

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



A DUTY TO CARE? - Rob Wilson

"Of this grassland that makes up the midriff of North America, somewhere between 75 and 99 percent has been ploughed under" (Trevor Herriot, "Grass, Sky, Song", 2009).

Recently, I attended a Saskatchewan Culture conference in Regina. A theme emerged from the four workshops I attended. Non-governmental agencies exist because people care and those who care want to work with others who care in order to do good. I am comforted in a thought that, for me, this describes The YFBTA.

From Trevor's book I learn of the work of American biologist (circa 1930), Aldo Leopold. "Leopold is perhaps most famous for his notion of a "land ethic", in which he argued that we must come to see the natural world as "a community to which we belong"" (pp. 31,32).

Many of us sense that we have a duty to care for the natural world. I hold this belief because it is apparent that human beings currently dominate most of the life forms of the planet and occupy most of the best living spaces. Many species have become extinct as a result of man's activities. Many species are threatened. The threats come from a number of



Scarlet Tanager

This photo of the Scarlet Tanager was reproduced from internet. Trevor Herriot believes that the bird seen by Brian and Elaine Tochor of Esterhazy, as reported in the September newsletter, was a variant of the Scarlet Tanager which is usually found in the southern USA. Trevor believes that they nest somewhere near Esterhazy in the oak woods of Qu'Appelle and its tributaries.

sources none more serious than the destruction of critical habitat. I believe in a duty to care because I believe that one should do good. There is something not good or not right in human induced extinction of life forms – even if they are forms, like mosquitoes, that humans don't like. I don't feel that humans, who err on occasion, with their imperfect understanding of the functioning of nature, should reduce the world's biodiversity. Humans of the future may regret deeply some of the current losses.

The removal, destruction and modification of our natural prairie continues. The decline of many species (admittedly, not all) also continues. Trevor Herriot reminds that such decline is nowhere greater than among our Saskatchewan grassland birds (eg. Sprague's pipit, Lark bunting, Baird's sparrow).

As Yorkton enjoys continued growth a number of new roads are planned. These will, of necessity, require the destruction of a few more wetlands on the outskirts of the city. We also witness a continuing decline in the number of places where our native plants can endure.

Inside this issue:

A Duty to Care ? Rob Wilson	1
Wing Tags and Knowledge Dr. Stuart Houston	2
Bird Anecdotes	3-4
Bird Rehabilitation and Monitoring	4-5
Birding by Water Ron and Gerri Knudsen	6

<http://www.yfbta.com>

What is needed at this time, I argue, is public policy which ensures REPLACEMENT of that which is destroyed. This needs to be done to ensure the protection and preservation of the little that remains.

I cannot, in conscience, ask a private landholder to be responsible for replacement or preservation of public spaces. I can, in conscience, ask this of my government. As land is sold to private interests, other land could, in a balanced way, be retained in a public trust with the goals of protection and preservation paramount. I can, in conscience, suggest that protection and preservation be considered as a cost of doing business. As additional land is acquired for commercial interests a duty of care could and should be applied.

Although I have tried, I have been unsuccessful in an attempt to find examples of government programs that are designed to increase the number of protected natural spaces in our area. As crown land is sold, is a duty of care passed to the new owner? Perhaps when land owned by a government is sold to a private interest the duty of care ceases to exist. One is most likely to purchase land in order to make money rather than to protect and preserve natural spaces and life forms for a collective benefit. Perhaps the duty of care is held collectively rather than individually?

What is sorely needed in our area is the political will to protect and preserve sufficient places and spaces to prevent further extinctions. While many will agree with the above statement there is scant evidence of such a will. We must all bear the responsibility for this. Politicians will surely respond to a public demanding specific action. As our native plants become more scarce and as some of our native species of insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and animals continue to decline in numbers perhaps we draw nearer to such a political will. I hope that if you agree with this viewpoint, you will further share your concern with a political representative of your choice. In such a manner humans can speak on behalf of the non-human life forms of our planet.

