

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



Editorial: Beyond Gratitude

While progressing through recent and continuing months of uncertainty I have, in an effort to improve my health, chosen to adjust my mental state. This adjustment includes an ongoing effort to be "present" (with thoughts and with my physical environment). I strive to be more "mindful" (focused and aware). I am currently able to restrict the topics that I mentally process during a given day. I continuously contemplate personal priorities. I also reflect upon personal values. This evolving mental state I frame within a determination to live "one day at a time". I try to have my actions throughout each day, aligned with and in agreement with my values. At moments when I believe some of these aspects to be "achieved" I experience, to varying extents, serenity and a sense of well-being.

Covid times and family matters have directed me to create lists – the first is a list of that which has, in the past year, been lost. The second is a list of what remains – what I still have. The first list I choose to banish from daily thoughts.

I choose to focus upon the second list. Such a focus inevitably brings me to gratitude. "Travelling" within a psychological ether of gratitude enhances the afore-mentioned sense of well-being.

Additional psychological benefits may be attained by further immersion – physical immersion into the out-of-doors, where one can experience nature. "Spending time outdoors sparks understanding, enjoyment and curiosity... Learning outdoors ... plays an important role in helping to develop personal and social skills, maintain health and well-being and providing inspiration for creativity..." (*New Scientist* January 09-15; 2021:p.21).

White-winged Crossbill



Photo: Bas Hobson

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Nature may provide opportunities to act, to assist, to sustain and/or to support. We can support with individual actions. We can support by developing an awareness which well may lead to appreciation. We can support by "walking with our wallets". We can support by sustaining some creature or plant on some part of our private property. In a time of biodiversity crisis, no positive action is too small to be of value.

If a waterway crosses your property or one runs adjacent to that property, biodiversity can be sustained by your determination to allow nature to vegetate along both edges of that water course thus buffering and filtering substances that might otherwise enter the water.

We can support nature through community - working with like-minded people to achieve shared goals. A community action may exist in many forms. It may be a shared action with neighbours. It may involve you choosing to "be part of a solution". Such a solution may be one proposed by urban or rural administrative actions (sports group, youth group, church group, park board, trail committee). A program of the Government of Saskatchewan (grant application, participation in Arbour Day initiative) may provide opportunity.

Be a decent human being. Be a good person. Be part of a solution. Do something for others (the "other" can be non-human). These "B"s can be keys to personal well-being.

Scientific research suggests that our brains are "wired" to connect our emotions to those things in our immediate environment that provide our needs and that enhance our safety. Caring for our emotions by caring about our environment can be good for us, psychologically. Taking physical action provides exercise which is, in all of its forms, hugely beneficial to our health.

Be grateful for what we HAVE. In these times of Covid-loss, nature is an entity that remains. We can "dig down" into this gratitude file. When we contemplate what we, as individuals, may do to give back to nature we might find joy. Such a psychological act of giving can make us feel good.

Through pursuit of curiosity and knowledge, we can help ourselves. If we can find our passion... if we focus on caring, we can help ourselves. We can couple these personal benefits with gratitude.

Surely we can go beyond gratitude with action. Wouldn't it be a good thing to share some of our passions and some of our actions with nature?

Editor's note: Grizzly but bearable
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQLNFvrTV-Y>

Arbour Day and Trees have Value

Honourable Warren Kaeding-Minister of Environment

Growing up on the family farm, my father taught me about the value of trees. He taught me to appreciate the nature around us. We utilized the shade they provided, the fruit they bore and the offered protection from the elements. I helped him plant about 20 acres of trees, including a small orchard. The small forest (below) remains today as a legacy to his appreciation of trees in our ecosystem.



I value Arbour Day and Week in Saskatchewan. I recognize it as an opportunity to refocus on nature. It can also provide an opportunity to work with youth helping them to understand the value of trees and informing them of ways that trees play a role in improving environments in Saskatchewan and around the world.

Trees serve as a reminder of the past and of the future. A tradition, centering on Arbour Day, has been to plant a tree in honour of and in remembrance of a loved one. As a grandfather, I hope to share these sentiments and traditions with my grandchildren in years to come.

