

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

What's flying around....



Editorial: Nature offers Value

Value, according to one definition, is the measure of how strongly something is desired for its physical or moral beauty, usefulness or rarity. When I contemplate value, my mind pushes a default button causing it to bring forward a file labelled "money".

I frequently hear of a nature experience that was "awesome or "priceless" (which may imply one of two meanings, each contradicting the other). Economists who concern themselves with "capital" refer to nature's values as natural capital. I choose to focus on the "useful" aspect of the definition when thinking about nature and value.

Nature, whether observed, experienced or contemplated, is generally acknowledged to be good for one's physical and mental health. Nature can provide sources of joy, inspiration and hope.

Some writers in these Covid times, advise readers to care for others. Some also encourage extending that caring to Nature.

I have noted suggestions for readers to strive to incorporate ways of being - be good, be kind, be-have decently. Those who choose to attempt to achieve these ways of "being" inevitably reap joy. Joy is also found through sharing. Sharing connects us to others. Sharing can be fun and fun, in turn, brings joy.

Nature can be inspirational. Inspiration may be discovered with contemplation of migration. We cannot help but marvel at incredible annual journeys undertaken by many species of birds and animals. Who has not been inspired by the resiliency and determination exhibited by nesting birds when calamity strikes a nest or brood? In many instances the adults, perhaps re-locating, reinvigorate their efforts with renewed energy.

Chesnut-sided Warbler



Photo: YFBTA member Morley Maier

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These ways of being are beneficial when exemplified for children. Nature provides ample opportunities for discovery especially if encountered through first-hand experiences. Spending time outdoors sparks understanding and curiosity and it builds knowledge. These benefits may well result in children developing a passion for Nature.

I mentioned sharing. Sharing our first-hand experiences connects us to community. Community sharing may be by way of conversing writing, drawing and/or performing. Recipients of sharing may find a source of hope; hope stimulated by an "awareness" that was triggered by that shared joy.

I recently encountered the intriguing phrase "soft fascination." The conjecture is that while we are engaged with the experiencing and discovering of nature we don't have to concentrate on reduction of stress or fatigue. Those benefits will naturally occur as we focus on feeling and being "alive". While in nature we are continually reminded in a "soft-fascination" manner that other creatures are successfully persisting.

Perhaps nature is priceless-in both senses of the word. Nature provides value.

Benefits of membership

There are benefits associated with a YFBTA membership in addition to the newsletters (this is the second issue of 2021). Members receive invitations to "excursions" (usually initiated by active members). There are some social gatherings which inevitably include a sharing of recent "sightings" among like-minded persons. Occasionally educational programs are initiated. Members receive digital notifications of current organizational activities. Members have an opportunity to participate in citizen science by collecting data (that is contributed to a provincial coordinator) supporting an annual provincial Christmas Bird Count.

Please consider your continuing support of Nature and your support of YFBTA by renewing a membership or "gifting" a membership for 2022.

Care for Nature: Lights out for migrants

Stewardship actions: a welcome change.

<https://www.inquirer.com/science/climate/philadelphia-birds-lights-out-audubon-20210311.html>

Submitted by Shevon Wilson

A Most Unusual Sighting

Members Gerri and Ron Knudsen: and Donna Bradford

On Oct. 4th, 2021 local farmer, Randy Torrie, was cultivating some of the dried up pot holes on his land when he noticed this very different bird walking in the newly cultivated area feeding on turned up food.

He checked his bird books and identified it as a **Crested Caracara**, a bird that is native to Texas and Mexico.



He phoned YFBTA member, Arden Bradford, to come and check out this sighting. Arden and Donna Bradford, with Gerri and Ron Knudsen drove out the next morning and confirmed the sighting. Donna, with her excellent camera was able to get many photos of the bird.