An example of the desired initiative is provided by The Saltcoats Community Regional Park Board. September 25, in a public ceremony, this board designated a part of the park as a protected area. This action was taken in response to expressed concerns about the decreasing abundance of native plants in the park area. Board representative, Grant McCallum signaled an intention to protect some additional areas in the future.

Further examples of caring and acting are provided in this newsletter. I hope that you will be inspired when you read the stories provided by Marge Wlock, Cindy and Len Smith, Jan Shadick and Bev Kirk.

YFBTA hopes that you will also be motivated to continue to support us in our efforts to educate and to advocate. By providing spaces we also provide reasons for tourists to visit our area. If you feel a duty to care, please act.

SIGHTING OF WING-TAGS ADDS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE : Dr. Stuart Houston

Photo by Rob Wilson



A century ago, Turkey Vultures were rare in Saskatchewan. Breeding birds used caves along river banks and in the "badlands" of the Big Muddy and Cypress Hills.

Since vultures learned to use cave-substitutes in deserted farm buildings, aided by increasing availability of roadkills, their numbers have increased exponentially since 1982. They have spread across the northern Parkland and the southern edge of the Boreal Forest. Our Saskatchewan Turkey Vulture Tagging Program, unique in North America, began in 2003, with over 470 wing tags applied during the first seven years.

Of the 13 wing-tag sightings to date in 2009, five have been either in the Saltcoats to Dropmore area or at Greenwater Lake, the only places where more than one wing-tag has been sighted. George and Laurie Murray sighted T82 feeding on a dead calf 7 miles west and 2 miles north of Saltcoats on June 16, 38.6 km west of where it had been tagged as a nestling on 9 Aug. 2006; the same T82 was sighted a second time by Tim Wendell on rocks along the west side of the Assensippi dam on July 12, now 11.3 km from its original Dropmore nest site. Sitting on the rocks beside T82 at the dam was A62, tagged near Shellmouth on 11 Aug. 2007, only 2.5 km from where it hatched two years earlier. Two other vultures that day with wing tags went unread.

Don Forbes must be the leading Turkey Vulture nest finder on the continent; in both 2008 and 2009 he found ten active

nests, and both years 18 nestlings were tagged. [Brent Terry, Mike Blom and Marten Stoffel were the taggers on Aug. 6, 7 and 24 2008; Stoffel and Greg Fenty were the taggers on August 10 and 11, 2009]. A cluster of up to 30 vultures gathers to feed on dead fish at the Greenwater Lake Provincial Park sewage lagoon. In two years, four of these vultures have had their wing tags read by Don or Ernie Forbes. They had been raised in four different nest houses, three close by and one distant, three when two years of age, and one at three years of age:

T13, read July 19, 2008, tagged as a nestling 252.3 km west, Aug. 1, 2006;

T41, read August 17, 2008, tagged as a nestling 8.8 km south, August 4, 2006;

T37, read July 7, 2009, tagged as a nestling 14.2 km south, Aug. 4, 2006;

A20, read July 12, 2009, tagged as a nestling 19.0 km south, Aug. 2, 2007.

Thanks to the keen observers for reporting the above sightings. Please, all of you, look for a wing tag on every vulture you see!

Chimney Swifts in Saskatchewan ? Laurel McDonald

I am the coordinator of the Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative with Nature Manitoba. As you may know, the Chimney Swift was officially listed as threatened under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) this spring. We have been monitoring Chimney Swifts in Manitoba since 2007, and will be continuing this season. In addition, we are building nesting towers and researching critical nesting factors such as temperature. There are similar programs at work in Ontario, Quebec and several US States.

I am also keeping a database to keep track of Chimney Swift sightings in Manitoba. I've thought that it would make sense to include Saskatchewan in the database in order to get the big picture because as far as I know there is no similar program there.

I would appreciate if anyone on Saskatchewan would report such bird sightings to me.

Thanks so much. Laurel McDonald

Please email Laurel McDonald <laurelm25@hotmail.com> .

CARING AND ACTING

Act 1: Owl Assistance - Bev Kirk

WHAT IS THAT? I asked myself that question as I travelled on a grid road that connects with Highway 8 south of Langenburg. It was Saturday, August 15, 2009. I was on my way to my farm home. It was pouring rain, and I was meeting another car when I noticed a grey mound in the long grass on the side of the road. Being busy, I quickly forgot the incident.

