

BC Nature Conference & AGM, May 2025 – Field Trip Descriptions

All field trips (unless specified below) will begin in the parking lot outside the Civic Centre to car-pool or walk. Look for the sign showing your field trip. Please be on time – latecomers might be left behind.

Friday/Saturday Field Trips

Friday 23rd May: 1-4 PM. Saturday 24th May: 9-noon.

1	Pennask Lake Road - nature & photography Cancelled for Fri & Sat – this is now a Sunday farewell outing S04 – see below Leader: Murphy Shewchuk.
2	Lundbom Commonage - nature hike; not on trails (Fri & Sat) FRIDAY IS FULL Join naturalist Frank Ritcey on an "off-piste" walk in the grasslands of the Lundbom. We'll take in some excellent wetlands, a bit of the grasslands, and even make our way through a spruce grove. Good chance of getting your shoes wet so wear good hiking gear (shorts and flip-flops are not recommended). Moderate hiking. Pit toilets at the interpretation site. Leader: Frank Ritcey. One of BC's best-known naturalists, Frank was raised in the wilds of Wells Gray Park and has spent the better part of his life either out in nature or talking about it to whoever will listen. He's probably best known for his appearances on the CBC's popular <i>North by Northwest</i> broadcast with Sheryl McKay.
3	Lundbom Commonage - grassland ecology (Fri only) We will visit the Laurie Guichon Memorial Grasslands Interpretive Site - Grasslands Conservation Council of BC , a diverse upper grassland site that is used regularly for youth and adult education. May is the perfect time to see the diverse plant communities and talk about grassland issues including invasive plants and managing grazing for healthy plant communities. Easy hiking. Pit toilets available. Leaders: Grasslands Conservation Council Directors Dennis Lloyd and Tom Dickinson , and GCC Executive Director Mike Dedels .
4	Kane Valley - birds & wildflowers (Fri & Sat) We have added space to these outings on both Friday and Saturday. There will be 2 groups on both days. SATURDAY IS NOW FULL. Kane Valley is one of the gems of the greater Nicola Valley area. This outing will be a mix of driving to various locations and going on short hikes to observe birds, wildflowers and other wildlife in medium-elevation grassland, forest, and wetland ecosystems. Participants will observe a wide variety of birds, wildflowers and hopefully other wildlife species. Easy hiking. Pit toilets available. Leaders: Liis Jeffries & Paul Willms. Liis is a retired instructor at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) where she taught Soil Science, Ecology and Biological Sciences. Paul is a retired forester who spent much of his career teaching Forestry and other related disciplines at NVIT.
5	Bioblitz & iNaturalist workshop (Fri & Sat)

	<p>Learn how to use the amazing iNaturalist app, or refresh your skills while participating in a Bioblitz at a rural property outside Merritt. The owner is in the process of re-wilding the property and this bioblitz will be a follow-up to one done by the Nicola Naturalists two years earlier at the same time of year. Make sure to download the iNaturalist app on your phone if you plan to participate in this workshop. Easy walking. No toilets.</p> <p>Leader: Julia Carr. Julia has joined the staff of BC Nature to work on the Municipal Protected Areas Program (MPAP). As a past member and team lead of the UVic/SFU-led BC Parks Biodiversity Program which uses iNaturalist to survey protected areas all over the province, she has had extensive experience with the app and with bioblitzes.</p>
6	<p>Lichens of the Nicola Valley (Fri & Sat) Introduction to Lichen beauty and lichenology at scenic Douglas Lake Ranch along Nicola Lake near Quilchena/Merritt. Provides an excellent opportunity to see rare lichens identified on rock and the soil biocrust. Participants will gain understanding of their special significance in the ecology of the Interior shrub-steppe/grasslands. 25 mins from Merritt, passenger car fine, to the site with opportunity for moderate difficulty. Walking a mix of easy (10 min walk through flat hayfield) with a moderately difficult 10 min sidehill scramble to see other lichens/biocrust. No toilets, bush only.</p> <p>Leader: Christine Rimmington. Christine is a lichenology enthusiast with Pacific Northwest Lichenologists, having independently studied Nicola Valley's diverse lichens the past five years.</p>
7	<p>Mushroom foray (Fri & Sat) The forests of the Nicola Valley support diverse Fungi and spring is a good time to explore for them. We will discover and identify mushrooms in a wooded area near Merritt as we walk in a group. We don't need to go very far or fast, there is always lots to see if you take the time to look around. Easy walking. No toilets, except the bush.</p> <p>Leader: Michael Ebenal. Michael has been cultivating gourmet edible mushrooms since 2015 and has been interested in mushrooms since he first found them in the wild on his first camping trips. In 2018 he built a facility to take his cultivating hobby to the next level where he has the space and equipment to grow hundreds of pounds of mushrooms per month and to do research and development. Learning about Fungi and teaching what he knows takes up lots of his spare time when he isn't working as an industrial electrician.</p>
8	<p>Butterflies with Bob (Sat only) THIS IS NOW FULL Experience the weird and the wonderful - butterflying with Bob. We will explore forest service roads near Merritt that Bob will monitor for butterfly activity in the days before the outing, for the best viewing and photographic opportunities. Bob will also describe various butterfly quirks, that make butterfly hunts interesting, and some of the many attractants used to lure butterflies to specific locations. Hint, butterflies taste with their feet. Yuck !!! Easy walking. No toilets, except the bush.</p> <p>Leader: Bob Scafe. Bob is the Nicola Naturalist's moth and butterfly aficionado. He has been tracking down butterflies in the Nicola Valley for many years and knows the best places to find them.</p>

