

Nicola Naturalist Society

Newsletter No. 6 - April 2012

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

Much more on our website: www.nicolanaturalists.ca

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE – our newsletter and website are open to all members to contribute short articles, photos, artwork, book reviews, etc. See page 4 for contact information.

Keep an eye on the IBA

As reported in our October 2011 newsletter, our society has been asked to take over monitoring the Douglas Lake Plateau Important Bird Area (IBA). Our neighbours in the Kamloops Naturalist Club will be monitoring the northern half of this huge area and Nicola Naturalists will focus on the southern half.

IBAs are established to promote stewardship of important aggregations of breeding, migrating or overwintering birds. The Douglas Lake Plateau IBA was established in the 1990s because it is a key area for large numbers of migrating Sandhill Cranes and also supports several rare species and large numbers of breeding waterfowl and grassland birds.



A male Barrow's Goldeneye – one of the species which breeds in the Douglas Lake Plateau IBA. Photo: Alan Burger

The NNS will be organizing special outings into the Douglas Plateau area to keep records of what birds are in the area, but you too can contribute each time you visit the area. Use the “*Contact Us*” page on the NNS website. Here you can report sightings of birds each time you travel through the IBA.

Most of the IBA is private land and we strongly urge birders and our members to respect the boundaries of the ranches. But there is plenty of scope to watch and record birds from the public roads passing through the IBA, including Highway 5A, Pennask Lake Road

and Douglas Lake Road. So keep a notebook with you on your travels and record sightings of interesting bird species, flocks of migrating cranes and other birds, or evidence of breeding. Your records will be added to our IBA database and used for our annual reporting to Bird Studies Canada – the organization which coordinates IBAs across Canada.

Time for a new National Park

Along with many other clubs in BC Nature, the NNS has written a letter to Premier Christy Clark and relevant BC Ministers in support of the proposed South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park. A small group of ATVers and hunters opposed to the park appears to have the ear of the BC government on this issue, but surveys show the majority of BC and Canadian residents support the park proposals. For more information on the park proposals go to:

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

Frogging again this spring!

Dig out your gumboots - our Amphibian Monitoring Project is continuing this spring. Dr. Kristiina Ovaska and her professional team from Biolinx Research Inc. will be working with us again in May and June. NNS volunteers will again be able to help with searching for egg masses and breeding concentrations, doing night-time call surveys and checking lakes and ponds for breeding frogs. To register for the project or get more information contact the volunteer coordinator Andrea Lawrence at 250-378-2468 or this e-mail address:

nicola.amphibians@gmail.com

For more details, photos and progress reports on our amphibian monitoring go to our Projects web page: <http://www.nicolanaturalists.ca/projects/>

To facilitate mapping the frog and toad breeding sites we use GPS to get accurate locations. To help volunteers get familiar with our GPS units we are holding a special GPS training workshop on 21 April – see page 3 below for details in Upcoming Events.

Harmon Lake Interpretive Forest

The Nicola Naturalists have been approached by the BC Forest Service to help maintain and promote the Forest Interpretation site at Harmon Lake in the Kane Valley. Situated on the southeast shore of Harmon Lake this interpretation site has recently had a major overall, with many new information signs and upgraded facilities for nature talks and group meetings. Bordering the Forest Service campground at Harmon Lake and near other popular Kane Valley fishing lakes and hiking/mountain bike trails, this site is in an excellent location to provide information on forest ecology, forestry practices and some local history.



NNS director Chris Lepsoe stands at the entrance to the Harmon Lake Interpretive Forest during a site visit, 1 April 2012. Photo: Alan Burger

The NNS directors recently met with officials of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MFLNRO) including the head of the regional Recreation and Trails division, Ed Abels. The directors agreed that the society would assist with the maintenance of the interpretive site and provide some interpretation programs, such as nature talks, wildflower walks or birding. Details of the agreement have still to be worked out after the directors and forestry officials have had a chance to visit the site after the snow melts.



NNS member Andrea Lawrence checks out one of the information kiosks at the Harmon Lake Interpretive Forest during a snowshoe tour on April 1st. Photo: Alan Burger

In the meantime three NNS members donned snowshoes to visit the site on April 1st. The site features many different ecosystems typical of the Merritt area, including coniferous and deciduous forests, patches of grassland, a large lake and wetlands. In the forested areas are some lovely stands of old trees, including Douglas-fir, white/Engelman spruce, ponderosa and lodgepole pine and aspens.



Some of the large Douglas-fir and spruce trees along the shores of Harmon Lake. Photo: Alan Burger

A gentle hike of about 2 km takes one through many of these ecosystems with signs along the way to explain some of the features and ecological processes important to the area and the role of the forest and grasslands in the regional economy and history. At Secret Lake a boardwalk and wharf give access to the shallow wetlands which in summer are teeming with aquatic insects.



Andrea and Chris at Secret Lake with the boardwalk and wharf in the background. Photo: Alan Burger

If you are interested in helping with the maintenance and interpretation activities at this site please contact one of the directors – and please come on our spring site visit and wiener roast in early May (see page 3 Upcoming Events for details).