That grid road is not my only route to town so I'm not sure when I saw the owl next. It seemed that every time I travelled that grid the owl was sitting in the roadside grass, usually only a couple of feet from the gravel. Sometimes it was on the north side of the road, sometimes on the south side. It seemed to range approximately a kilometer from the usual spot. One day I noted that the roadside grass had been cut yet the owl continued to be seen in its usual spots, unmoving and unflinching as traffic passed. Sometimes its eyes were closed but often they were open.

The owl continued to be a regular sighting. I saw the owl each time I drove that route. My husband and my sister-in-law also saw it regularly. By September 10, we were all starting to worry about the owl. It didn't fly yet it didn't seem to be unhealthy. We were worried on behalf of the owl about the approach of colder weather. That day I resolved to do something about the situation.

I had read about the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association (YFBTA) in our local paper. September 10, I contacted YFBTA. I was advised to contact The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Saskatchewan (W.R.S.O.S.) I decided to drive to the owl's stretch of road to attempt to determine if it could fly. I stopped the car a short distance west of the owl. I got out of the car and cautiously tried to walk up to the bird. It was a little nervous, probably because it could see my shadow. Once I approached to approximately ten feet it would take funny, skipping, hopping steps and then fly a short distance. I changed my tactics. Returning to my car, I drove past the owl and then approached by foot from the east. This worked considerably better as the owl could not see my approaching shadow. With caution, I was able to approach to approximately a meter. The bird, about fourteen inches in height, was beautiful.

Its colour was grey with black markings. It had distinctive, widely spaced ear tufts. Its underside was a dappled white and tan with long, downy feathers on the legs. The eyes were a brilliant yellow green. It slowly swiveled its head to take a look at me. For a few seconds we stared at each other then it flew a short distance.

The bird didn't appear to be injured or sick. I resolved to leave it, drove home and telephoned the W.R.S.O.S. I left a message describing my concerns over the owl. Within thirty minutes I was contacted by a volunteer from W.R.S.O.S. She provided me with the name of a birds-of-prey rehabilitator for our area. I was advised to provide no food or water to the owl. The rehabilitator was quite certain that the owl's parent must be caring for it or the young bird would have died of starvation. He shared my surprise that the owl had not been taken by a predator. He advised to let nature take its course.

This story does not have a happy ending. I continued to see the owl in the usual spots until September 14. Two days after that we observed its body on the roadside of Highway 8, about a kilometer the usual spot. I assume that it wandered or flew that distance, landing on the much busier road.

We feel very badly about our owl. I wonder if we could have, or should have done something more. We have a very sensible neighbour who suggested that this particular owl was a "dud" and that it probably would not have survived despite any efforts on our part. Regardless, I will always remember the day I first looked into the owl's huge, bright eyes.

Act 2 : Hawk Assistance

My Husband and Nature-nut Wannabes

Cindy Smith



Juvenile Swainson's Hawk

Photo by Cindy Smith

My husband and nature-nut wannabes brought me a fledgling hawk in mid august. They found the hawk on the road, and as

it only rocked back and opened its beak when they approached it, they assumed it was injured. The hawk was easy to handle, which led me to believe it wasn't well, but after palpating all wing and leg bones, which was also eerily easy, I determined there were no breaks, and thought the best thing for it was to return it to where they picked it up, about 2 miles from our acreage. I assumed it had just fledged too early. A quick check in our Petersen's guide confirmed it was a fledgling Swainson's.

I drove back to release the bird, and I set it in a tree near where the boys had picked it up. I often ride that trail with my horse and see hawks soaring above the adjoining field.

Next morning I rode my horse over to see what had become of our feathery youngster. He was down again out of the tree. Again I easily picked him up, and this time he had flies on his head that he wasn't fighting. I knew he was weak. I hadn't brought a proper halter to tie my horse. I just threw her reins over a fence and went to untangle the talons from my sleeve and re-position the young hawk in the tree. This took a couple minutes, but I managed. When I turned around I saw the west end of my Paint Mare heading east without me. No amount of "Whoa, Jet" convinced her that she should stop and be caught so that I wouldn't have to walk home. In fact, once on the trail, she got a full sense of her freedom and picked up the pace for home. It was a long walk for me.