9	<p>Kentucky-Alleyne Provincial Park – toads, birds & hike (Fri & Sat)</p> <p>This outing is primarily a hike around Kentucky Lake – about 4.5 km of moderately easy walking through forest and open glades with views of the lovely emerald lake. Expect some interesting interior forest birds and wildflowers. We will also inspect the eco-culvert and funnel-fence that BC Parks and the Nicola Naturalists erected in 2012 to funnel tiny Western Toad toadlets safely from their breeding pond into the forest. Moderate hiking. Pit toilets available in the park.</p> <p>Leader: Ted Cederland. Ted is an avid hiker and outdoorsman and a long-time member of the Nicola Naturalists. He runs a construction company in Merritt and was one of the members who constructed the toadlet funnel-fence in 2012.</p>
10	<p>Beaver re-introductions in the Nicola Valley (Sat only)</p> <p>We will visit a wetland restoration project in the Kane Valley that pairs beavers’ role as ecosystem engineers with human-made facsimiles of beaver dams, termed “beaver dam analogues”. This project is intended to boost watershed sponginess in light of numerous impacts to the hydrological integrity of the Nicola Watershed. The tour will include a gentle hike along an access road with good opportunities to see wetland-loving bird species and potential for seeing “nuisance” beavers that have been relocated to this site. Easy walking. Pit toilets available in Kane Valley.</p> <p>Leader: Tom Willms. Tom is a fish and wildlife biologist and instructor at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt. He is one of the lead organizers of the beaver re-introduction program.</p>
11	<p>Extended birding - Lindley Creek-Midday Valley loop (Fri & Sat) FRIDAY IS FULL</p> <p>We will drive this loop south of Merritt with frequent stops to bird the varied habitats, including mixed forest types, Nicola River, open glades, pastures and grasslands. This is an ideal location to see and hear birds of the BC Interior, including all three species of nuthatches, several flycatchers, Western Tanagers, both species of bluebirds, several woodpeckers and perhaps even Williamson’s Sapsucker, Three-toed Woodpecker and Lewis’s Woodpecker. Easy walking. No toilets, except the bush.</p> <p>Leader: Liam Ragan. Liam is one of the leading birders in B.C. On the BC Nature staff, he coordinates the Important Bird Areas (IBA) program for BC as well as First Nations Liaison for Key Biodiversity Area (KBAs) in B.C.</p>
12	<p>Burrowing Owl pellet analysis (Fri & Sat) WORKSHOP IS CANCELLED FRIDAY AND SATURDAY</p> <p>The workshop analyses Burrowing Owl pellets from Nicola Valley restoration sites. Why study pellets? How does the owl digestive tract form pellets? By dissecting pellets we can learn about predator-prey relationships and the owl’s hunting and dietary habits. It gives us an accurate analysis of what the owl has eaten in the last 12 hours. Was that a rodent tibia, scapula, grasshopper or beetle? Tools will be provided for pellet dissection that will answer all your questions. Check for the designated room in the Civic Centre.</p> <p>Leaders: Dawn Brodie & Loretta Holmes. Dawn is a Registered Animal Health Technologist. She has worked for over 30 years to help conserve Burrowing Owl</p>

