

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

# What's flying around....



## Symphonies and Synergies

Editorial: Rob Wilson

On behalf of Nature, imagine an action or an intention. For a start, you might consider a space where biodiversity might be sustained. You might consider organisms with which you decide that you may co-exist. If you did - hold that thought or those thoughts.

You may have initiated an action. Take **note** of your thoughts. You may, in a musical sense, be a **soloist**. Your thoughts are worth saving and may be worth sharing.

**Musing** and sharing may create a duo (or **duet**) that, coupled with a determination to be dynamic, may cause you to choose to act. Such an **ensemble**, if formed, is also a primer for initiative/s..

**Melody** is created when notes are arranged in relation to each other in such a manner as to be a recognizable entity. In an analogous fashion, various groupings of action-oriented individuals may be ready to organize to **perform** or implement.

At this point it is manifest that something is going to happen.

If ideas and plans are “in the winds”, something akin to what, in musical parlance, is referred to as **harmonic structure** (pleasing relationship) is created. I mention harmonic structure because that is what underpins an **orchestra** (I refer to and explain below). Groups working **symphonically** create **harmonic structure** and groups working environmentally create pleasing relationships as they orient toward shared goals.

## Orange-crowned (*Vermivora celata*) warbler



Photo: YFBTA member Morley Maier

In this manner YFBTA works in a way that is analogous to the working of an **orchestra**. YFBTA knows how we can work together. **Examples** are The Loon Initiative Committee reports (submitted annually to Birds Canada), the Road Allowance Initiatives, the Blule Bird Nesting Boxes project and the creation and publication of our newsletters.. Orchestras perform symphonies. Individuals and groups can “build” actions to support Nature. I invite you and encourage you to continue **making music** for Nature as we go forward.

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**Joyce Anaka, My Friend**

Submitted by Msrion Ockochinski

Joyce Anaka was born at Gunn’s Beach, located at a lake that has been known by many names, (notably Devil’s Lake) to early lake goers, and Good Lake, officially. When she was eighteen, she joined the CWAC and trained at Vermillion, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon before being posted to Toronto. She worked briefly in Calgary and then returned to Gunn’s Beach to take over from her father who died in 1947. From then on, with the help of her mother, Margaret Gunn, Joyce was a combination postmistress, storekeeper, resort owner and, for a few years, farmer with sheep, horses, and a couple of milk cows.

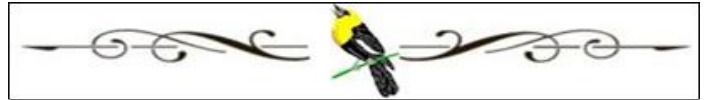
After retirement she turned her hand to writing family and local histories. She was always interested in Nature and local history, as was her husband, Bill. She and Bill enjoyed many trips with the SHFS through the years. (Bill died in 2017).

Joyce has been interviewed several times for Remembrance Day programs, for historical programs, and for information about Good Spirit Lake and the park (Gunn’s Beach and beyond). She was also interviewed for the publication, *Good Spirit Lake: a Century of Change*.

When a call came out to record Saskatchewan cemeteries, Bill and Joyce signed up. They spent countless hours travelling the roads and trails of the RM of Good Lake recording forgotten small burial sites by asking questions and following directions (sometimes some of these were in the middle of a field). There may have been only a single marker or a small family plot. The records can be found on the RM of Good Lake web page.

Joyce’s record keeping ability was a genetic trait. She showed me copies of papers written by her ancestor, Peter Fidler, who was a surveyor and Factor with the Hudson Bay Company. *In Peter Fidler: Canada’s Forgotten Surveyor, 1769-1822* by J.G. MacGrogan it showed how Peter had recorded the births of all of his 9 children by name, date, time and phase of the moon. Peter kept meticulous records. Joyce’s parents also kept meticulous records as well. This trait is one of the reasons she didn’t get the Shingles vaccine as her parents had records of every illness in her last three years. Joyce being their only child—and

*no where had they listed Chickenpox so she felt that she was immune. It turned out that Chickenpox was a missed entry or she had a mild case. Shingles hit her hard in her last three years.*



**One-in-a-Million**

Yfbta member Bob Brown

I was in my backyard in Bryan-College Station, Texas when I saw a flash of orange in my hedges. My first thought was that it was an oriole. When it hopped out of the shrub it was clearly the shape of a cardinal. It was more yellow than orange. One of my neighbours suggested that it might be a Desert Cardinal (*Pyrrhuloxia*) that had been blown out of its Western habitat by a recent storm. The colouring was wrong. I did a bit of research and found out that there is a very rare genetic mutation that can turn a cardinal from red to yellow. One site suggested that it’s about a one-in-a-million mutation.