Later I rode back and the hawk was down again. This time I set him on a round bale. Drove back later with the car with some water and strips of steak. He very quickly realized there was food and drink and eagerly ate and drank everything, hopping toward me with his beak open for more.

By this time I knew the bird was not well, and I called my friend Rob who I knew would be interested. He called Janet and we arranged to give our friend a lift as far as Watrous the next day. As Janet instructed, I collected the hawk in a cardboard box, stopped feeding him steak and only gave him a weak sugar/water solution. It was evident that he was very thin and getting weaker.

He spent the night in our veranda in a box and the next day we drove him to Watrous, where Janet would pick him up and take him to the University.

Message from Jan Shadick **President of Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of** **Saskatchewan (WRSOS)**

As president of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Saskatchewan (WRSOS), I am privileged to meet many wonderful people while rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife. It was in this context that I met Rob Wilson and Cindy Smith in Watrous on August 21st.

Rob had contacted me about a young hawk that Cindy's husband found on the ground in the Saltcoats area. He generously agreed to drive as far as Watrous with the bird; from there I brought it on to Saskatoon.

This "passing of the bird" relay system is a common arrangement with our volunteers, serving as a means of transporting injured animals to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVN) in Saskatoon. Although WRSOS has identified "Target Vets" who will see wildlife in cities and towns around the province, there are not enough yet to cover all corners. Target Veterinarians will usually stabilize the animal and send it on to the WCVN for more intensive treatment.

Cindy had done a lovely job of feeding this hawk and keeping it stable for traveling. She had carefully placed it in a cardboard box lined with slip-resistant straw. I drove my precious cargo back to Saskatoon, being careful to minimize disturbance, i.e. not playing the radio, singing or otherwise exposing the bird to auditory stress. Although a hot day, I was also careful to not overuse the air conditioning, nor let the box overheat from the sun shining in the car windows.

While I take these actions for granted, our volunteers learn the rules of transporting wildlife at a Hotline Orientation offered by WRSOS. The Orientation is designed for volunteers who answer the Wildlife Hotline, so a wealth of information is packed into an hour presentation. For those who sign up for a shift on the Hotline, there is a manual to take home, and a list of many people to call for additional information.

I arrived at the WCVN and turned the hawk over to the wildlife veterinarians there after filling out a form and having to name the young hawk. My imagination is not what it used to be, so, in honour of Yorkton, I named the hawk "Yorkie". My apologies.

I received word initially that the hawk was very thin, but they did not see fractures or other obvious problems. The hawk was given fluids, food and a full assessment. I was optimistic until about 5 days later when I received an e-mail that he had been found on the floor of his cage that morning. His body was sent for necropsy in hope of identifying the cause of death.

In late September I received a copy of the necropsy report. Results indicated that the hawk was malnourished, had a phenomenal number of parasites and was anemic. Which problem came first is the million-dollar question. Did he become malnourished because of the parasite load, or did the parasites flourish because he was unable to adequately feed himself? We'll never have the answer to that question. Many young animals die during the weaning stage as they are

learning to feed themselves, perhaps not finding enough food, or becoming prey while still learning survival skills.

Those animals found by people before succumbing to their wounds or to starvation can be "over-wintered" by licensed rehabilitators, then released in the spring with stronger survival skills and when Mother Nature is more forgiving.