	<p>populations in British Columbia, and since 2016 at the Upper Nicola Band Burrowing Owl Reintroduction Program.</p> <p>Loretta is member of the Upper Nicola Band, and the band's Senior Cultural Heritage Resource Technician. She has a background in environmental monitoring, wildlife management and forestry that includes bird and mammal inventory surveys.</p> <p>Loretta and Dawn share Burrowing Owl monitoring and ongoing field research, and conduct owl presentations to local communities.</p>
13	<p>Minerals, fossils & geological history, Merritt area (Fri & Sat) FRIDAY & SATURDAY ARE BOTH FULL</p> <p>The Nicola Valley offers great variety in geology and fossil sites. Mining has featured strongly in the town's history and economy. This is a driving tour within 15 km of Merritt, with limited walking on flat ground. Mostly stopping and pointing out or visiting geological features of interest and what they represent. Easy walking. Pit toilets en route.</p> <p>Leader: Gerry Sanford. Gerry is a long retired geological engineer, with experience in exploration, underground geology (including as a Shift Boss underground) and in open pit geology. He left geology after 18 years for other endeavours, but maintains an interest in the geology of the Nicola Valley.</p>
14	<p>Forestry in the Nicola Valley (Fri & Sat)</p> <p>We will visit a forest site on Nicola Ranch property that butts against the city of Merritt. The area is a mature Douglas-fir stand that was select-logged by First Nations to prevent a runaway crown fire next to the City of Merritt. It is an example of how the risk of a potentially devastating forest crown fire can be eliminated by thinning with no net cost (the salvaged timber paid for the operation). Included is a First Nations culturally modified tree and an ancient hunting stand via a hike up a slope (80 metre vertical climb). The discussion will cover both good and bad logging practices in the BC Interior. Moderate walking. No toilets except the bush.</p> <p>Leaders: Norm Hansen & Chris Lepsoe. Norm is a retired Registered Professional Forester who has worked as a lead forester and forestry consultant for many decades in the Nicola Valley and surrounding areas. Chris Lepsoe is Registered Forest Technologist. He has worked in the forest industry in many capacities and was an instructor at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt for many years.</p>
15	<p>Sustainable ranching in the Nicola Valley (Fri only)</p> <p>Many naturalists don't appreciate the value that ranchers bring to maintaining natural ecosystems and wildlife. As land owners and leasees of Crown Land, ranchers are custodians of much of the Interior grasslands and woodlands. Led by a prominent local rancher, this outing will visit beautiful Kane Valley to see and hear about sustainable ranching, issues around water management, local decision-making and much more.</p> <p>Leader: John Anderson. John was born and raised in the Nicola Valley and has been ranching here for decades. He has been active in numerous organizations such as the Grasslands Conservation Council. He is currently chair of the Nicola Watershed Community Round Table, that focuses on water and land management, chair of the Indigenous Relations Committee for B.C. Cattlemens Association and president of Nicola Nordic Ski Club.</p>
16	<p>Tour & history of NVIT, recognition of First Nations people (Fri only)</p>