Fact: In 1988 the White (or Paper) Birch was adopted as the official tree of our province. It is a species that can be found anywhere in our vast province.

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to stewardship and responsible development of our province's natural resources. How we grow our crops, harvest our forests, and protect our vital water systems is critically important as we prepare for, respond to and adapt to a changing climate.

Prairie Resilience: A Made in Saskatchewan Climate Change Strategy is a document designed to explain plans to make the province more resilient to those climactic, economic and policy impacts that the Government of Saskatchewan anticipates as part of this change.

Every year 12.5 million tonnes of carbon are stored in the province's soils and forests. A nature-based solution, like planting trees, is an important tool to combat the effects of a changing climate.

SaskPower has been an active participant in the cultivation of trees to be planted in the province. These trees are grown at their Shand Greenhouse. The greenhouse uses waste heat from its nearby power stations to grow various seedlings for which organizations and members of the public can apply, on an annual basis. To date that greenhouse has produced and distributed over 12.5 million seedlings.

I share a quote written by Lucy Lacombe; "He who plants a tree, plants a hope."

Thank you to all those who take the time to plant hope for the future.

B.I.R.D.S

Copied, with permission, from a
Saskatoon Nature Society newsletter

Birds In Real Danger, Saskatoon (B.I.R.D.S.)

BIRDS grew out of a communal desire to protect our feathered friends,. It became a partnership among the Saskatoon Nature Society, Wild Birds Unlimited, Saskatchewan Light Pollution Abatement Committee and Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation.

We are all passionate about birds and recognize the threats to birds from flying into glass structures. Over 699 million birds are killed by glass in North America each year according to the FLAP Canada.

BIRDS has been actively advocating for bird safety since its inception. We have a 6 foot banner that attracts attention at community events and encourages conversation and awareness of the problem and possible solutions. This banner is on display at Beaver Creek when not otherwise in use.

Jan Shadick gave a well-attended presentation about bird collisions at Gardenscape. She may give additional presentations. All partners have attended City meetings and advocated for implementation of bird-friendly building guidelines.

Progress has been positive! The City of Saskatoon, the University, and Meewasin Valley Authority (MVA) have taken steps to implement some of the ideas and suggestions from the Director of FLAP (Michael Mesure).

1. The University has added "Dots" to windows on new overhead walkways to reduce bird collisions.
2. MVA has placed "dots" on their windows at Beaver Creek, and has plans to place them on their downtown office building. They have also included a more rigorous assessment of buildings for bird-friendly design during their review process.
3. The City of Saskatoon has begun to develop Bird-Friendly Building Guidelines in accordance with recommendations from FLAP. After consulting with LSWR, FLAP and other partners, they are publishing a Healthy Yards pamphlet with tips for homeowners to help protect birds from collisions with glass. It will be ready for visitors to Gardenscape and will later be distributed as an electric bill insert throughout the city.

Never in our wildest dreams did we believe that we could make such a significant difference in community attitudes within such a short time span.



Brown Creeper



Photo : YFBTA member Rob Wilson

The Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas

LeeAnn Latremouille

Breeding Bird Atlases are large-scale projects to document nesting birds within a given region. They provide insight into the status and distribution of birds. These projects point to changes over time. Atlases are five-year projects set to repeat at twenty year intervals. They rely heavily on a network of volunteers to collect checklists and to provide point count data from within 10 x 10 km squares across a jurisdiction. The results of modern atlases are published in open-access comprehensive digital accounts creating an invaluable resource for the public, governments, conservation organizations and industry.



Photo: Lee Ann Latremouille

Saskatchewan's first Breeding Bird Atlas began in 2017 and to date participants have spent over 13,800 hours collecting 21,964 checklists and 12,038 point counts from 2,593 atlas squares. While atlassing was limited to the southern portions of the province and the southern boreal in 2020, the fourth season of data collection for the Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas was nevertheless successful. By late May the province opened up such that participants were free to get outside and explore their surroundings. Many find comfort and rejuvenation in a connection with nature and we were happy to see folks getting outdoors! Health restrictions meant that we saw a reduction in the number of active participants, several of whom would have normally come from out-of-province as volunteers or seasonal staff.