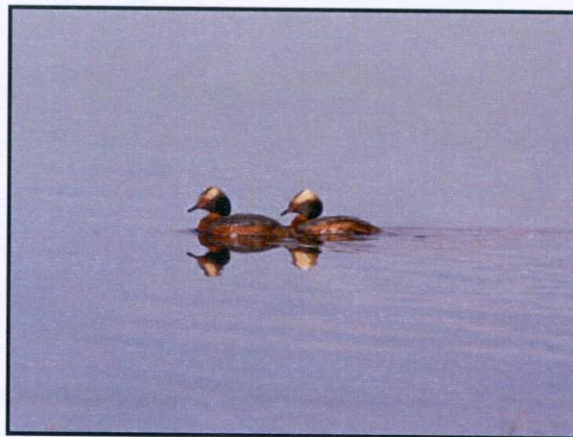
Should you find an injured or orphaned animal, call the WRSOS Wildlife Hotline at (306) 242-7177. A trained volunteer can help you sort out the best response for the animal's welfare.

A big Thank You to Rob and Cindy and everyone who supports Saskatchewan Wildlife!!

For more information about WRSOS, visit our website:
<http://www.wrsos.org>

Jan Shadick
President, WRSOS
(306) 652-5975

Prairie and Parkland Marsh Monitoring Program - Katherine Brewster



Horned Grebes
Photo by John Conkin

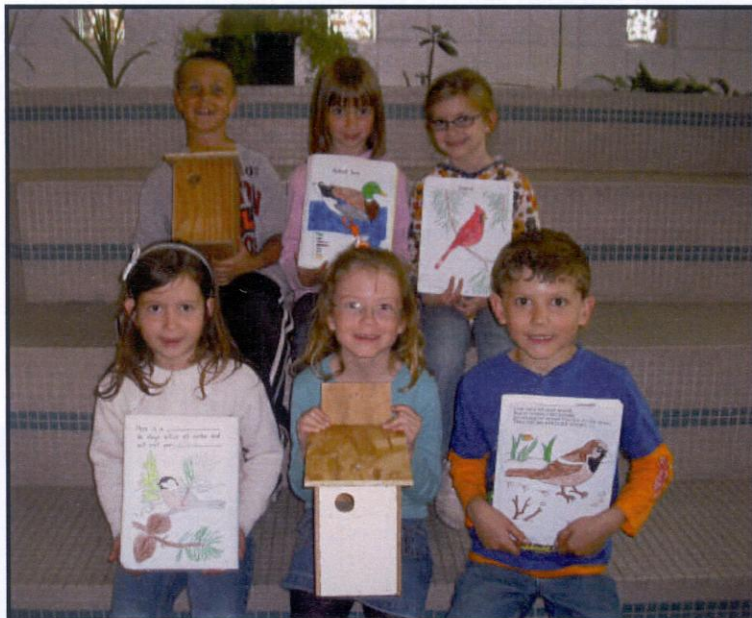
The Prairie and Parkland Marsh Monitoring Program (PPMMP), which began in 2008, is one of Bird Studies Canada's (BSC) newest regional programs. Current information on species distribution and habitat associations is limited for several marsh bird species, but existing information suggests that some populations of these birds have declined in North America.

The focus of the PPMMP is to better understand the link between marsh birds and habitats that they occupy during the

breeding season. During 2008, 139 survey sites were established in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

In 2009, the program expanded to Manitoba and now monitors more than 500 sites within the three Prairie Provinces. There are still large gaps in geographic coverage and it is necessary that these gaps are filled to improve our understanding of the current state of marsh birds: to do this we need your help! BSC has inactive study areas within the YFBTA region and we issue a challenge to the YFBTA to help monitor these areas beginning spring/summer 2010. An interest in birds and a commitment of about 12-hours per year is all that is required for someone to make a direct contribution to the conservation of marsh birds.

Please contact Katherine Brewster at prairieprograms@birdscanada.org or 1-306-249-2894 for more information.



Grade 1 Students at M.C. Knoll School

In grade 1W at M.C. Knoll School in Yorkton, we are studying about the birds in our area. Students are learning how to spot and identify local bird species. We have read books, watched videos and coloured pictures to become aware of what birds might be spotted and observed. Students have become "Bird Watchers" as they eagerly report sightings in their backyards or in their travels.