I found an article that you might like: "Why some songbirds make migratory pit-stops to replace worn and ragged feathers" <https://theconversation.com/why-some-songbirds-make-migratory-pit-stops-to-replace-worn-and-ragged-feathers-156539>

Submitted by YFBTA member Kenn Wood

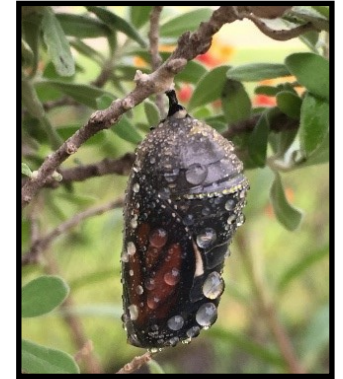
Monarch Musing

YFBTA members Cathy and Bob Brown

We can all rattle off the stages of the Monarch Butterfly: egg; larva; pupa; and adult... but to sit with a cup of coffee in the morning or a glass of Shiraz after dinner with some very interested neighbours and watch these stages happen in real time is awe-inspiring!

In early April, in central Texas, we noticed tiny caterpillars on our Butterfly Milkweed plant. We'd seen adult Monarchs on the plants days earlier but missed the egg stage as the eggs look just like tiny pinpoints of dirt. With many sets of eyes watching and counting we settled on 15 caterpillars on two plants.

That was a challenging count as they don't sit still for any reason. They were on a mission to eat themselves silly and eat they did! Within days they had eaten every single bit of leaf, tiny bite by tiny bite, until the plant was stripped of all green and we were left with short, brown twigs and the caterpillars had quadrupled in size! The caterpillars, one by one, (perhaps in birth order?) crawled down the stalks and inched away over mulch chips, rocks, twigs, and across a gravel driveway and found a variety of suitable spots to "hang out". We later found eight of them attached to: a brick wall; under a window; on the Texas Sage plants; on the underside of the cast iron planter and two who chose the undersides of the arms of our Adirondack chairs. The substance they attach to and hang from is amazing stuff. Our neighbour, Susan, is certain that the inventor who discovered "Super Glue" got the idea and recipe from a butterfly.



Over the course of about two hours the busy caterpillars expended a lot of energy curling into a circle, and wiggling and stretching and squirming their outer skin up and over their heads and pushing it off until it fell to the ground. It was amazing to see a tiny, light green Christmas bell hanging where moments before there had been a long, fat caterpillar.

After several days each chrysalis darkened and then amazingly changed again so that we could see the stripes and colours of the curled-up adult monarch through the membrane. I happened, quite by chance, to see one of the monarchs descend as the bottom of the chrysalis opened. It had started as a caterpillar and emerged as a fully formed but very short butterfly.

It stayed clinging to the chrysalis for a short hour or so. It was slowly stretching out to its full body length and just hanging out, although it did leave its chrysalis home and move to a nearby twig. It now began to open and close its wings to dry them and prepare for flight. Now this may be total coincidence (and according to my husband it was) BUT at this point a beautiful adult Monarch flew over to the newly emerged butterfly, not once, but several times, and then my Monarch lifted off and followed its guide across the street to a neighbour's fence.

The whole process took three weeks in the spring and it happened again for three weeks in the fall. Once flying about, the adult Monarchs fed voraciously on the flowers for days to gain strength for the long flights ahead. The spring-birth butterflies left for Canada and the fall batch left for Mexico with a grand farewell (well, adios!) from the neighbourhood (Okay, we saw no evidence to confirm their destinations.)

We found the mothers of all those eggs, exhausted and dying as their greatest mission in life had been accomplished.

We hope to see their offspring on our plants in the spring of 2020 continuing one of nature's amazing odysseys. Of the eleven caterpillars we watched we had five butterflies emerge.

It was a joyful few weeks studying this amazing transformation and I highly recommend watching *Butterfly TV*. Plant a couple of local milkweed plants and next spring keep your eyes peeled for these tiny creatures. They will take you on an adventure.



Photo : YFBTA members Cathy and Bob Brown

Trumpeter Swans at Madge Lake YFBTA member Bob Wynes

For an enthusiastic amateur bird watcher like myself, the excitement of sighting a rare species is only understood by other bird enthusiasts. It is like non-fishermen trying to understand why we fishermen will sit for hours in a boat or in the middle of a frozen lake waiting for that tug on the line.

