

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



Is YFBTA for You?

At times throughout 2021 and 2022 you may, like me, have discovered malaise, anxiety and some depression. I believe that we are facing economic and environmental crises. As a result I have been researching and contemplating strategies to ameliorate some of these “feelings” and perceptions. I believe that the appropriate response to crisis is action.

Because of personal strong interests I focus upon Nature. I am now aware that physical and psychological benefits can be found in engagement with Nature. Some of these benefits can be attained simply by becoming aware. A practice referred to as mindfulness encourages one to pay close attention to each of our senses “in the moment”. Throughout my reading I encounter advice “to be kind and to be caring”. Kindness and caring may be extended to Nature in addition to humans. “Good” feelings and a healthy sense of positivity are my personal benefits.

With regard to environmental crisis; advocacy, support and engagement can be helpful actions. Some of my acquaintances share a desire to “do something” to enhance Nature. YFBTA is emerging from two years of pandemic hiatus.

Our association provides opportunities for advocacy, for “support” of Nature and, if a member chooses, action.

Examples: Partnering with a regional park, with town representatives and with a local beautification committee resulted in the planting of trees. A partnership with a local school resulted in an educational trip into the out-of-doors for students (With the recent formation of an Arbour Day Committee the tree planting is likely to continue). YFBTA remains committed to connecting youth with Nature in 2023.

Merlin

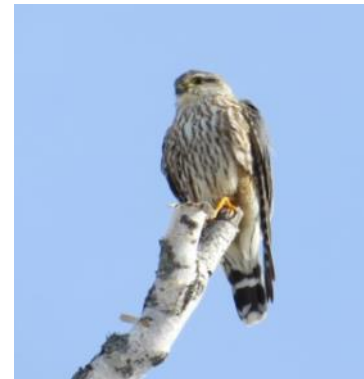


Photo: YFBTA member Bob Wynes

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YFBTA partnered with the Anaka Blue Bird Trail folks. 103 Blue Bird nesting boxes have been readied for March 2023 inspections by male Blue Birds. Monitoring is intended for the coming year.

Citizen Science activities provide valuable data to be submitted to like-minded organizations. The Duck Mountain Loon Initiative will continue. A Christmas Bird Count is intended for Saltcoats. Some members share Nature sightings, anecdotes and photographs with various social media groups.

Some YFBTA members contributed data to a Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas (Interested in average percentage change in populations of groups of birds from 1970 to 2016? Check out an excellent report from Jim Lee, president of the Saskatoon Nature Society. It is on our YFBTA website www.YFBTA.ca). Other members have reported Great Horned Owl sightings to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum <https://royalsaskmuseum.ca/research/biology/ryan-fisher>

Since you likely already belong to YFBTA (newsletters are a benefit of membership), it is my request that you share this editorial. I believe there are many folks who, wanting to support Nature, are searching for ways to be part of solutions.

Bullock's Oriole YFBTA member, Laurie Murray

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) is a small New World blackbird. This species and the Baltimore Oriole were once considered to be a single species—the Northern Oriole. This bird is named after William Bullock, an English amateur naturalist .

Bullock's Orioles are sexually dimorphic, with males being more brightly coloured than females. Bullock's Orioles, measure 6.7 – 7.5 inches in length. They weigh 1.0 -1.5 ounces. Their wingspans are 12.2 inches.

Adult males are characterized by strongly contrasting orange and black plumage , a black throat patch and a white wing bar. Although the tail is mostly black, the outermost three or four rectrices (flight feathers) are tipped orange, forming a T shape. Adult females, by contrast, have a grey – brown upperpart. They are a duller yellow on the breast and underparts and have an olive crown. In all cases , females lack the black eye – line presented in adult males.

Bullock's orioles are seasonally monogamous. The breeding season typically lasts from May until July. Mated pairs of Bullock's orioles cooperate to weave deep, pendent baskets in which the female deposits between three and six eggs. A nest is woven of plant fibers, primarily bark and fine grass, though animal hair is also commonly used.

