



# What's Flying Around...

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.  
Yellowhead Nature Society

April 2026 - Issue 2



## The Beauty of Balance

*Editorial by Co-editor Valerie Brooks*

When contemplating what to write for this issue's editorial, I was inspired by the concept of "balance" in many of the submissions and thought about the importance of that word in various aspects of our day to day life:

- Work / Life balance
- A balanced diet
- A balanced approach
- Balancing risks
- Balanced equations
- Balanced compositions
- A balanced budget, etc., etc., etc.

If the definition of the word balance is explored we'd explain it as, "a state of equilibrium, where opposing forces, weights, or elements are equalized, resulting in stability or harmony." Seems rather nice when you think about it, and striving for balance in our life makes sense.

When I think of the word 'balance' I think of nature. Nature always seeks a balance. Left to its own devices, the natural world would operate in a more or less balanced way, creating a stable and sustainable environment for all that lives within it and depends on it.

Human activity on earth has thrown a wrench into Nature's plans of stability and harmony. Humans have manipulated, exploited and taken for granted the natural resources and physical geography of the planet to satiate their own desires, creating an imbalance in the natural order, all in the name of progress and growth.

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Photo credit: Valerie Brooks Echo lake, SK

So what are those of us who recognize this imbalance to do? Can we make a difference somehow? Can we do anything to salvage the mess that has been created that the next generations will have to deal with and try to clean up?

I believe it is possible, but only with a balanced, sustainable, collaborative approach. This association is a beautiful example of work being done quietly and consistently to restore balance in our natural world. When we talk of planting trees on Arbor Day, or protecting native plants in our ditches, or creating bird, bee, bug, butterfly friendly gardens, we're supporting the work that nature is trying hard to continue to do. Is there more to be done? Sure.

The trick is finding enough like-minded people willing to stand up for the Earth. Earth Day is fast approaching and is a good example of people coming together to bring awareness to the needs of the natural world. Looking at the natural world as one interconnected, balanced system is necessary and learning to live in balance with the natural world is mandatory. Exploring Indigenous ways of being and knowing may be useful on our journey to regain this balance.

We have many passion projects that we each care for and support, all important and meaningful, a plethora of quiet voices getting lost in the din of progress and growth. For the future of humanity, completely dependent on the natural world, I for one will do my best to level the playing field and give Mother Nature a fighting chance to do what she does best, sustain life on earth. Will you join me?

*YFBTA INC.*





## Twinky the Butterfly House Guest

By: Wanda Lavalee via Sherrell Fox

And so it began, on a sunny morning on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January in my warm prairie kitchen, the morning after the first new moon in 2026. I was startled when Twinky came into my view on a fern as I was watering my plants. A butterfly! How could this be?

A quick search on my phone confirmed that the butterfly was a swallowtail, not an uncommon sighting in summer in our yard, as we have this butterfly's favourite host plants: parsley and meadow rue.

Since Twinky has been discovered in our house, we have been feeding it sugar water soaked paper towel, oranges, strawberries and blue berries.

He sometimes flies about 3 or 4 feet in the air but mostly just in little flits here and there. If you look closely, you will see his tail wing is injured on one side. I think it may have happened on one of my cacti. He hasn't left the kitchen and one day flew under the fridge - thought that may be the end but he walked out and now spends his days laying on his food or looking out the window at the bird feeder with various squirrels, birds and rabbits to watch. He jumps around and walks between the plants and climbs the blind cord or the screen on the window.

On the practical side, a swallowtail caterpillar pupated somewhere safe on one of the several plants I brought in for the winter. A month is within its normal lifespan...so it has completed most of its natural life with us. I have read that across many cultures, butterflies symbolize: transformation and renewal; spiritual growth; messages from ancestors or loved ones; hope and positive change. In some Indigenous teachings I read that butterflies can be seen as gentle messengers-representing change, guidance or a spirit visiting. The fact that it has stayed almost a month feels meaningful, as it wasn't just passing through.



Photo credit: Twinky the Swallowtail - Wanda Lavalee

### Postscript:

Twinky's hosts, Wanda and Denis Lavalee of Winnipeg, reported that Twinky completed his life cycle March 11<sup>th</sup>. They enjoyed the irony that Twinky "always sat in the window watching the birds at the feeder...lol."



Photo credit: Twinky on Windowsill - Wanda Lavalee



Photo credit: Twinky the Swallowtail-Wanda Lavalee





## Last Mountain Lake Stewardship Group

A Review of the SK Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy

As we welcome in 2026, we would like to share with you our commitment to protect wetlands while protecting the water quality of the Qu'Appelle River system.

With renewed energy and commitment, we plan to continue our Awareness Program by sharing our monthly newsletters with you, the public, over the next few months, as we explore how the new **Saskatchewan Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy** will affect our communities at the grassroots level. This new policy does not protect wetlands. Our focus will be on the negative impacts of this water policy—particularly **what it truly means to lose our wetlands**.