The highlight of my birdwatching in recent years has undoubtedly been the frequent sightings of Trumpeter Swans at Madge Lake and other smaller waterbodies in Duck Mountain Provincial Park.

Trumpeter swans are truly magnificent birds. With an impressive wingspan of 84 – 96 inches, a neck length of 60 inches, and a weight of 21-30 pounds they are considerably larger than any other North American waterfowl. Their all white plumage also makes them distinctive in flight, lacking the black wing tips of pelicans or Snow Geese. The males are called cobs, the females called pens, and the young are called cygnets.

The cygnets are greyish colour when they are young, but become mostly white as they molt into their flight feathers by fall. Trumpeters will begin to pair up at about 3 years of age, but typically not nest until they are 4-6 years of age.

The only species with which Trumpeters can be confused is the Tundra Swan (formerly called Whistling Swan). Large numbers of Tundra Swans migrate through Saskatchewan in the spring and falls. Distinguishing the two species at a distance is difficult. The larger size of the Trumpeters, profile of the bill, lack of yellow patch on the bill are all helpful visual clues. What I find to be the most helpful distinguishing feature is the trumpeting call of the species for which they are aptly named. The iBird Canada app. on my iphone includes amazing quality bird calls which aids in positive identification of species.

The history of Trumpeter Swans in North America is tragic, and can only be compared to the demise of Bison. Trumpeter Swans share a remarkably similar, albeit less known, story to that of the Bison. The swan population was severely depleted by subsistence hunting and over 125 years of commercial swan skin harvest by hunters and trappers for the Hudson Bay Company. Many thousands of skins were shipped to Europe between 1772 and the late 1800's. Trumpeter swans which historically were widely distributed across North America, were extirpated from most of their range and on the brink of extinction.

Surveys done in 1929-32 in the United States accounted for less than 100 trumpeter swans and there was little hope for their continued existence. However, with increasing conservation efforts and more extensive surveys including Canada and Alaska, 1,914 birds were accounted for in 1959. 3,700 swans were accounted for in 1968. And an amazing 63,000 trumpeter swans were accounted for in 2015, with an equally impressive increase in distribution.

Although swans are still missing from two thirds of their original range, and are at a fraction of their historic populations, their story is a little known success story which deserves to be celebrated.

Early in my career while working in habitat protection with Alberta Fish and Wildlife in Grande Prairie, Trumpeter Swans had been one of our "focus" species.

It is gratifying to have the innovative, creative, and persistent international conservation efforts of many agencies, organizations, and individuals work for us and for them to reward us. I state this because we have these magnificent waterfowl on display "on our doorstep" at Madge Lake.



Photo: YFBTA MEMBER Bob Wynes

The Trumpeter Swan Society, based in Minnesota and founded in the mid-1960's, has a great website from which much of this information was drawn. (www.trumpeterswansociety.org).

If you want to know more about swans this is a great resource to visit (and perhaps consider membership in TTSS). Another great resource, despite being published 41 years ago, is a book by W.E. Banko entitled "The Trumpeter Swan".

Time to eat crow?

If seeing is believing you will see and believe that crows are intelligent. This video convinces your editor that crows possess memory and that they understand sequencing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbSu2PXOToc>

Could a crow, without understanding, be trained to solve the presented tasks?

Submitted by YFBTA member Betty Malo

Rescue- "Sky Puppies"

Jan Shadick

Bats have long suffered from bad press, and Covid-19 did not help. So, when Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation received almost 400 Big Brown Bats from the Unity rink, we were unsure how social media would respond. Thankfully, the Bat Love was overwhelming, and we are so grateful for the immensely supportive response from all across Canada and into the US. Bat researchers from all over weighed in on the situation and offered their assistance.

It began with a phone call from our "Bat Lady", Melanie Elliott, who is a bat rehabilitator in Saskatoon. Melanie has been doing this work for over 20 years and is wonderful with these little creatures. She had left town, and was not due back for another 6 weeks when she was notified by Dave at DTS Roofing that they had found a huge colony of bats, possibly thousands..... I am sure she dreaded the call to tell me the news. I just hoped Dave's prediction of numbers was off.

