ready for the bluebird's return the following spring.

Val took over the role of caretaker in her late 60s and recalls with a chuckle that after a few years Bill took down quite a number of the houses, "a 200 house trail was just too much for a young lady like herself to take care of." She has enjoyed taking care of the trail over the years, but admits it is getting to be a lot of work. Val's love of nature started from a very young age. Her parents, very keen birders, were always out with their binoculars and bird books. She believes that is why she enjoys the outdoors so much. She retired from teaching in England and came to Canada in 1967. Retirement allows her the time to focus on nature and Val loves every aspect of it.

Val recalls a story from soon after they moved onto the farm near Invermay. "Our place was on the edge of the ball diamond in Invermay. We had bluebird boxes and there were bluebirds in them. When we moved the house out to an abandoned farmyard outside of town, there was a real presence of bluebirds in the yard. They would peck at the reflections in the windows and even come down the chimney", Continuing in her calm and understanding nature, she simply states, "Well, we moved into their territory, so where else are they to go?" Her perspective of nature is a refreshing one.

Val suggests being very picky when placing bluebird houses, The saying "location, location, location" is key, even for the birds!

The best landscapes for the bluebirds are open grasslands, with low grasses and perches nearby, but not near buildings. They need a clear view to see any enemies coming, which is why Val says the community pastures are ideal locations. Birdhouses are set up in pairs. It gives the bluebirds a chance to establish a nest before the swallows come in and take over everything.

Interestingly, Tree Swallows are more aggressive and territorial than bluebirds. However they cohabitate peacefully, providing the bluebirds protection against other birds.

### Mountain Bluebird



Photo: YFBTA member Morley Maier

The pairing of nest boxes is very beneficial. Take note though, once a swallow nests in a house, it is unlawful to remove it.

The bluebirds return early in the spring, making maintenance of these houses very important. The fall clean up routine monitors what took place over the summer months. Val sees who was 'checked in' to which house and which houses remained vacant, recording who "made it" and who did not. The summer residence's mess is cleaned out to remove debris as disease spreads easily in dirty conditions.

Mites also thrive in dirty conditions. Mites bite the baby birds, biting badly enough to cause the young to die or to jump out too early. Neither situation is wanted so it is crucial to always clean out the old bluebird nests! Winter comes and goes with high winds that knock off lids. Animals push over posts as they scratch their itchy hides. Mother Nature delivers other threats to the houses as well. So when springtime nears, it is time to check that the boxes are upright and the lids are on, so that the bluebirds can settle straight into them when they arrive in early spring.

During the summer Val lets the birds be. She says the birds do respond quite well if disturbed, as Bill would be out checking in on them and recording all sorts of data, even moving orphaned babies. She laughs and says “but that is beyond my skill, so I leave them be and enjoy my summer doing all the other things I love to do.” Then fall comes around again and the process starts all over.

Years and years ago, you would have been hard pressed to find bluebirds in the area due to changes of the landscape that farmers and industry have made. They have since returned and are thriving because of remarkable conservation of concerned citizens, like Val Edwards and her commitment to the Anaka’s Bluebird Trail. People permanently changed the natural habitat by moving onto the Prairies all those years ago which is why we will always have to protect them. Thank you Val, and Bob, for the gift of your time to maintain these bluebird houses.

Tips for Bluebird house design and placement: Floor dimensions min. 12.5cmX12.5cmX25cm deep (removable); entrance hole must be exactly 40mm in diameter; roof should overhang the entrance hole; add cross ventilation holes and drainage holes in case water does get in; perches are NOT used; if you are near a pasture, place the box on the outside of the pasture to limit damage done by animals; place boxes 1.2-2m (2m if near horses) above the ground facing a perching location but facing away from the prevailing winds; paired boxes can be 1.5-4.5m apart – if you are placing single boxes, they should be 90m apart.

**Good Resource:**

<https://www.audubon.org/sites/default/files/bluebird-nest-box.pdf>

**A Tribute to Frank Roy**

Stan Shadick and Lois Wooding  
Originally published in Saskatoon Nature Society Newsletter

Our dear friend, Frank Roy passed away on April 11, 2020. For 35 years, Frank taught over 4500 students at City Park and Walter Murray high schools in Saskatoon as well as at Meadow Lake, Gambia, and at the Canadian Military Base in Lahr, Germany. He specialized as an English teacher but also taught French, Social Studies and Outdoor Education programs. He loved teaching, earning nothing but appreciation and respect both in and outside the classroom. One of his students, acclaimed poet, author and Rhodes Scholar, Mark Abley, considered Frank to be “one of the most influential people in my life”. Frank received numerous awards including the Meewasin Conservation Award, the Joe Duffy award for excellence in the teaching of English, an Honourary degree from the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Frank Roy was a founding member and past president of the Saskatoon Nature Society and helped establish our Nature Notes columns in local newspapers.