The project can take up to 15 days to complete. Both males and females work to raise young. They also work together to defend their nests from predators and parasites. Both males and females sing. While males have a sweeter voice, females tend to be more prolific singers.

Like other members of the Icteridae, Bullock's Orioles prefer habitat edges, they especially prefer riparian corridors, open deciduous woodland and scrub forest.



Photo provided by YFBTA member, Laurie Murray

These birds mainly feed on caterpillars and other arthropods. They also pluck insects from spiderwebs or from the air. They have been known to come to a dish filled with grape and other jellies and they sometimes eat oranges and grapes.

This species can be found as far north as British Columbia. but they have been heard in Saskatchewan also. They mainly live in United States.

I identified this bird in our region with a "bird call" app. I was disappointed because I was unable to see or photograph it.

"Birds of Saskatchewan" pp. 640-641 refers to a previous Saltcoats sighting in 1950. It is interesting to note plumage variations.

There was mention at a 2022 YFBTA meeting of other possible, but not confirmed sightings.

Nuthatch Nesting Notes

Jean Knoll

Our backyard is a bird watcher's haven. Both the White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatches are regular visitors to our winter feeders, and their distinct "pip pip pip" noises as they move along the trunks of the trees is a common sound.

My husband's hobby of constructing bird houses led to my request for a house specifically to interest nuthatches. The first few houses were quickly claimed by house sparrows. However, this spring - after hanging a slightly altered design on our 60' high Siberian Pear tree - I noted the smaller Red Breasted pair of nuthatches going in and out of that house.



Photo: YFBTA member Rob Wilson

I was thrilled and was so hoping to observe this nesting pair parent baby birds. After a few days of watching carefully, I also noted those same house sparrows trying to get into the small opening. The male nuthatch made some valiant attempts to discourage the much bigger sparrow from this pursuit, all while the female was often inside the house. Some romantic bird moments involved the male bringing nuts and chipped sunflower seeds, and feeding his mate - all while staying on guard against these too snoopy and persistent sparrows.

While careful not to invade the almost tame and friendly nuthatch's space, if anyone in the back alley saw a middle aged woman speaking harshly to the trees, or getting up from her chair while looking skyward, let's just hope they chalked it up to the eccentric behaviors of a retired English teacher. Sparrow patrol - not something I ever envisioned myself doing, but there I was.

I was saddened to see that the nut hatches appeared to have deserted the house. The sparrows were still somewhat curious about the opening, and I hope the massive pine trees in the neighbour's yard will continue to provide these little red-breasted birds with a more suitable home. Since these friendly little birds have been in our yard every year for the past 23, I hope they can persevere. My dismay was temporary only, as minutes later I also observed a pair of warblers, a group of gold finches, a pair of wrens, and two hummingbirds. The Siberian Pear was in full blossom, the pink crab apple would flower within days. I am hopeful my feathered friends will continue to flit around from the pine tree to the pear tree while I enjoy our shared space.

Will You Renew?

YFBTA is determined to be active in 2023 continuing with previous initiatives and intending to develop some new projects. YFBTA will focus on some social activities in addition to its citizen science activities.

Our aim is to encourage awareness of Nature. YFBTA continuously searches for ways to connect youth with Nature.

Will you consider supporting YFBTA with a membership renewal and/or by "gifting" a 2022 membership?

Geococcyx californianus (Roadrunner)



Photo: YFBTA (Texan) member Susan Stevenson

The Best Day to Plant a Tree

YFBTA member Walter Farquharson

A happy, determined and eager group of 18 YFBTA members and friends gathered at Saltcoats Regional Park on May 27, Arbor Day 2022. As in 2021 their intent was to plant a Colorado Spruce and Siberian Larch provided by YFBTA chairperson, Martin Phillips. A hands-on, spade-wielding, Minister of the Environment, the Honourable Warren Kaeding took his turn in digging the holes, planting the trees, and firming them into place. In his remarks to the group, Minister Kaeding affirmed the response to the query "What is the best time to plant a tree?" quoting the traditional response, "Twenty years ago-and second best is "Today!"