Wetlands play a critical role in:

- protecting downstream communities from flooding,
- safeguarding water quality for drinking water, and
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

This month's newsletter focuses on the first of these essential benefits - **Flood Protection**.

A common misconception is that wetlands only exist in the rural prairie landscape and therefore wetland drainage has no effect to urban dwellers. However, as urban development expands, wetlands disappear and their capacity to hold water also disappears. So it's even more crucial that any remaining wetlands that surround our cities remain intact as a protection from flood waters. Sadly, wetlands around the City of Regina are being destroyed by drainage. Flood waters that would normally be held back by wetlands, are being channeled downstream into city properties.

On September 15, 2025, a significant rain event caused the Wascana Creek to rise 1.03 meters in just one hour, resulting in flooded basements and properties within the City of Regina. Following this event, the City of Regina requested financial assistance from the Provincial Government to help cover the costs of flood damage to homes. This is a cost to taxpayers.

By stepping back and examining how and where our water moves across the landscape, we ask the question: "Does the Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy make economic and environmental sense for downstream communities?"

We invite you to explore this question with us and/or your MLA, as we continue the conversation about water, wetlands, and community resilience within the Qu'Appelle River system.

## White-tailed Deer on the Farm

By: Kenn Wood



We moved to our farm (five miles west of Ebenezer) in 1996. There have always been white-tail deer in the area. The mix of poplar forest and grasslands provides an ideal habitat for them. However, during the twentieth decade, we have seen an explosion in their numbers.

I began feeding them (rolled oats and baled hay) and for a decade we fostered over one hundred whitetails in our yard! Things were not that easy for them in spite of the extra groceries.

You could identify the poorly doing ones - emaciated despite the supplements and often lame. A few days later the coyotes would devour them, and this often happened in the yard! However, one rarely saw this as hunting usually happens at night, and over the next days, the carcass would be carved up and hauled off the yard.

This went on for more than a decade then the deer numbers began to decline. I have continued to supplement their diets, and a round bale lasts the winter.

I am excited to announce that the tables have turned around! This winter we are hosting only about twenty whitetails, it seems a balance has returned.

## White-Tailed Deer with Moose on Anderson Lake





## Where the Geese Meet: Flyways, Habitats and Hybridization in North American Geese

By: Allison Henderson Hunter

Any day now, you might find yourself standing outside, your ears stretching to make sense of a distant honking carried on the cold air. For a moment, you pause – then it lands. Geese!

And something in your chest lifts. You recognize the sound before you see them, and with it comes a quiet knowing – life is returning.

As you may be well aware, our province sits at the meeting point of two major North American avian migration routes – the Central and Mississippi Flyways. Saskatchewan is positioned between them, so our province becomes a transition zone where birds from both flyways converge, rest and refuel. Each spring, millions of geese move through this landscape. The dense mosaic of wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region provides one of the most important migratory staging areas on the continent – a place for geese to feed, rest and gather strength before continuing north to some of the most remote breeding grounds on Earth.

Among the travelers are several species of geese including Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*), Ross’s Goose (*Anser rossii*), Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*) and Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*). Canada Geese are widespread and breed in the boreal and subarctic; Saskatchewan sees both migrants and locally breeding birds. Cackling Geese are a smaller relative of Canada Geese that primarily use the Central flyway and breed in the high arctic tundra. Snow Geese form iconic and massive flocks each spring in Saskatchewan. They are among the most abundant geese in the world and use both flyways to arrive at breeding grounds on the arctic tundra in Canada, Alaska and Greenland. Ross’s Geese often travel in mixed flocks with Snow Geese and breed in the Central Arctic – forming huge colonies especially in Queen Maud Gulf in Nunavut. Greater White-fronted Geese often travel in smaller, more dispersed flocks slightly later than Snow and Ross’s Geese. They travel both Central and Mississippi flyways to access breeding grounds in Northern Canada and the Alaskan arctic.

When different geese species share a wintering range, travel along the same migration pathways, and overlap on their breeding grounds, hybridization can occur. In fact, the incidence of hybridization in waterfowl is relatively high compared to many other bird groups,

and among closely related geese, it is not especially rare. This most often happens within the same genus (e.g., *Branta* × *Branta* or *Anser* × *Anser*), particularly where birds gather in shared staging areas or overlap on Arctic breeding grounds.

Well-documented examples include Canada Goose × Cackling Goose and Snow Goose × Ross’s Goose, the latter of which is more commonly observed. Hybrids between more distantly related geese of different genera may also occur, although they are much rarer. In many cases – especially among closely related species – hybrids are viable and sometimes even fertile, a feature that distinguishes waterfowl from many other groups of animals.