Photo: YFBTA member Bob Brown

**Editor’s note: YFBTA Loon Initiatives Report**

The 2024 report (provided annually to Birds Canada) has been sent to members.

If you missed it, you can find it on the YFBTA website (yfbta.com).

## Embracing Nature in Urban Areas

Submitted by Amy Wahl

### Embracing Nature in Urban Areas

In the heart of Saskatoon's urban landscape, the Meewasin Valley, with its unique blend of city life and natural beauty, serves as a perfect canvas for the flourishing grasslands, wetlands, urban forests and other ecosystems that contribute to the well-being of both residents and the environment.

This green haven serves as a refuge, providing a host of benefits that extend beyond mere aesthetics.

**1. Biodiversity Conservation:** The Meewasin Valley acts as biodiversity hotspots, offering a refuge for various plant and animal species. The diverse range of flora and fauna not only contributes to the ecological balance but also enhances the overall biodiversity of the region.

**2. Air Quality Improvement:** The trees in urban forests are nature's air purifiers, absorbing pollutants and releasing oxygen. The urban forest plays a pivotal role in improving air quality and mitigating the effects of urban pollution.

**3. Community Well-being:** Access to green spaces has been linked to improved mental health and overall well-being. Areas provide residents with spaces for relaxation, recreation, and connection with nature, fostering a sense of community and promoting a healthier lifestyle.

**4. Climate Resilience:** As cities face the challenges of climate change, natural areas act as crucial components in building climate resilience. Urban forests contribute to temperature regulation, reduce urban heat island effect, and provide shade, making the city more adaptable to changing climatic conditions. Grasslands and wetlands act as carbon sinks, absorbing more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere through photosynthesis, helping to purifying the air we breathe.

**5. Co-existing with Beavers:** Beavers are a keystone species that create habitat for a plethora of other species. Meewasin works with the City of Saskatoon and University of Saskatchewan researchers to develop best practices for how to live alongside the urban beaver populations in Saskatoon. Trees are wrapped with a wire mesh to deter beavers from cutting down significant trees in the riparian forest. We also have a series of citizen science projects that track the long-term successional changes to the riparian ecosystem with the help of beavers through public photo submissions in areas of increased beaver activity in the city.

Through strategic planning, community engagement, and sustainable practices, Meewasin ensures that the urban habitats remain an integral part of the city's identity..

**1. Native Planting Initiatives:** By reintroducing a variety of grass, flower, shrub, and tree species, we aim to enhance biodiversity and create resilient urban ecosystems that can withstand environmental challenges. Some of these species include: Blue Grama Grass, Green Needle Grass, Purple Prairie Clover, Three-flowered Avens, Red Osier Dogwood, Saskatoon, Chokecherry, Green Ash, Bur Oak, Silver Maple, American Elm, and Trembling Aspen, along with many others.

**2. Educational Programs:** Meewasin engages the community through educational programs that highlight the importance of biodiversity. Workshops, guided tours, citizen science, and interactive events provide residents with the knowledge and tools to contribute to the conservation of nature. More information at:

<https://meewasin.com/experiences/>

**3. Volunteer Programs:** Meewasin hosts regular volunteer events monthly to build community and help steward the resources in the Meewasin Valley. Sign up for our newsletter or head to our Volunteer Schedule to see an ongoing list of events in all seasons that contribute to the overall health of our river valley:

<https://meewasin.com/volunteerschedule/>

**4. Sustainable Urban Planning:** Meewasin collaborates with city planners and local authorities to integrate sustainable urban forestry practices into development plans. This includes improving green spaces, preserving existing trees, and implementing measures to protect the urban forest during construction and expansion projects