Despite these challenges, atlassers spent more than 2,600 hours collecting checklists and it was a record year for the point counting effort in the south with over 3,500 completed - a 60% increase over the previous three years! Highlights from the summer include confirmed breeding records for three notable species: Sage Thrasher, Bullock's Oriole, and Cordilleran Flycatcher. See our latest newsletter for more details.

In years past the YFBTA membership has come together to view Square Blitz Priority atlas squares in need of observation. This is a boon to reaching our coverage goals in the region. With the point count effort nearly complete in priority squares in the area, many squares are still in need of shoring up on the general atlassing effort. Contact Regional Coordinators or view the coverage map on the website to see where your birding can have the most impact.

Although the delivery of in-person workshops was halted in the spring, it did provide the impetus to adapt our workshop materials so that they could be delivered in an online medium. The beginner bird identification webinars and intermediate videos have allowed us to share knowledge with a larger audience than was possible before; a silver lining for which to be grateful. Our aim for the leadup to the 2021 atlassing season will be to guide small groups on bird walks, to hone identification skills and to introduce atlassing methods.

Thank you to all our volunteers and then supporters who make this project possible. Visit our website at sk.birdatlas.ca to learn more and to view newsletters, coverage and species distribution maps, bird identification training videos, and much more.



"By rights, we humans ought to live in constant wonderment, amazed by every star, cloud, tree, leaf, feather, fish and rock (Candace Savage; *Curious by Nature*; p. 95. ISBN 1-55365-092-1).

Editor's note: I agree whole-heartedly with Candace. Amazement can be a joyful emotion, something that may trigger gratitude.

YFBTA thanks City of Yorkton Community Grant

Chicken Romance on the Prairie

Joe Schmutz

With the warmer weather of March around the corner, it's not just the air that will heat up. Male Sharp-tailed Grouse, Saskatchewan's provincial birds, will come to their traditional dancing grounds atop a grassy hill and defend a tiny territory of a few square metres hoping to be selected by several of the females that visit these grounds later in Spring.

The males strut with their feet in a dance that has been copied by First Nation ceremonial dancers. The grouse will hold their bodies horizontally, drop their wings, expose their bright yellow ceres over their eyes and puff out their purple air sacs to give a cooing sound heard for hundreds of meters. They also erect their grey and white tails showing off the tips of their two central tail feathers, hence the name "Sharp-tailed" Grouse.

The actual Prairie Chicken of the mid-western U.S. has a rounded tail. Prairie Chicken have been spotted in southern Saskatchewan only a few times and not in recent years.

Ours are the Sharp-tailed Grouse that are widespread on the prairies. They can be found also in pockets in Ontario, the Yukon and BC.

My partner, Ken Belcher, and I have been counting grouse on dancing grounds in the Biggar and Perdue community pastures and adjacent Hunter lease for 7 years, on 14 grounds in total. We try to arrive before sunup, get on our Honda motorcycles and visit each ground. We first stop at a distance, count what we can see, then drive up to the ground and again count the number of birds that fly away. Often the grouse fly back within minutes, sometimes while we are still busy stepping out the size of the ground and taking a GPS location.

The grounds are round or oval from 20 to 80 meters across. Grass on top of a hill is normally short and the grouse shorten it more by the trampling it for days on end. There are droppings scattered everywhere, proof of the many hours spent. A male does not want to miss a day's attendance because it is harder to regain a temporarily vacated territory than to claim it day-in-and-day-out. Invariably there are feathers, tell-tale sign of the serious business of cock fights to keep the neighbours in line. It is the females who are in charge.



Male Sharp-tailed Grouse displaying on a Biggar Co-op Pasture dancing ground on 6 May 2017. Photo Joe Schmutz

Photo: Joe Schmutz

When their time comes, they visit the edges of the grounds to size up the situation. Eventually they select a male to mate with, typically in one of the central territories. The theory is that these central males are healthiest and most vigorous and more often than not have equally healthy and vigorous offspring.