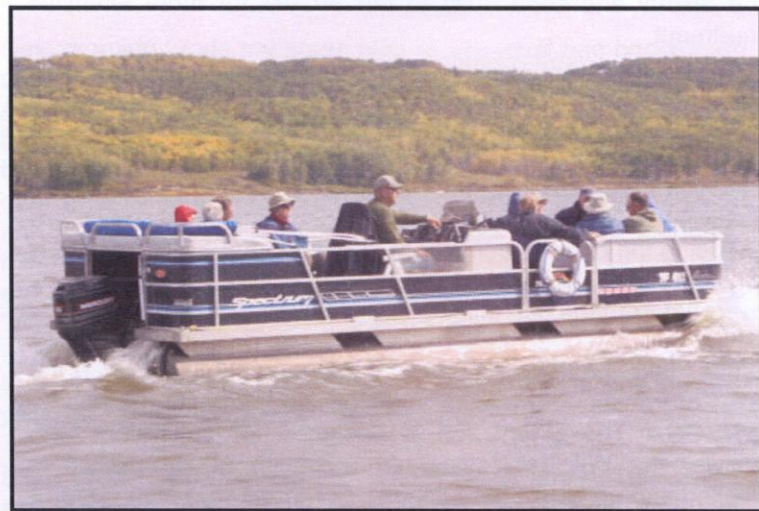
I feel this is a very important part of the Science Curriculum as it allows the students to connect with the bird species. Hopefully, the children will become increasingly alert and aware of their surroundings as they learn to appreciate nature

in their neighbourhoods. Our June project is painting wooden birdhouses for Father's Day in anticipation that they will attract more birds to our backyards.

Submitted by
Mrs. Marg Wlock
M.C. Knoll School

Birding by Water

Ron and Gerri Knudsen



Boat Tour of Assiniboine River

The boat was operated by Phil Devos of Yorkton.

Photo by Rob Wilson.

Saturday September 26th was a fine sunny fall day, warm with a breeze. Thirty one Nature Sask Fall Meet (hosted by the YFBTA) participants boarded a bus driven by Curtis Maleschuk from Saltcoats at 8:30 am for a trip to the Assiniboine River Valley south of Roblin MB. The trip was through mainly marshland and many of the wetland areas designated as Ducks Unlimited waterfowl protection sites. The bus trip was about one hour to the Pyott campground with a brief walkabout there prior to boarding three pontoon style boats for the trip up river birding along the shoreline. The boats were provided and piloted by Del Andres, Phil DeVos and Chris Thorvaldson. They pointed out many of the features of the waterway to the participants.

We saw immature Bald Eagles, loons, Western Grebes, Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron, geese, ospreys, and of course many coots along the way to Ricker's campground where we were served a fine lunch. We boated back to the Pyott

campground after lunch. Although the wind had come up somewhat, there were still many waterfowl such as cormorants and coots on the water. There was a noticeable absence of shorebirds that day but we heard jays and songbirds from the boats.

We boarded the bus again and went down the valley to the dam-site to see the project that had created this massive reservoir before meandering our way back across the farmland and marshlands toward Saltcoats. We had time to stop at Sloughview to admire the transformation of the land that John Sawkey had returned to nature over the past 20 years. The trip finished up at 5:00pm at the dedication of the land in the Saltcoats Regional Park set aside for the preservation of natural plants named in honour of Jim and Shirley Jowsey for their work in researching and publishing the resource material on natural plants in this area.



People who were on the tour boat operated by Chris Thorvaldson of Bredenburg - Photo by Rob Wilson



Bill McKenzie spotted and photographed this eagle.

We Need To Preserve Nature In Its Natural State

Paula Maier

We have all driven or walked along a prairie side road and noticed the flowers blooming there, maybe yellow lady slippers or brown-eyed susans or golden rods, depending on the season. Maybe we have admired the diversity of the trees and shrubs like aspen, red osier dogwood and hawthorn with scented blooms in the spring and bright red berries in the fall. Or we have noticed an oriole's nest woven into a tree branch, observed deer tiptoeing across or even had a skunk cross our path. These lovely spaces are often the only "wild" spaces for native plants and animals to thrive in the area.. But even these spaces are in jeopardy of human encroachment.

Fields have been expanded into these ditches and lanes left as dirt paths for many years are upgraded and trees pushed down to accommodate larger farm equipment. This is not crown land. It is not under provincial jurisdiction. It is under the umbrella of the local municipalities, Department of Highways and towns and villages.