**Frank Roy**



*Photo: Bill McKenzie*

He helped organize our first May bird counts and the Golden Eagles birding group, and frequently led trips to various city parks as well as Gardiner Dam and Luck Lake. “Taking a walk with Frank was like taking a master-class in birding, with small helpings of other aspects from life thrown in for good measure.

He was funny but thought provoking, imparting a gentle sense that you should always try your best to live up to your ability.”

Frank was also a past president and Fellow of Nature Saskatchewan. He was an active member of committees that advocated for the creation of Grasslands National Park and Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Park. He was a co-editor of both “Birds of Saskatchewan” and “Birds of the Saskatoon Area” and author of “Birds of the Elbow”. Frank was “a wonderful ambassador for those of us who are dedicated to protecting nature.

We will remember Frank for his hours of volunteer time. But the memory of his insatiable laugh will be the one that lasts longest.”

**Lynx or Bobcat: Saltcoats, June 13**



Photo : Brent Klause

**YFBTA Raffle Draw: Update**

A date for drawing the winners of the 2019 –2020 raffle has been tentatively chosen. YFBTA plans to coordinate the draw with a Saltcoats Laketown Players production that may yet happen. The tentative draw date is October 8, 2020

**Purple Finch**



Photo : YFBTA member Rob Wilson

**Letter to the editor**

I've been looking after the grands two days a week. We've used Talia's activities as posted online. They've been great. We've done squirt gun art and made bird cookies. We visited the baby owls along the Meewasin Trail. I sent Talia some photos. She asked if the children would like a particular activity. I suggested owls because Malcolm is crazy about owls and low and behold, she sent us an activity about owls. I give Talia a lot of credit. She's doing the best she can do in a bad situation.

YFBTA member Kathy Morrell

**Health Care for DMPP Forest**

YFBTA member Bob Wynes

The forest in Duck Mountain Provincial Park (DMPP) has become very old. Forest fires, the natural forest renewal process, have essentially been removed from this landscape over the past century.

Every old Duck Mountain forest is currently a “boom” situation for Pileated Woodpecker habitat, with abundant, large aspen trees with extensive heart rot suitable for nesting cavities, and advanced age and White Spruce providing abundant food. However, as these forests die and fall down, the future is likely headed for a “bust” in terms of Piliated Woodpecker populations.

Aspen will not regenerate without larger scale disturbances and we will not have young forest regenerating that will eventually age and provide future habitat. The best analogy is to consider a human population that has only 70, 80 and 90 year old people. Without younger age demographics, the future would be bleak.

Saskatchewan Parks, Culture and Sport are being very proactive in the management of forests in DMPP. Provincial staff are working with forest companies to renew areas of forest in the north end of the park through logging. The young forests that are regenerating, following logging, will provide a much healthier diversity of forest ages in the park landscape (and will provide habitat for Pileated Woodpeckers and many other species in future decades).



## Young Writers' Corner

### Owls

Malcolm Sinclair (assisted by Grandma)

My name is Malcolm Sinclair. I am six years old. I go to Silverwood Heights School in Saskatoon. I like owls because they are amazing creatures.

They can fly without making any sound. They usually nest in trees. Owls look like brown lumps with big yellow eyes and a yellow beak. They have claws on their feet. Their claws are called talons. They use their talons to catch small animals.

My grandma, my sister, Sarah, and I saw two little owls in a big spruce tree along the Meewasin Trail. At first, we thought they were Short-eared Owls. Now we think they're Long-eared Owls.

They were white to start with because they were just babies. They didn't have their feathers yet. When they became adults, they had brown feathers. These little owls flew away because they learned to fly.

The baby owls were incredible. Everybody in the neighbourhood stopped to look at them. They were famous.

I learned more about owls from Talia Fawcett, She's the student for the YFBTA. She put some videos and craft ideas about owls online for me. They were great. Sarah and I also made squirt gun art and bird cookies. We got those ideas from Talia, too.

Thank you, Talia.