**5. Memorial Tree Program:** Meewasin provides an opportunity to sponsor or dedicate a tree in the Valley. This supports Meewasin's conservation work and honours important people and initiatives in the community. In the midst of Saskatoon's urban landscape, the Meewasin Valley stands as a testament to the harmonious coexistence of nature and human quality of life. Through thoughtful planning, community involvement, and a commitment to green practices, we can ensure that the urban ecosystems continue to thrive, providing benefits for generations to come



Photo: Meewasin Valley Authority

## Wasps

Kendra Parrish

A century ago, biologist J. B. S. Haldane quipped that God must have "an inordinate fondness for beetles." With 400,000 described species and about another million waiting for a name, beetles are usually cited as the most numerous order of animals. Mounting evidence suggests, however, that another order may actually reign supreme. The hymenoptera, which includes the ants, bees and wasps, have been underestimated because so many secretive, solitary parasitoid wasps do their deadly work unnoticed. Parasitoid wasps are species in which the mother uses a sharp tube called an ovipositor to lay her eggs inside a living host. The babies hatch and eat the victim from the inside out. A shocking pattern has emerged that whenever a species of beetle, or fly, or spider, or even plant is studied in great enough detail, the researchers usually discover a new parasitoid wasp specialized in using it as a host. As Entomologist Lynn Kimsey puts it, "You have to figure that for every species of beetle, there are at least one or two wasp parasites or parasitoids."



*Kimsey quote source: 'Beetles And Wasps Vie For Title of Most Diverse Critter', NPR Weekend Edition, Aug 1, 2020.*

I delight in finding parasitoid wasps in my own backyard. They are stunning, with slender bodies and surprising colours. The most impressive I've found is the *Megarhyssa atrata*, the black giant ichneumonid wasp. They have ovipositors up to fifteen centimeters long which they plunge into dead trees to inject their eggs in woodwasp larvae deep within.

For most of the parasitoid wasps observations I've posted on iNaturalist, though, I've not been able to get a species ID. The group is simply too understudied. The photo shows one of the unidentified beauties that I've found.

### YFBTA Newsletters in 2025

I have been putting together newsletters for nearly a decade. I find the task to be a labour of love.

In the spring of 2024 I experienced a health issue. I am working at recovering and I am feeling much improved these days.

I intend to work at publishing a 2025 Issue 1 newsletter. Working on this current issue I am finding this labour of love quite challenging.

I hope that YFBTA will find the resources to facilitate the continuation of newsletters throughout 2025. The ideal solution would be find a replacement editor. Currently YFBTA members provide me with submissions of articles, anecdotes, Nature "sightings" and photographs. Others assist with technical issues and with hard copy mailouts and digital distribution.

Currently, obtaining material for newsletter is the greatest problem. Please consider contacting me with suggested material for the next newsletter. You might also consider stepping into the editor's chair with me assisting in a transition to something new.

I hope to hear from some folks in this regard.

Rob Wilson (editor)

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)



## Red-bellied Woodpecker YFBTA member Don Weidl

Currently there are twelve species of woodpeckers that occur in Saskatchewan. Most people are familiar with the Hairy Woodpecker and the smaller Downy Woodpecker.

A less common species that seems to be occurring on a regular basis is the Red-bellied Woodpecker. Originally found in eastern North America, this species has been slowly expanding its range to the northwest into Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker is about the same size as the Hairy Woodpecker but looks very different. Unlike the spotted, black and white colour of the Hairy and Downy, Red-bellied Woodpeckers have a uniformly barred back, brown underparts, and a red nape. There is a faint wash of red on the belly which isn't always visible, but the red nape is always conspicuous.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers are opportunistic feeders and have been known to pluck fruit from trees, snag insects from foliage, and sally short distances for large flying insects. Their call note is a muffled and descending "cheer!" given singly, a few times, or in muffled series. At the time of printing in 2019, "Birds of Saskatchewan" reported 17 records of the Red-bellied Woodpecker from several communities. Some of these locations include Val Marie, Chaplin, Regina, Saskatoon Grenfell,



Photo: YfFBTA member Don Weidl



## How the *Blue Jay* Got Its Name YFBTA Member Carol Bolt

Isabel Priestly came to Canada as a WW1 war bride. She met "Bob" Priestly, a Canadian Soldier, and married him.