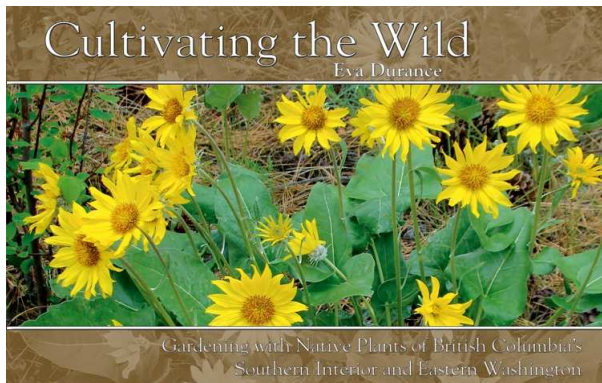


Upcoming Events

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

Thursday 19 April 2012, 7 PM in the NVIT lecture theatre: *Eva Durance: Gardening with native plants in the Southern Interior*

Eva Durance is a naturalist from the Okanagan with a reputation as a birder, wildflower expert and gardener. She has recently published a book on gardening with wildflowers and will share her knowledge and enthusiasm – just in time for the gardening season! Eva will bring copies of her book to sell (\$23 – no HST) and autograph. This will be our final evening presentation for this season.



Eva Durance's new book

Saturday 21 April 2012, 1 PM at NVIT: *Global Positioning System (GPS) introductory workshop with Murphy Shewchuk.*

This hands-on workshop will cover the basics of using a GPS, with a classroom session at NVIT followed by some field practice in the local area. Murphy Shewchuk has relied on GPS for many years in his outdoor work and in gathering material for his many books.

Bring your own GPS if you have one. The society owns 3 units which will be available for practicing. The workshop is especially aimed at volunteers in our amphibian monitoring project, but all members can attend for free. Non-members are asked to donate \$10.



Please register for the workshop by phoning Alan at 250-378-2468 or e-mail nicolanaturalists@gmail.com.

Spring & Summer Field Outings

We are putting together a roster of field trips for the next few months. We will send out e-mails and post trip details on our website – **these are tentative dates and times.**

Sunday 6 May

Harmon Lake Interpretive Forest and wiener roast. Birding and wildflowers. Meet 10 AM at Harmon Lake on Kane Valley Road.

10-12 May

Amphibian monitoring. Visit by the Biolinx Environmental Research frog experts. Details to come

Monday 14 May

Douglas Lake Plateau grasslands. IBA site visit with Krista Englund, the BC coordinator for Important Bird Areas (IBAs). All welcome. Meet at 8 AM at the Civic Centre to carpool. Bring lunch and binoculars.

Saturday 9 June

Tunkwa & Leighton Lakes. Waterfowl, wildflowers and more.

14-16 June

Amphibian monitoring. Visit by the Biolinx Environmental Research frog experts. Details to come

Saturday 19 June

Another opportunity to visit the Douglas Lake Plateau grasslands. Meet at 8 AM at the Civic Centre to carpool. Bring lunch and binoculars.



Sagebrush Buttercup *Ranunculus glaberrimus* and bee.
Photo: © Murphy Shewchuk

Feature Species

Each newsletter features local wildlife or wildflower species. Please contribute photos and text!

Black Bear hibernation



Black Bear *Ursus americana* in the Merritt area. Photo: Gloria Brenner

Around this time of year bears are emerging from their winter dens, where they have been since the late fall. Although bears are often used as examples of hibernating mammals, they do not go into the same deep state of hibernation as many of the smaller chipmunks, marmots and ground squirrels. In these small mammals body temperatures drop from about 38°C to 5-10°C during hibernation and all bodily functions are barely ticking over.

Although they do not allow their body temperatures to drop quite so drastically (from about 37-38°C when normally active to 30-35°C when hibernating) bears' metabolism does change, and for the 6-7 months that they hibernate they do not eat, drink, urinate or defecate. They lose 30-40% of their body mass.

A recent study has shown that, although their bodily functions slow right down, hibernating bears have amazing capabilities to heal wounds that they might have incurred before settling into the den. Researchers in Minnesota who tracked and studied hibernating bears for 25 years found that black bears often entered their dens with infected or inflamed wounds from fights, accidents or encounters with hunters. During hibernation these wounds healed quite rapidly with little scarring. This result was unexpected, because healing is usually helped by increased blood flow and body temperature, exactly the opposite of what hibernating bears experience. Changes in the body chemistry of the bears related to the hibernating process are thought to promote healing (try pronouncing this one! - ursodeoxycholic acid). These results might have application in human medicine too.

For more on this story and links to the original research article: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/17404059>

Western Spring Beauty



Western Spring Beauty *Claytonia lanceolata*
Photo: © Murphy Shewchuk

As the snows recede we eagerly look for signs of spring flowering and this small perennial is often one of the first to flower. It is widely distributed from mid-elevation sagebrush and forests up to the treeline, and sometimes occurs in large patches. It can often be found flowering along the edges of melting snowbanks. The flowers are short-lived and the whole plant wilts once the seed capsules are formed.

There are several other members of the genus *Claytonia* commonly found in BC, including miner's lettuce *Claytonia perfoliata*. The Latin species name of the spring beauty, *lanceolata*, refers to its spear-shaped leaves.

The western spring beauty was an important plant to the First Nations people of the BC interior. It is sometimes known as "Indian Potato" because the underground corms taste like potatoes when cooked. Native people harvested these and sometimes stored them in pits – just like potatoes. In some areas they were cultivated to ensure a plentiful supply. The leaves too are edible and are a source of vitamin C, preventing scurvy.

Nicola Naturalist Society Contacts

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