### Long-eared Owl



Photo: YFBTA member Morley Maier

### Interesting Sightings

Michelle Easton photographed a Red-headed Woodpecker near her home (June, 2020).

"Just saw a Red-headed Woodpecker in our yard. I've never seen one of these before." Mike Farquharson ( May, 2020 Saltcoats).

Blair Mitchell provided a screen shot of two of ten Turkeys spotted north of Preeceville. It is believed that someone has introduced them to the area. (Spotted in April). *Taken from an email provided by the Kelsey Ecological Society*.

### Received by the Editor

"We have a lot of mockingbirds (Cathy lives in Texas). Apparently they change their songs with the arrival (or anticipated arrival) of other birds. Right now they are singing like Robins, but the Robins have not yet returned. They are also singing like Cardinals and Blue Jays, both of which have arrived for winter." YFBTA member, Cathy Brown

### Encounter

YFBTA member Isabelle Easton

On a daily run I saw something unusual. Farther up on the road I spotted something, I assumed it was some sort of bird or gopher, nothing I'm not used to. I just kept running and when I looked back at the spot, it had disappeared. But then to my surprise a coyote popped out of the long grass about 30 feet in front of me! At first I was a bit shocked because it was out in broad daylight, but soon I remembered most animals are almost always more afraid of you then you should be of them. Also I remembered and hoped that my noisy bear scaring tactics (that is learned from my B.C. cousins) would work on this adult coyote.

I talked loudly and turned my running music up really loud. I walked backwards away from it, watching to see if it was following me, It did! I gave my mom a call and she came to pick me up. On her way to get me she was honking the horn to try to get the coyote to move further away and it did but only slightly. I thought this was so strange and wondered if babies were near. When I was in the car mom told me about three pups that were sunbathing in the gravel road right where my unusual encounter had happened! Maybe I should wear bear bells next time.

## Van Brien Sanctuary

Brian Irving

Nature Saskatchewan held its 2019 Annual fall Meet at Green Water Lake Provincial Park on the weekend of September 14-16. The Saturday afternoon tour was a bus trip to the Van Brien Sanctuary south west of Kelvington. It is one of several properties owned by Nature Saskatchewan.

The land had been part of the William Harrison family farm which had its beginnings as a homestead in 1906. Sylvia Harrison was the fourth child born on the homestead and was raised in a log house that would be occupied for sixty years. She was a meticulous student attending a one room country school and later completing high school in Wadena. After attending Business College she had various jobs before landing a position as a secretary at Regina General Hospital. There she met Connie Pratt who introduced her to the Saskatchewan and Regina Natural History Societies. They travelled around the province attending spring meets and other excursions. She served on the SNHS board and various committees. Mentors to Sylvia were well known naturalists such as George Ledingham, Stuart and Mary Houston, Margret Belcher, Jim Jowsey, Manley Callin and Robert Nero.

As she travelled around she became aware of the need to preserve some habitat as more and more land was being cultivated. Of course she noticed the trend on her family farm as well. Prior to her father's death in 1963, she approached him "asking if she could have the forty acre parcel of land on the south side of Meadow Bank Lake with the intent of seeing it preserved for the long term.

Her dad was happy to oblige.

In 1967 Sylvia married Anton Van Brien at the log house where she grew up. Later the couple retired to a nearby community and continued to enjoy the natural surroundings where she grew up. Sylvia died in June of 1992 and the forty acre parcel was transferred to Nature Saskatchewan on March 1, 1993.

The property is part of a larger riparian and marshy area as well as aspen and balsam poplar woodland, fence lines and adjacent cropland. The diversity has encouraged over 160 species of birds to occur in the area. White-tailed Deer, Mule Deer, moose and elk are known to raise their young on or nearby. An amateur survey of plants revealed nineteen species of trees and shrubs. Additionally over 140 species of flowering plants occur naturally.

A portion of the sanctuary was cultivated farmland that has recently been seeded to forage. Wildlife will utilize the forage. It is anticipated that aspen and Balsam Poplar will quickly encroach on to the field thus adding to the wooded area. Hopefully native forbs will do the same. Yes, there will be non-native species as well, however this is to be expected when a parcel is surrounded by farmland. We recognize that fragmentation of habitat in farmland makes it difficult for native species to persist.

The Van Brien property is an example that is making a difference.

### Editor's note

Each of the properties owned by Nature Saskatchewan is monitored by volunteer stewards who regularly provide reports.

Brian is the current steward of the Van Brien property.

Thank you, Brian, for providing this information.

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