	<p>The senior administrators will lead a tour of the Merritt Campus of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT). The tour will cover the history of NVIT and its role as BC's Indigenous public post-secondary school. This is an excellent opportunity to learn about this unique Indigenous institute.</p> <p>Leader: Dr. John Chenoweth. Dr. Chenoweth is President and CEO of NVIT. He is a member of the Upper Nicola Indian Band (Syilx Okanagan Nation), has been part of the NVIT community for years, and is deeply committed to empowering Indigenous learners and revitalizing Indigenous languages.</p>
17	<p>Hamilton Commonage – ponds, wildflowers & birds (Fri & Sat) FRIDAY AND SATURDAY ARE NOW FULL</p> <p>We will drive into the grasslands via Nicola Lake and Pennask Lake Road. Hamilton Commonage has a diverse mix of forest, grassland, small lakes and ponds. We will visit sites where the Nicola Naturalists are monitoring Great Basin Spadefoots with autonomous sound recorders and weather sensors. The ponds support many breeding waterfowl and there are interesting grassland and forest birds, plus loads of wildflowers. Easy walking on moderately rough terrain. No toilets except the bush.</p> <p>Leader: Alan Burger. A retired university prof and wildlife biologist, Alan is a keen birder, all-round naturalist and photographer, and president of the Nicola Naturalist Society.</p>
18	<p>Macro-photography workshop (Sat only)</p> <p>An outdoor workshop – we will meet at the Civic Center, talk about gear, and then do a walk of about 3 km along the Coldwater River and back, to view and photograph some spring flora and fauna. Folks don't necessarily need to have a macro camera, but bring one along if you have one. Otherwise try using a macro function on your phone. Easy walking. Toilets possible at parks along the way.</p> <p>Leader: Leanne Cleaveley. Leanne is an elementary school teacher/librarian and a photography enthusiast with a particular interest in macro images. She has written photography guides on a variety of topics and enjoys time outdoors. Her macro photos of insects and spiders have been a regular highlight at Nicola Naturalist meetings.</p>
19	<p>Value-added use of logs & sustainable building (Fri only)</p> <p>We will visit <i>Nicola Logworks</i> at their Merritt production site. This innovative company leverages value from logs that many sawmills have difficulty using. Combined with robotic-assisted traditional style “piece en piece” technology this company excels at complex log and timber joinery. Their log and timber products are exported worldwide.</p> <p>Leader: John Boys. There are few people as qualified or as passionate as John to discuss log building and realizing the value of our precious timber. He has been building log homes since 1984 and run his own innovative company <i>Nicola Logworks</i> since 1989. He has pioneered new technology, trained numerous woodworkers, written articles about log homes and continues to be a leader in the Log and Timber Building Industry Association.</p>
20	<p>River restoration to meet traditional Indigenous values (Fri only)</p> <p>Following the disastrous 2021 floods, there has been a strong focus on restoring the Nicola and Coldwater Rivers, which meet in Merritt, to a more natural and flood-</p>

	<p>resistant state. The STUWI(x) Naturalization Project is led by local community members and the six local First Nations, with funding from Merritt city and the provincial and federal governments. This outing will explore the restoration area and hear from the leaders of this unique project.</p> <p>Leader: Charlene Joe and others. Charlene is a member of the Lower Nicola Band. She is the Indigenous Engagement Manager with the city of Merritt and the chair of the STUWI(x) steering committee. She and others in this committee will be leading the outing.</p>
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Night outings

Friday night (May 23rd): 8 – 11 PM. Meet in the Civic Centre parking lot at 7:45 PM to car-pool.

FN01	<p>Moths and moth-sampling techniques THIS IS NOW FULL</p> <p>We will visit Bob Scafe's property on the edge of town, where he has already recorded over 800 species of moths. Here we will see several moth-collecting devices in action, including UV and pheromone traps, discuss sampling moths with photography and taking museum specimens, and view some of the local moth species. You will never look at a moth in the same way again! Toilet available.</p> <p>Leaders: Bob Scafe & Dr. Dave Holden. Bob is the Nicola Naturalist's moth and butterfly aficionado. Dave is a professional entomologist with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, focused on studying moths across our province.</p>
FN02	<p>Owling in the Merritt area THIS IS NOW FULL</p> <p>Depending on the number of registrants we will organize one or two owling ventures close to Merritt. Likely areas are the forests and agricultural land along Lindley Creek Road and the upper Bench area bordering Merritt.</p> <p>Leaders: TBA.</p>
FN03	<p>Great Basin Spadefoots at Pennask Lake Road THIS IS NOW FULL</p> <p>We will visit sites where Great Basin Spadefoots (a Threatened species in Canada) breed in grassland ponds. The Nicola Naturalists have been monitoring spadefoots here since 2011, lately using autonomous sound recorders matched with remote weather sensors. Owls and Poorwills are also likely to be encountered.</p> <p>Leader: Alan Burger.</p>

Sunday Farewell Outings

Sunday May 25th 0900-noon. Instructions will be given to registrants on where to meet. Participants will likely use their own vehicles (*en route* to home) but car-pooling can be arranged.