She was born in England. She received an extensive education in botany. She made good use of this knowledge when she came to Yorkton with Bob. He was a newspaper man. Mrs. Priestly worked for Ducks Unlimited.

Her observations were very valuable. In addition to documenting the recovery of plants following the drought of the 30s, she made lists of the birds she had seen.

A group of like-minded people gathered around her. She founded the Yorkton Natural History Society. People were interested in her bird sightings so she decided to publish a little booklet of her observations. It had a subscription list of 500 (the list included a library in England).

Mrs. Priestly was very active in the community. She was a driving force in several charitable organizations. Although she was a prominent citizen, she was modest and unassuming.

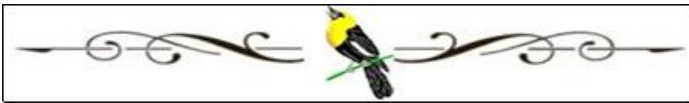
She had three children. When they were small Isabel would read stories about animals to them (probably from Thorton W. Burgess books. In these books animals talked). Each Burgess book in the series was dedicated to a different animal. One of these books was dedicated to a Blue Jay– it flew about the forest spreading the latest news. Since the booklet edited by Isabel spread the news about nature, she decided that Blue Jay would be an appropriate name and that is how the Blue Jay magazine got its name.

Isabel's last *Blue Jay*

Isabel Priestly arrived in Yorkton in 1935. She died in 1946. Her family had gathered for Easter. This was a reunion as the two older children had come home (from university) for the weekend. "Bob" who was now working in Regina was also there (He was waiting to get a house after which Isabel and the youngest son could join him).

Earlier in the week Isabel had complained of a terrible headache. Dr. Houston couldn't find the cause so Isabel just carried on with Easter preparations and with enjoying her family and the special meal.

She told Ruth (Beck) Smith that she would have the latest *Blue Jay* ready for the next day. Ruth typed the issue up. After dinner, the headache returned and Isabel went to bed. She died the next morning of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. She was 53.



**Of Geese and Ospreys**  
Thom Carnahan and Oney Pollock

In April 2022, as in every year, Oney and Thom began watching for the arrival of osprey at the Canora dam east of town. They usually come very close to April 16 as they have done exactly a few times. So just before that date we visited the site and found two adult geese and a few goslings occupying the nest; we don't know when they arrived. A few days later, the osprey arrived. There was unhappiness displayed and possibly some bad words exchanged.

**Osprey (Pandion haliaetus)**



Photo: Taken from internet

The osprey swooped very close to the nest a few times and flew directly over it, never landing or directly attacking the nest. Then they would station themselves in a nearby tree, watching and squawking. The geese would fly very close to the osprey when in a tree and while in flight. We viewed many of these close in-flight interactions, but not once did we see actual physical contact or fighting but many aggressive displays on both sides. There were broad wing flappings and dive bombings. We were there on most days.

It appeared to be a stalemated situation. The osprey would not win a battle with geese. Probably no injuries. These behaviors continued for two weeks when the family of geese left of their own accord. Then the osprey took over the nest and proceeded as normal, breeding successfully.

**Remembering Wally Karau**

Wally and Martha Karau were involved in YFBTA from its beginnings. We've appreciated their hard work, their good humour, their generosity in giving of time and energy—and of course Martha's wonderful quilts, a feature of several of our auctions. Both were strong advocates of the summer student program and both served on the committee working with a series of students. Wally often helped our students set up schedules involving Churchbridge, Esterhazy, Spy Hill and accompanied them to introduce and assist them. Karaus moved to Cochrane, Alberta. Wally died June 9 at age 86. A graveside service was held at Churchbridge September 14. Martha spoke of her and Wally's involvement with YFBTA, the friends made and the experiences shared— an important part of their time living in Churchbridge, Wally's home community to which they had retired.  
YFBTA member, Walter Farquharson

The problem with seeing only the economic value as Leopold, a famous naturalist, said is that "we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect"

Taken from *Protecting the Prairies* (page 137)

## Young Writers' Corner

### Why I Like Banding Bluebirds

Deklyn Zelionka

Submitted by YFBTA Member Gerri Knudsen

My favourite part of going to the bluebird banding on the weekend was how I got to hold the baby birds. The babies were very fluffy and cute and were so light and tiny to pick up. I have never gotten to hold a baby bird before so I was so happy to finally get my chance to hold one.