A female will mate with one or more males over several days, making sure that each of the dozen or so eggs in a clutch is fertilized before it is laid.

The location of the dancing ground is amazingly constant from year to year. A ground is visited by males as long as females come to it. Females tend to nest within 2 km of their chosen ground but only so long as they can find the mix of habitat they need to: hide their nest for three weeks of incubation, have adequate insect numbers within walking distance for their chicks, have a mix of open grass where grasshoppers hatch and dense grass where chicks can scatter and hide from predators. Finally, in the tall and dense shrubs like Saskatoons, chokecherry and hawthorn, a hen can brood her young for the hours it takes to ride out the dangerous wet and cold summer weather which we occasionally get on the prairies.

The community pastures and lease land we visited to count grouse must be providing this kind of needed habitat. During the seven years of counting so far, we found a total of 14 grounds. During the first years of searching we found two grounds and were told of or discovered additional locations gradually. Despite continuing searches, listening and scanning with binoculars, we have not added new grounds in recent years. This suggests that we've found most or all of the grounds present in the three areas. The nine dancing grounds on the 29 km² Perdue community pasture translate to 1 dancing ground for every 3.2 km². This is a very respectable density of grounds.

Over the years, we counted from 1– 33 grouse on a dancing ground. Taking an average of grouse counted on all grounds visited in one year and plotting this average over the seven years of counting suggests stability in numbers.

Frogs of Special Interest YFBTA member LaVaughn Duxbury

Leopard Frogs are found throughout the U.S. and Canada. There are three populations of these frogs in Canada. The population which ranges throughout Saskatchewan is the Western Boreal/Prairie population. This population has been listed under COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada), an agency of Environment Canada, as a species of special concern.

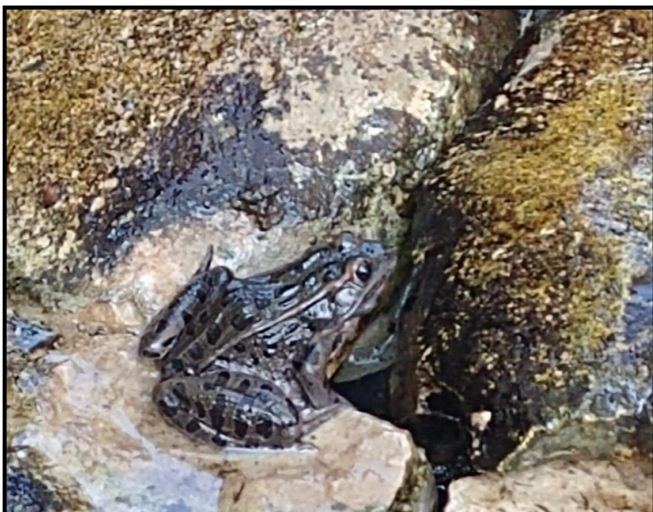


Photo: YFBTA member LaVaughn Duxbury

Leopard Frogs are found in woody, marshy areas where they are active day and night. They eat worms, other frogs, mice and on occasion may eat fruit. With assistance and some care, they can be sustained in one's yard.

They are important in science studies. If stressed, this species does not excrete from its skin as some frogs do. However one should always wash one's hands after handling frogs as they can be carriers of diseases that can affect humans.

Females mature in 1-2 years whereas males take 2-3 years to reach maturity. Their life span can be 5-8 years if it is not shortened by predators such as skunks, hawks and a number of other small animals.

Hibernation is initiated in October or November in soft mud in ponds, dug-outs and/or lakes. Emergence from hibernation in March (or as weather permits) triggers sexual activity. Females can produce 500 - 1 000 eggs which a male will promptly cover with sperm. Depending upon weather conditions, these may hatch anytime within the following 2-17 days.

In October, 2020 I discovered the photographed Leopard Frog in my fish pond. After some research and some sympathy regarding rapidly approaching winter I transported this frog-in-distress to a near-by dugout where, after boring a hole in the ice, I released it.