From the beginning of YFBTA's call on the provincial government to reactivate the practice of proclaiming an annual observance of Arbor Day and promoting it as a call to appreciation and action within the province, Minister Kaeding offered support and encouragement to the cause. Then Minister of Environment, Dustin Duncan, proclaimed Arbor Week and Arbor Day 2021. The goal is first to involve as many individuals, groups such as schools, community organizations such as YFBTA, municipalities, and ad hoc collections of people to become more aware of the reality that planting trees is essential to our personal and environmental health and well-being.

Awareness leads to action such as planting trees, saving trees, habitat protection. Such action resulted in the tree plantation built over many years by Roger Kaeding. The farmyard itself was well treed and Phyllis' garden included a number of fruit trees. (Phyllis' parents Walter and Olive Maben had maintained a productive orchard on their farm south of Saltcoats.)

Minister Kaeding spoke of the global need for action and commented on the many programs of reforestation in many European countries that were beginning to reverse the tide of centuries of deforestation. He commended the federal governments plan for the planting of two billion trees in ten years.

The Government of Canada website launching this program affirms the following:

"Forests and trees sustain life on Earth. Beyond the jobs that our sustainably managed forests provide, people living in Canada rely on forests for a wealth of benefits. Healthy forest ecosystems sustain thousands of living organisms, supply us with food, provide shelter and shade on a sunny day, clean the air we breathe and the water we drink, and hold spiritual significance for many, particularly within indigenous cultures."

Governance groups provide action and support



Photo: YFBTA president Martin Phillips

The gathered group remembered some of the local tree planters of decades past and talked of school groups that over the years have participated in tree planting in the Regional Park, at the cemetery and in the area of Saltcoats known as the K Block. Applause greeted mention of the planting of 100 spruce to mark Saltcoats' resident, Val Trowell's 100 years of living. The contributions of pioneer horticulturalists on the prairies and of the Horticultural Department of the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon were cited, including Adolf Heyer, Cecil Patterson, A. J. Porter, Frank Skinner. Plant breeding and selection have resulted in a host of new ornamental and fruit-bearing trees, a growing number of options for local gardens and parks as well as new industries. Prior to 1940 few varieties of fruit-bearing trees, even such as apples and plums, were available that were sufficiently hardy to survive our prairie climate or that produced truly edible, enjoyable fruit.

YFBTA thanks City of Yorkton Community Grant

YFBTA member and Councillor for the Town of Saltcoats, Shirley Perarson, spoke of the co-operation between the Town and the Regional Park Board and of the good work done by the Saltcoats Community Beautification Committee. YFBTA members in turn commended Town Council and staff for their work and readiness to help with such efforts as tree planting. The group shifted venue to High Street where a YFBTA purchased native White Birch was planted and a second birch (provided by Scottish relatives celebrating the life of Joan Wilson) was dedicated. The day concluded with an event dubbed "Enjoy a Cuppa Tree" that involved birding, conversations, and food on the Knudsen patio.

It is time now to work towards Arbor Week and Arbor Day 2023. This is a call to every reader of this newsletter to start making plans to observe Arbor Day/Arbor Week 2023.

Who might be involved with you? What group do you belong to that could be encouraged to plan some planting? Can some of your planting be truly inter-generational?

The 16th century German theologian Martin Luther was often concerned that the times he lived in were so much in turmoil that perhaps he was living in "the last days". One day a student asked him, "Brother Martin, if you were sure that tomorrow would bring the Day of Judgment, what would you do today?" Luther hesitated, then responded, "I should plant my young apple trees!"

