

Nicola Naturalist Society

Newsletter No. 2 April 2011

Our quarterly bulletins (spring, summer, fall and winter) feature nature news, society events and items of interest for the Merritt area.

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE – the newsletter is open to all members to contribute short articles, photos, artwork, book reviews, etc. We are also looking for material for our website (see next paragraph). See the last newsletter page for contact information.

NNS website up and running

The Nicola Naturalist Society website is now fully functional. Check it out at:

<http://www.nicolanaturalists.ca/>

There are links to upcoming meetings and events, club projects, membership information and more. We regularly post photos of local wildlife, flora, landscapes and other nature topics submitted by members.

Logo contest – **Deadline Extended!**

We need a logo! Your logo can be immortalized on our newsletter, future website and anything else the NNS produces. You don't have to be an expert artist – if necessary we will get a local artist to tidy-up the winning logo. It can be stylized like the BC Nature logo, or more realistic. The logo should feature some local species (plant or animal) or some element of our local landscape and environment.

The logo contest winner will receive a one-year membership of NNS and a book prize. See the last page for addresses to submit your entry. More details on our website. Contest ends ~~31st March~~ **30 April** 2011.



Frogs are calling (you)!

Article and photos: Dr. Kristiina Ovaska, Biolinx Environmental Research Ltd., Victoria, BC



Columbia Spotted Frog

Do you enjoy paddling in ponds, sloshing in sloughs, wandering along wetlands, or just spending time watching wild creatures going about their lives? If your answer is “yes” to any of the above, please come and join us for an information session on Saturday 14 May on how you can help monitor amphibians in our area.

Ever since a child, I have been fascinated by the wet and wonderful world of frogs and salamanders, and over the past several decades as a professional biologist I have been able to continue my interest in all things slimy, slithery, and/or jumping, which of course include frogs. Unfortunately, many amphibian populations throughout the world have experienced dramatic declines and even extinctions for reasons that are not fully understood, while others still remain healthy. It is important to monitor these “canaries in the coal mine”, so that future generations can watch a tadpole turn into a frog, and continue enjoying the special places that amphibians, along with a myriad of other wetland animals and plants, call home.

The Nicola Naturalist Society is starting an amphibian monitoring project this spring. If you would like to participate in the surveys or have wetlands or ponds on

your property included in the survey, we would like to hear from you.

What are the goals of the project?

We want to find out:

- Distributions of different amphibian species within the landscape;
- Where important breeding areas are located; and
- Health of amphibian populations and their habitats over time.

Who can participate?

We welcome anybody with a keen interest in wildlife and wetlands. You will receive training in identification of different life stages of frogs and salamanders, on survey methods, and on how to document what you see.

What does monitoring amphibians involve?

Several different survey methods are available. You will have an opportunity to participate in one or more of the following:

- *Call surveys* are carried out after dark along selected routes to locate breeding sites of chorusing frogs. This method works well for species with loud calls such as Spadefoots and Pacific Treefrogs.
- *Pond surveys* consist of walking along the shoreline and/or paddling around a water body and visually searching for adult amphibians and/or their egg masses. These surveys are carried out during the day.
- *Larval surveys* include using dip nets to find out whether tadpoles or salamander larvae are present in a water body, which indicates an amphibian breeding site. Larvae can also be trapped using minnow traps (and released after identification).

What level of effort is required?

The level of effort and type of involvement is flexible and up to you. Here are some examples of how you can participate:

- Join in group activities, when we all go out as a group to carry out a survey;
- Independently monitor a particular pond or wetland or a group of wetlands close to your home;
- Take on a frog call route with a friend near where you live;
- Accompany herpetologists on different types of surveys;

- Opportunistically check out water bodies when you go hiking or boating;
- Share your local knowledge of wetlands and water bodies in the area;
- Report opportunistic observations of amphibians, including sites of mass migrations of newly transformed toadlets across roads or elsewhere.

It all counts!



Kayaks or canoes are used for some pond surveys.

Will there be opportunities for observing other wildlife and plants?

Certainly! We encourage people to take the time to observe and document birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and plants they see while visiting wetlands.

How do I get started?

Please attend our upcoming mini-workshop (14 May). After an approximately 1 hour presentation and discussion, we plan to go out and try to locate Columbia Spotted Frogs, which breed very early in the spring – weather permitting. If you can't make it this time but are interested, there will be further opportunities to get involved.

Contact the volunteer coordinator

If you would like to attend the amphibian workshop or are interested in participating in this project please contact the project's volunteer coordinator Andrea Lawrence at 250-378-2468 or e-mail nicolanaturalists@gmail.com

Our amphibian monitoring project is funded by:

- BC Public Conservation Assistance Fund;
- BC Habitat Conservation Trust Fund.

Upcoming Events

Our monthly evening meetings are held at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) on Belshaw Rd, Merritt. Field outings are for members only (family membership includes dependent children). Guests of members can purchase special membership for a day to cover insurance.