The genetic variation introduced through hybridization may, in some cases, contribute to adaptability within goose populations over time. From a scientific perspective, waterfowl provide an excellent system for exploring evolution, the maintenance of species boundaries and the ecological context in which hybridization occurs.

...continued on page 5



Photo credit: Member Davis Daniels  
Most likely a Cackling X Ross Hybrid Goose

Do you have pictures or stories about interesting species or hybridization in nature that you want to share? Send your writing or pictures to [farq.blueheron@sasktel.net](mailto:farq.blueheron@sasktel.net)





From a more poetic perspective, it is interesting to ponder the fluidity of nature and be humbled in recognizing that nature does not always hold to the boundaries that we draw. That which may seem unusual to us is, for geese, part of an ongoing and quiet blending at the edges of boundaries between species – shaped by shared routes, shared landscapes and time. Far from empty, the prairies are a vibrant meeting ground. Here, geese from across the continent converge, and what happens in these shared spaces can shape generations to come.

In these times when much can feel uncertain or divided, perhaps the calls of geese carry something steadier: a reminder of the fluidity of boundaries, that connection persists, and that we are all a part of something larger than ourselves. When we pause to listen and hear the geese this spring, perhaps we can hear a kind of freedom – an invitation to loosen our grip on certainty and to find belonging, not in boundaries, but in the shared ebb and flow of the natural world.

To learn more about hybridization in geese and other birds, check out the Avian Hybrids Project, led by Jente Ottenburghs, at <https://avianhybrids.wordpress.com/> or the *Handbook of avian hybrids of the world* by E. M. McCarthy.

**References**

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Ottenburghs, J., van Hooft, P., van Wieren, S. E., Ydenberg, R. C., & Prins, H. H. (2016). Hybridization in geese: a review. *Frontiers in zoology*, 13, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12983-016-0153-1>



Photo credit: Melodie Achtymichuk - Mixed Geese

**“The Gold Road” - Backroad Chronicles**  
*By: Arden Bradford*

I think the sun was 2 fingers above the Eastern horizon on a calm and bright July morning. I was slowly driving West on the back road checking the sticky traps I had put up in the wheat fields to monitor the severity of the wheat midge infestation. The wheat midge fly is just a speck of an insect that can cause severe damage to the value of a wheat crop. That morning I had to decide if an insecticide was needed to kill the fly or let Nature take its course.

There was a rise in the road where it passed over a creek and when I reached the top of that rise I had to brake to a stop as I could not understand what I was seeing. The road, starting about 50 yards in front of the truck, was paved with gold, shining in the early morning sun and stretching for hundreds of yards in front of me.

I got out of the truck and slowly walked forward and discovered dragon flies with outstretched wing tip to outstretched wing tip across the width of the road, and head to tail perfectly spaced for the length of the road in front of me just short of a half mile with wheat fields bordering each side.

I stood there in awe and came to understand that the dragon flies were using that black dirt road and warm, early morning sun to dry the dew off their golden wings and warm their bodies before take-off and breakfast on the wheat midge in the surrounding fields. I backed the truck up and left them to their business. No spraying that year!

What I witnessed was Nature seeking a balance and I was very fortunate to see Nature’s power and beauty at work that morning.



Photo credit: Melodie Achtymichuk - Geese at Sunset





## NW25 Outdoor Learning Co.

*Connecting Youth, Community, and Nature in East Central Saskatchewan*

NW25 Outdoor Learning Co. is a rural outdoor education company based on a family farm near Bredenbury, Saskatchewan. Owned and Operated by Megan Gurski, NW25 was created with the goal of helping children, youth, and families reconnect with the land through hands-on, experiential learning.

Megan is a full-time teacher who has always been passionate about outdoor education and land-based learning. She has taught Land-Based Education and Outdoor Education and continues to bring that same philosophy into her work with students and community groups today. Living and working on her family farm has provided the perfect setting to develop an outdoor classroom where nature itself becomes the teacher.

At NW25, learning happens through exploration, curiosity, and experience. Programs are designed to help participants build confidence outdoors while developing practical skills and a deeper appreciation for the natural world around them. Activities often include wildlife and plant identification, nature observation, outdoor safety and survival skills, fire building, shelter building, navigation, and creative nature-based projects. NW25 offers a variety of programs throughout the year including Summer Forest School, School and Group Programs and Community Workshops.



Photo credit: Melodie Achtymichuk - Red-Tailed Hawk



Photo credit: Melodie Achtymichuk - Snowy Owl

Megan believes that some of the most powerful learning happens when people are outside, working together, problem-solving, and discovering things for themselves. Her goal with NW25 Outdoor Learning Co. is simple: to create opportunities for people of all ages to slow down, step outside, and experience the land in a way that inspires lifelong learning and connection to nature.