Art Meets Nature YFBTA member Carol Bolt

It all started last September when Paula, Nancy and Carol took a Needle-Felting workshop at the Godfrey Dean Art Gallery in Yorkton. The new Executive Director of the gallery was there. We started chatting with him. He found out we were YFBTA members and wanted to know all about it. We explained it to him and he said he would like to partner with the YFBTA. He had a couple of nature-themed exhibitions coming up. Would we like to do a nature walk in conjunction with one or both? So, sensing an opportunity we said sure.

Jeff Meldrum, a multimedia artist who is also a naturalist had a bear-themed exhibition at the GDAG which was to close on May 28th. Jeff Morton, the GDAG Executive Director asked us to do a walk that day. The closing reception would follow.

So, Paula and Carol went out and walked the Ravine Ecological Preserve Trail just to check it out. It was in good shape (Well, having said that, the bridge across the lagoon was a bit dodgy. It's plastic, slippery, wobbles and floats. Not for the faint of heart).

Red-necked Grebe



Photo: YFBTA member Rob Wilson

At 12 noon, 18 people assembled at the Ecological Preserve's parking lot. Paula and Morley led the tour. Flowers weren't really out yet but there were some Wood Violets, Bedstraw and Baneberry among others. Some birds spotted were Soras and Red-necked Grebes. The chokecherries and saskatoons were flowering. Also identified were White Poplars, and Red Osier Dogwood. There was a lot more flora and fauna spotted. So this just goes to show that there is all sorts of interesting stuff to see on your doorstep. All you have to do is look. We returned to the GDAG for Jeff Meldrum's presentation. It was good combination of art and nature.

Unusual Sighting Creates Excitement

YFBTA member Paula Maier

On Apr. 28 we received a delightful visitor to our yard. He showed up at suppertime. It took us a little searching to figure out who he was but Sibley's Bird Guide doesn't lie. We had a Hooded Warbler in our yard!

He flitted about in the shrubbery on the sunny side of the house acting as warblers do. We were so excited that I forgot to take a photo. Morley, camera in hand, ran across the wet spring lawn in his socks and captured an image.



The Hooded Warbler returned the next evening at the same time. This bird, a rare visitor from the eastern U.S., has only been observed here a few times. We are told this is only the 8th recorded sighting in our province*.

I posted a photo on Sask. Birders Facebook site and it caused quite a stir. We received many comments and also inquiries from those who keep track of unusual bird sightings. Annie McLeod, editor of the Blue Jay, contacted us. We gave information to Phillip Taylor who is keeping track of rare sightings since Birds of Saskatchewan was published. We sent information to Rudolph Koes of the American Bird Assoc. He is the editor of the Birds of North America regional reports.

This was an enjoyable experience as we had an opportunity to peek into the very interesting world of unpredictable bird behaviour.

Diversity in Saskatchewan: a 2001 report

The Saskatchewan Department of Environment: 201-2002 annual report included an accounting of the flora and fauna believed to inhabit the province:

544 species of animals (430 birds, 87 mammals, 08 amphibians and 19 reptiles)

2269 species of vascular plants

283 species of nonvascular plants

an estimated 20 000 species of insects (Saskatchewan Environment 2002)

Most people in the province were only aware of those species they hunted, logged, grew as crops, admired in their gardens or combatted as weeds. It was hard for many people to understand what biological diversity actually meant.

Taken from *Conserving the Legacy Wildlife Conservation in Saskatchewan 1905-2005* by Wayne Pepper; p.323 (Published by Nature Saskatchewan; Special Publication No. 40 ISBN 9780921104360 (soft cover)).

Chrysemys picta bellii Western Painted Turtle



Photo: YFBTA member Wayne Clark

"Birds Count" in Bird Counts

Shorebirds, aerial insectivores and grasslands birds are in a stark, rapid decline. On our website (yfbta.com) check out a message from the president of the Saskatoon Nature Society, Jim Lee.