Thursday 21 April, 7 PM at NVIT Lecture Theatre: *Painting with Light: Creativity in Outdoor Photography*

Well-known local author and photographer Murphy Shewchuk will give tips on how to take photos of wildlife and landscapes, illustrated with his excellent nature photos from the BC interior. Murphy has also offered to provide guidance on improving your camera use, so bring your camera along to get tips for getting better photos.



Saturday 30 April: - Birding local wetlands

We are planning a joint birding day with the South Okanagan Naturalist Club from Penticton. This is a great time of year to learn about waterfowl, rails, herons and other marsh and wetland birds. Bring a lunch, your binos, spotting scope and field guide. To register for this outing please contact Alan Burger at 250-378-2468 or aburger@uvic.ca

May 12-15: - BC Nature Spring Conference and AGM. *Enjoying nature in the Cariboo-Chilcotin.* Hosted by the Williams Lake Field Naturalists.

NNS members are encouraged to attend this event which features lectures, field outings, photographic presentations and social events. It's a lot of fun and a good way to meet other naturalists and get to know BC's nature. For details visit www.bcnature.ca and click on Conferences and Field Camps.

Saturday 14 May: - Amphibian Monitoring Workshop

This newsletter's feature article describes this project. To register for the workshop please contact Andrea Lawrence at 250-378-2468 or e-mail at nicolanaturalists@gmail.com If you can't make it on the 14th but are interested in

helping with this project or just want to learn more about local frogs and salamanders please contact Andrea.

Spring/summer bird identification workshop

Following our popular bird identification workshop last December we will hold another workshop, this time focused on identifying birds breeding in our region. A short classroom session will be followed by some birding in the field. This is tentatively planned for **Saturday 11 June**. If you are interested please contact Alan Burger at 250-378-2468 or aburger@uvic.ca

Be forewarned that workshop participants will also have their arms twisted to participate in the BC Breeding Bird Atlas – which is highly addictive!

More field outings – stay tuned. We will notify members by e-mail or phone and post information on our website.

Information on sightings of Grizzly Bears needed

On 7 April we were treated to an excellent lecture on the biology and conservation of Grizzly Bears in southwest BC by Dr. Sue Senger of Conservation Northwest. As a follow-up, Sue has asked residents of the Merritt/Nicola area to contribute information on any sightings of Grizzly Bears in our area or elsewhere in southwest BC. If you saw or photographed one of these bears in the past few years please contact Sue at: ssenger@telus.net



Grizzly Bear in the Lillooet area (Photo: Dave Molenaar)

Feature Species

Each newsletter will feature one or more local wildlife or wildflower species. Please contribute photos and text!

Williamson's Sapsucker

(*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*)



Female (left) & male (right) Williamson's Sapsuckers
(photos: Alan Burger)

The pine and Douglas-fir forests of the dry interior are favoured habitats for large numbers of sapsuckers. Most of us are familiar with the widespread and common Red-naped Sapsucker, but the Merritt area is also home to the much rarer and more secretive Williamson's Sapsucker. Their preference for nesting in large trees (typically conifers larger than 50 cm diameter or aspens larger than 30 cm; usually with heart-rot) seems to limit their abundance and they are on the BC "Red-list" of threatened or near-threatened species. Research in recent years by Les Gyug and others has shown the importance of the Thompson-Nicola region as nesting grounds for this woodpecker species. In the past 3 years several new nest sites have been found by local volunteers with the BC Breeding Bird Atlas program.

This is one of the most dimorphic of all our woodpeckers, males having striking black & white plumage while females are grey-brown with barred backs and flanks. Both have pale yellow bellies. This is one of the few birds where the nestlings can be sexed by their plumage even before they fledge.

Like other sapsuckers, this species feeds on sap taken from "wells" pecked into the bark of trees. But when breeding Williamson's Sapsuckers feed extensively on ants, gleaning them off the trunks and branches of trees. Unlike most other woodpeckers, sapsuckers migrate – they arrive in April and head south again in September.

Conservation efforts to maintain the small and declining BC population of Williamson's Sapsuckers are aimed at maintaining stands of large old trees. The species benefits from old-growth retention practices and the protection of identified "wildlife trees".

Sagebrush Buttercup

(*Ranunculus glaberrimus*)



As spring approaches we eagerly await the appearance of greenery and flowers. Usually the first little splash of spring colour in our area is the tiny Sagebrush Buttercup. These hardy little plants (usually only 2-3 cm tall) start growing before the snow has melted away and even bloom underneath the snow cover. Look for them on south-facing slopes in the early spring. This is one of over 25 buttercup species in British Columbia – growing in a wide range of habitats from wetlands to the driest grasslands.

As one of the first plants to emerge in spring, the Sagebrush Buttercup would be a target for plant-eating animals, except that they are poisonous. Some First Nations groups in BC are reported to have used this plant to poison their arrowheads. So avoid picking them!

Nicola Naturalist Society Contacts

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Directors: Glen Carlson and Chris Lepsoe
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- Newsletter contributors : Alan Burger; Andrea Lawrence; Dave Molenaar; Kristiina Ovaska; Sue Senger; Murphy Shewchuk.

Send newsletter contributions and logo to:

Alan Burger – aburger@uvic.ca or to the NNS contacts above.