That part of the rescue turned into quite an adventure but that is another article.

Editor's note: Migration Can Be Deadly

It is not only human migration that may be fraught with danger.

The complexity of nature astounds me. In this instance my astonishment is tinged with sadness.

<https://www.wired.com/story/whats-causing-the-mass-bird-die-off-in-the-southwest/>

Young Writers' Corner

Bird Watching

Mylo Murray Age: 9

My interest in birdwatching started last spring when the pandemic started. I bought a couple of bird books, my favourite being *Birds of Canada* by David Bird.

When I got home with my first bird book, I went onto my back deck to look for birds and saw an American Robin. At first, I did not know what it was but then my mom said it might be a Robin, so I checked my bird book and I found it and crossed it off.

I like crossing birds off that I find. I found my first Chickadee in the summer when I was camping at Kenosee.

The Black-capped Chickadee is the most widespread chickadee in North America. I have found out that this bird likes peanut butter and can be fed off my hand. The Black-capped Chickadee can be seen everywhere in Saskatchewan all year. When I found my first chickadee it was right when I got to the campsite and I was so excited.

When I was on a walk on a path across from my Grammy's camper, I also saw a woodpecker in a tree, and it was a baby woodpecker but I did not know what kind it was.

In the summer I was really into birds and I went on lots of walks down by a creek near my house and I saw lots of blackbirds, killdeers, ducks, geese, swallows and other tiny birds. I also went on walks on a path in between my house and the creek. It had trees that woodpeckers would go in and there were also chickadees and lots of sparrows and magpies. It also had rabbits that my dogs would bark at.

The reason I got into birds in the first place was because I thought they looked cool and I liked watching them fly and I liked their bird calls. The bird that got me into birding was the Black-billed Magpie.

There were two magpies, and it was at the path between my house and the creek. We also put bird feeders in my backyard. Blackbirds and sparrows and robins started coming.

Later in the summer the blackbirds left leaving just the sparrows and robins.

A robin then had a nest in our shed. Sparrows kept going in but luckily the robins survived and moved south for winter and then it was just sparrows left because they do not migrate.

After, Dark-eyed Juncos moved in but later they moved out and I thought I knew why. I thought that the sparrows scared them out because the sparrows are mean. They might have wanted the food for themselves but that might not be the reason.

Up until this day the sparrows still have the food for themselves, even though I want chickadees instead of them.

I would never tell them that. I am excited for more bird watching when spring arrives again!

Black-capped chickadee



Photo: Mylo Murray

What's Flying Around: Newsletter Group Volunteers

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Sightings:

Robin, Jan. 01; Feb. 22: Horned Larks, Jan. 04; Brown Creeper, Feb. 09; Female Goldfinch, Feb. 17; Great Gray Owl, Feb. 28: YFBTA member Rob Wilson at Saltcoats.

Bald Eagle, Jan. 18; Northern Shrike, Jan. 19; Feb. 21; Shevon Wilson at Saltcoats.

Pileated Woodpecker, Jan. 24; YFBTA members Jack and Jeannette Dawes at Saltcoats.

Four Dark-eyed Juncos, Feb. 02: Walter and Joan Farquharson at Saltcoats.

White-winged Crossbill: Feb. 03; Larry Folk at Madge Lake.

We MAY have spotted:

Townsend's Solitaire, Feb. 02; YFBTA members Walter and Joan Farquharson at Saltcoats.

Saw-whet Owl, Jan. 28; YFBTA members Rob and Wilson at Saltcoats.



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White Raven Submitted by Shevon Wilson

"The bird was spotted at Qualicum Beach. Mike Yipp says the mysterious white ravens are considered leucistic - not albino, which have no pigment at all. These ravens have blue eyes and likely have genetic defects that dilute their natural colour (taken from *"The Vancouver Sun"*).



Photo: Lisa Bell

A Bone to Pick

You might take interest in a video which explores a relationship existing among vultures and wolves.

Into your search engine, type "Bearded vulture/The Snow Wolf: A Winter's Tale".

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