As interest in outdoor learning continues to grow across Saskatchewan, NW25 looks forward to collaborating with schools, organizations, and community groups to help more children and families experience the benefits of learning outside.

For more information about NW25 Outdoor Learning Co., upcoming programs, or partnership opportunities, you can visit the website or follow along on social media to see the outdoor learning adventures happening right here in our region.

Website - [www.nw25olc.com](http://www.nw25olc.com)

Facebook - [www.facebook.com/nw25olc](https://www.facebook.com/nw25olc)

Instagram - [www.instagram.com/nw25olc](https://www.instagram.com/nw25olc)





## Appreciation to Outgoing Executive

*Thank You to Martin Phillips*

Martin has served YFBTA/YNS as Chairperson since 2013, prior to that serving as Co-chair with Laretta Ritchie-McInnes.

Martin was persistent in seeking out possible grants and support when that was crucial to programs such as our hiring of a summer student for several years.

He and Margaret have graciously hosted many gatherings at their farm. It was always his aim to be sure to end each annual meeting within two hours and he was mostly successfully despite our organizations many faceted programs.

As he retires from being Chairperson, we know that Martin will continue to be involved in many activities within the organization and the projects and causes it espouses.

Paula Maier, newly elected YFBTA/YNS Chairperson, will undoubtedly call on Martin for his wisdom and experience.

FYI: Carol Bolt continues as Vice-Chair, a position held since succeeding Marcel Pelletier in 2015. Monique Smith became secretary in 2015 following Rob Wilson, and added Treasurer's responsibilities in 2016, following Laretta Ritchie McInnes. Thank you to Arden Bradford who was elected Chairperson at the Annual Meeting, March 3rd but who has found it necessary to resign from that office. Thank you to all - and to faithful committee members - and to each YFBTA/YNS member and supporter for their work, ideas, love of nature, and all friendships subsequently shared.



Photo credit: Valerie Brooks - Loon (Ruby Lake, SK)

## Featured Photo



Photo credit: Member Bob Wynes - Trumpeter Swan and chicks

## Policy Changes

**Note:** Those who receive and enjoy *What's Flying Around* are encouraged to share it with others. It's easy, and legal, to forward electronically - to as many as you think would appreciate its content and who might be encouraged to become members. Check out the Website and YFBTA on Facebook.



Photo credit: Valerie Brooks - Lily Pad in Bloom





## Book Reviews

**Close to Home** (the world of nature just outside your door) by Thor Hanson, conservational biologist.

This book alerts us to know that “the places we see the most may be the ones we know the least.” This is an easy read and he writes of the real importance of participatory or community science (more favoured labels than citizen science). He provides multiple examples of important discoveries or monitoring done in backyards or public parks, the value (with examples) of school or class or family projects. Hanson emphasizes the projected numbers of as yet unidentified species of insects but even of birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Many scientists have preferred having even very young children as assistants. (Darwin among them).

The small child who has not learned to focus on the necessary is most likely to spot a new species or note an undescribed behaviour. The author urges that, as we explore nature, we learn not just to identify a species but that we take time to observe behaviour and note it – e.g. a species relocating in response to change in available habitat, presence of predators.

**Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast.** By John Vaillant best selling author of *The Golden Spruce* and *The Tiger*.

Ten years ago, in May 2016, Fort McMurray, the hub of Canada’s petroleum industry, was overrun by wildfire. The multi-billion dollar disaster melted vehicles, turned entire neighborhoods into firebombs, and drove 88,000 people from their homes in a single afternoon. John Vaillant warns that this was not a unique event but a shocking preview of what we must prepare for in a hotter, more flammable world, as fire’s destructive power is unleashed in previously unimaginable ways.

With masterly prose and a cinematic eye, *Fire Weather* takes us on a riveting journey through the intertwined histories of North America’s oil industry and the birth of climate science, to the unprecedented devastation wrought by modern forest fires, and into lives forever changed by these disasters. John Vaillant’s urgent work is a book for - and from - our new century of fire, which has only just begun. *(taken from book jacket)*



Photo credit: Valerie Brooks - Pelican and Friends

## Call for Contributions

The co-editors of “What’s Flying Around” would like to challenge our readers to grab their cameras, pick up the pen, or open their laptops and take part in our “**Spring Spectacular Challenge**”.

We’re looking for anything and everything you love about Spring. From first buds to later blooms, interesting insects to fantastic flyers, any marvel of this season of renewal and rebirth is desired.

Think your writing is not good enough? We’ve got you! Send in your rough draft and we’ll help you make it great, and you’ll help us spread the glory of Spring to our readers.

Great pictures are ALWAYS needed, so all you photo enthusiasts, send us your favourite pictures so we can highlight them in future issues of the newsletter. Not a member? That’s OK, we’ll still use your contributions and send you a free copy of the newsletter!

Send all submissions to the email listed below.

### What’s Flying Around...

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