Young Writers' Corner

My Favourite Plant was the Hoary Puccoon YFBTA member Zaiden Evans

Editors' note: Taken from "The Gazette",
newsletter of Saltcoats School

On June 8th the grade 6 class of Saltcoats School participated in a nature day organized by the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association. The day took place on the property of Kenn Wood and Nancy Bird. We did many things and learned many things from the moment we got there to the moment we left. We learned about many different animals like moose and gophers. We also learned about some plants like the Hoary Puccoon flower. Mr. Wood was very enthusiastic to teach us about beavers, which are very interesting. It was a hot and humid day with lots of mosquitoes and Wood Ticks, but most of us persevered.

None of the grade sixes were prepared for the onslaught of information we would receive once off the bus. A large part of this information was about mammals, birds, and a dab of amphibians.

The first thing we would learn about was the Purple Martin. Related to a swallow, these birds nest in big communities. To feed they will fly around with their wide beaks open to catch flying bugs like mosquitoes and dragonflies.

Another swallow is the Bank Swallow. The Bank Swallows will dig holes in sandy outcrops. Then they nest in these holes. This would offer so much protection.

A Chickadee is very easy to identify. They will make a "chika dee dee dee" sound, but sometimes they will say "cheeseburger".

Many bird watchers attract birds with bird feeders. These feeders can include a handful of foods. They may have oranges, sunflower seeds, nuts, Canola fat, and more. The food is on a platform of wood attached to the ground by a pole. The food and birds are in danger of squirrels, raccoons, and cats. To fix this, this tin is fixed to the pole slanted downwards. This makes it impossible to climb up and protects the feed.

During our tractor ride we ventured into the long grass to find a duck nest. The mother duck exploded as we neared the nest. The nest was hidden in long grass and we would never have known about it if Mr. Wood had not shown us. In total there were eleven small spotted eggs. There was no protection for the eggs other than its placement in the long grass.

As we moved on the tractor ride we saw moose droppings and trees without bark. Moose will scrape the bark to shed their antlers.

Richardson's Ground Squirrels



Photo: YFBTA member Morley Maier

On the final stretch, we moved to a creek bank. There we spotted and held a Boreal Tree Frog. It was small and brownish green.

The last animal we would see would haunt the class till we got home. It is a small brown insect called the Wood Tick. They followed us around the whole time. The class average had to be at least five. For the eleven people in the class that would make 55 Wood Ticks.

Plants were a big part of the trip too. We saw many things like Pussy Toes. They are very soft and fuzzy. They were gray and small.

My favourite plant was the Hoary Puccoon.

Editor's note: Find and enjoy, on our YFBTA website (www.yfbta.com) a continuation of Zaiden's impressive description of his class excursion.

A Dedicated Nesting Mom



Photo: YFBTA member Lois Farquhar

Received by the editor:

Hi Rob - It's fall migration time in Texas and we're seeing lots of Canadian birds passing through.

Within the last week I have seen Wrecking (House) Wrens, Loggerhead Shrikes, and this morning I thought I could hear Sandhill Cranes. I looked up to see hundreds of them high in the sky headed due South.

Texas YFBTA member, Bob Brown

An Animal I Saw Randy Torrie

The location was 4 miles north of Saltcoats on the 2020 Range Road near the Kirkham lake and beside the Doman bush. The animal was initially on the road in front of my truck.

At first I thought it was a mink but was too big. Perhaps it was a fisher?

When I got stopped, the animal, now in the ditch, looked back towards the truck and then headed into the trees.

It was dark brown. It had a long tapered tail. Under its chin it had white colouration. I estimate it was approximately 3 1/2 feet in length.

I checked our wildlife book and a River Otter was the closest resemblance that I could find.

I didn't get a picture as it all happened too fast. Hopefully it will find its way home.

What's Flying Around: Newsletter Group Volunteers

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