**Editor's note:** Deklyn is eight years old and in Grade Two.

### Anderson Lake Fall Bird Sightings

- Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)
- Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)
- Belted Kingfisher (*Contopus cooperi*)
- 2 Great egrets (*Ardea alba*)
- 18 swans (tundra or trumpeter)
- 6 Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

### Seen North-east of Saltcoats

- Red-headed Woodpecker family (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

## Feeding Deer in Town

Provided to the town by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment

Biological adaptations, such as a thick winter coat, fat reserves, a reduced metabolic rate and sedentary behaviour help deer survive severe winters. Deer mainly rely on their fat reserves and lose weight over the winter. Winter-related starvation can occur but trying to save deer through supplemental feeding can end up causing them more harm than good.

Deer are ruminants and they have stomachs with four parts. They rely on microbes to help digest the woody vegetation that makes up much of their winter diet. Carbohydrate-rich food sources such as hay and grains is not part of a deer's normal winter diet, which means that the deer cannot digest it. This may mean the deer starving to death, even with a full stomach.

Supplemental winter feeding can also result in other negative consequences. Animals may congregate at a place where food is provided, and may come from long distances away from winter cover, leading to attacks from predators and diseases.

Research has shown that deer usually fast for several weeks in the winter without suffering harmful effects.

Deer tend to migrate to wintering areas with thick overhead cover and natural winter food sources. Saskatchewan residents who wish to support deer populations are recommended to ensure that larger blocks of tree cover, such as aspen bluffs, remain intact. These areas provide the cover and sufficient food for deer to survive the winter.

### Consider a renewal?

YFBTA is determined to be active in 2025 continuing with previous initiatives. YFBTA will focus on some social activities in addition to its citizen science activities (Christmas Bird Count), celebration of arbour day/week,

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 2025 membership?

## Bluebird Banding

YFBTA member Regina Melnyk

A fine spring day on the prairie found approximately thirty folks accompanying Lorne Scott along the Bill and Joyce Anaka Bluebird Trail northeast of Springside. That day 35 Bluebird hatchlings were banded. A few nesting boxes contained hatchlings that were too old to band. The age problem arises because the Bluebirds must be immature and therefore not able to fly (if they flew they would not return to the nesting box and would be deprived of parental care).

In one box a Tree Swallow adult was able to be handled so that bird was also banded as well. This gave the group an opportunity to view, while observing the inside of the nesting box, differences between Tree Swallow and Bluebird nests.

This gathering of folks provided an opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of Bill and Joyce Anaka who, many years ago, created the trail.

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The recent passing of Joyce prompted the YFBTA to install two signs recognizing the Anakas at both ends of the part of the trail along the highway.

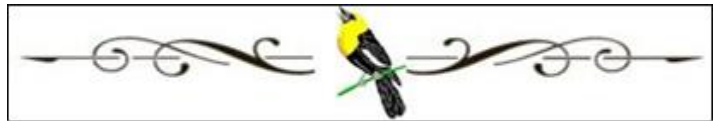
After Bill and Joyce were no longer able to do the work of cleaning and repairing (and replacing when necessary) Bluebird nesting boxes, the task was taken up by Val and Bob Edwards. Sadly, Val has passed away.

The clever design of the sign includes their contributions as well as a listing of those responsible for assisting Val and Bob with the work of monitoring and maintaining the trail.

As well as observing the banding process we had opportunities to do some ditch scouting. We found yellow Lady's Slippers, Mouse-eared Chick Weed, Golden Bean, Heart-leaved Alexander and Blue-eyed Grass.

In nearby pasture land rosy coloured masses of Three Flowered Avens were in full bloom One keen-eyed member discovered a ground nest which is believed to belong to a Brewer's Blackbird.

Thank you is extended to Lorne Scott for taking the time to travel some distance to share his expertise.



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

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**SASK LOTTERIES**

Printed by  
Admin Centre Printing Services

111-2001 Cornwall Street  
Regina, SK S4P 3X9  
306-780-9210

[adminprint@sasktel.net](mailto:adminprint@sasktel.net) [www.adminprint.ca](http://www.adminprint.ca)