Every municipality has their own view of how these areas should be managed. Some have bylaws to attempt to curb degradation by fining those who cultivate this land. This is not an easy process and usually the damage has already been done. Other municipalities have no bylaws and have taken no steps to preserve these areas. It is a complicated business and we cannot pick on the farming community. The fact is that farming machinery will not fit down the narrow treed lanes any more and with the narrow margin of profit, farming the ditch can be justified as a means to up the ante a bit. That being said, there are far too few places left for native plants and animals to make their homes. These roadways and ditches were never designated to be nature preserves, but that is what they have become.

What can we do? We can encourage the farmers we know who do not encroach upon these areas. Can we educate those who do? Maybe we can, for example, speak to our local reeves and councilors of our concerns and show them of other ways these areas can be used as nature trails for urban folk who need a dose of green space. It is interesting to note that the older the ditch is the more the native species return. These are important areas to try to preserve as part of the larger picture of restoring and retaining the little of the magnificent prairie that once was.

Tour of the Kaposvar Birding Trails

Judy Parker

The day was sunny with just a hint of fall when we started our tour of the Kaposvar Birding Trails. The trails wind through the creek and up the hillsides for approximately two kilometers.

We ate our lunch on the outdoor patio of the Esterhazy Golf Clubhouse. We enjoyed our soup, sandwiches and good

conversations, but the binoculars were never far from fingertips, just in case something caught the eye across the valley. Sharon has promised to share her recipes for her Three Root Soup and Potato Leek soup.

After lunch, we toured the Esterhazy Flour Mill, Sask Potash Interpretive Centre and Community Museum, all clustered in the Historical Park. Our guides were very knowledgeable and pleased to give as much information as time permitted. The mill was built in 1907 and became a National Heritage Site this year. The potash centre is the only one of its kind in Western Canada and possibly in all of Canada. We stopped for coffee at the museum. We walked around, coffee in hand, going through the rooms displaying artifacts supporting different themes, dining room, kitchen and more rooms upstairs.

It was a day of good weather, good conversations and good memories.



YFBTA FUNDRAISERS

Ann Tatham celebrating her 88th birthday on October 11. Her daughters - L: Barbara Herman and R: Mary Tatham.

Photo by Anne Sawkey

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The Last Word

On behalf of the YFBTA, I would like to thank Ann Tatham of Churchbridge, Barbara Herman from Saskatoon and Mary Tatham, CEO of Richlu (clothing) Manufacturing in Winnipeg, who have made outstanding contributions to the Yellowhead birding group for a number of years. Ann created colorful afghans which have been raffled during the past three years. Barbara and Ann have also made attractive dish cloths, towels and similar items (in demand) which they sold in order to raise funds for the birding group. Mary Tatham and Richlu Manufacturing have made generous donations of clothing to be sold at the AGMs and Bird Symposiums. As a result several hundred dollars have been raised each year to help fund the activities of YFBTA. Their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Saltcoats hosted the Nature Sask Conference on September 25 – 27. Fortunately the weather was excellent during the conference and made the tours more enjoyable. The tours included Cherrydale Golf Course and Nature Trail, Slough View Park. Kaposvar and Lefly Birding Trail. I was impressed by the nature of people attending this conference and taking part in these tours. They were delightful and considerate individuals. Those who visited the Sawkey Bird and Nature Trail were indeed a great pleasure to meet. I will never forget those who visited our nature park in 2009. Visitors are always welcome to visit our trails and yard site - weather and conditions permitting.

I was very impressed by the quality of articles and photos received and published in our newsletters. We try to publish all - if room permits. A number of unpublished articles and photos will be posted on our website. All contributions are welcome.

We will publish our next newsletter in 2010 which will include information regarding dates and locations of the AGM and Bird Symposium. Changes are being made. In the meantime - the best to all. Keep in touch. Thanks for your emails, letters, cards and phone calls. *Please: Don't forget to renew your membership or feed the birds.* **John Sawkey**

Memberships and Renewals

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