KEEP CHECKING – we have added one new Sunday outing and we're working on adding more.

S01	Douglas Lake Plateau – grasslands and ranching THIS IS NOW FULL
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	<p>This trip will explore the Douglas Lake high elevation grasslands, including the Douglas Lake Ranch (the largest ranch in Canada) and parts of the Upper Nicola Band reserve. These grasslands and associated forests and wetlands support diverse wildlife, including many rare species such as Badgers, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Great Basin Spadefoots and more. The focus of this outing will be to see how range management can benefit wildlife and natural ecosystems. Easy walking. Pit toilets at Douglas Lake campsite.</p> <p>Leaders: TBA, but will include knowledgeable staff from the Douglas Lake Ranch.</p>
S02	<p>Hike the Coquihalla Pass forest THIS IS NOW FULL Beginning at the brake-check near the Coquihalla summit, we will hike into the forest and soon be away from the highway noise. This montane forest is a mix of coastal and interior species, with some impressive large trees and lush undergrowth. You might find Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Sooty Grouse and other coastal species. Moderate hiking – 2-4 km. Toilets at the brake-check.</p> <p>Leaders: TBA</p>
S03	<p>Birding at Tunkwa Lake Provincial Park THIS IS NOW FULL This high-elevation park in forest and grassland has two large lakes and several smaller wetlands. The lakes and ponds support dozens of species of breeding water birds, including some uncommon species like Eared Grebes, Red-necked Grebes, Ruddy Ducks and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Rare shorebirds like Wilson's Phalarope and Black-necked Stilt have been found here in spring. A pair of American Herring Gull regularly breeds here – one of the southernmost breeding locations in B.C. Easy walking. Toilets in the park.</p> <p>Leaders: Alan Burger A retired university prof and wildlife biologist, Alan is a keen birder, all-round naturalist and photographer, and president of the Nicola Naturalist Society. Ken Lipinski is a keen birder and naturalist from the Kamloops Naturalist Club. He knows Tunkwa Park well.</p>
S04	<p>Pennask Lake Road - nature & photography THIS IS NOW FULL Pennask Lake Road climbs up to a grassland plateau (1350 m, 4429 ft). in the heart of the Douglas Lake Ranch, Canada's largest cattle ranch. The route offers a look at the terrain as the receding glaciers left it revealing the gouges, ponds, drumlins and eskers plus the plants and wildlife that call this home. Most of the road is good gravel, but weather can add uncertainty to the trip. A four-wheel-drive vehicle with good clearance is preferred as well as three or four hours to spare. Easy walking. No toilets except the bush.</p> <p>Leader: Murphy Shewchuk. Murphy is a freelance writer/photographer/historian with a dozen published backroads books, including <i>Coquihalla Trips and Trails</i> covering our area. He has been exploring this area for over 50 years.</p>
S05	<p>Bluebirds of the Nicola Valley THIS IS NOW FULL In spring and summer the Nicola Valley is home to both Mountain and Western Bluebirds. Nowadays most of them use nest boxes maintained by numerous volunteers. This Sunday morning outing will take you to several places where we expect to find both bluebird species, and other users of the nest boxes like House</p>

	<p>Wrens and swallows. A chance to learn more about bluebirds and this important conservation initiative.</p> <p>Leaders: Yvonne Lord and others. The leaders are experienced volunteers with the Vancouver Avian Research Centre, which manages the bluebird nest box program in the Merritt area.</p>
S06	<p>Learn to sketch in nature ONE SPACE LEFT</p> <p>This is a workshop for people who think they can't draw, led by an artist who has taught many people the joys of sketching. Beginning with an indoor instruction session we will move out to do sketches in nature. Prepare to be amazed at what you can do! Try it once and you will know how forever. Discover a creative and relaxing way to enjoy nature.</p> <p>Leader: Jean Kiegerl. Jean is a Merritt-based artist who “accidentally” took an art class at university, which launched her long-time career and passion. Jean’s paintings, sketches, prints and cards are well known in Merritt and beyond. She was an active member of Creative Company, the artisan/artist co-op in Merritt, is the past-president of the Nicola Valley Community Arts Council and was an “Active Artist” member of the Federation of Canadian Artists. See more at: www.kiegerl.ca</p>