We spent the next few days preparing containers and checking temperatures in cold spaces where we could house them in hibernation. We rounded up some volunteers who had their pre-exposure rabies series and waited to hear from Dave. The call came in on Thursday that they had two tubs of bats and were bringing them in the next day. In the text on Friday morning he estimated between 200 to 400 bats.

We organized the room into a processing site with volunteers assigned to specific duties. One removed the bats, another weighed each, recorded the information, and passed it to a third for an exam and for removal of mites. Once a bat passed the exam, it went to the next station where it was given water. These little gems were very thirsty after three months of hibernating.

Although these bats are called Big Brown Bats, they weigh about 20g each. Our job was to decide if they were healthy enough to go straight back into hibernation. That decision was based on weight, hibernation considerations, and a lack of injuries.

If you can imagine being woken from a deep sleep and then placed into a fairly small space with many others, you might respond in a similarly grumpy manner.

In the fall, healthy hibernation weight is 18g, but we decided that 16g was our cut off since winter was already partly over. Boys went into one bin and females into another. Skinny or injured bats were placed into ice cream pails with a piece of screen and a towel on which they could hang. These we were going to have to feed, "building" them to hibernation weight over the coming weeks.

Four of us began at noon. We were grateful when more volunteer helpers came later in the day. We finished at 8 p.m. having worked continuously. I will remain indebted to those incredible volunteers for years to come.

A huge part of experienced exhaustion was the unknown. No one had ever done this before. There was no protocol to follow. We were breaking new ground; for ourselves, for Saskatchewan and for Canada.

The next day we began feeding the bats..... this entails weighing the bat so we have a starting daily weight, swaddling it in a warm towel, waiting for it to 'wake up' from it's torpor, and then endlessly stuffing mealworms into it until the bat ceases to feed (and has gained 3 to 4 grams).

We did this all week while the temperatures outside dropped to -40 degrees (which meant that Dave was not able to remove more bats). At the end of the second week, we got word that another 100 were on the way. By this point, we had all fallen in love with the bats. We were now infinitely more comfortable handling them, and, well, "only" 100 would be nothing.

Over the next couple weeks, we continued to receive smaller deliveries of bats, and continued feeding bats up to 7 hours a day. The final numbers topped out at about 600 live bats and around 70 DOA. We only lost one bat that upon arrival was alive but quite thin. We are proud of our accomplishment!

We were quite relieved when Dave said he had the final delivery of bats for us, and that the roofing project was done. We could now focus on "just" feeding 87 underweight bats. Thankfully it was Spring Break at the university and we had several veterinary students as well as veterinary technicians offering to help with feeding. The schedule was full that week, and we are so grateful to the many hands that quickly helped move a large number of bats from skinny to "fat enough for hibernation."

The number of helpers waned over the next 4 weeks as we kept plugging along sending more bats into hibernation each day or so. At the end, we had 3 or 4 dedicated individuals still hanging in there with us until the last bat was ready for his long sleep. We really cannot express our gratitude enough to honour those whose commitment brought them in every day for weeks on end.

Big Brown Bat



Photo: Dawn Erker

In the end we saved almost 600 bats who will go back to Unity when the mosquitoes are out in mid-May. They will have bat boxes for roosting, thanks to even more volunteers who have offered to help build boxes for them.

The Town of Unity was initially hesitant about having the bats back, so we are relieved that they have now embraced the bats as their own. Melanie, the bat rehabilitator will be spending time in Unity to decide on the best placement for the boxes, doing workshops with groups and families to build their own boxes, and providing information on sealing up entry ways if homeowners do not want the bats to move into their attics now that the arena is sealed up tight.

It has been an interesting journey, and we are the stronger for it. The best part has been the incredible ground swell of support for the bats, from individuals calling to have them released on their land, to others wanting to know how to build a box for them. Our "team" continues to experience love and joy at seeing 600 bats saved.

From BC to Alberta and all the way to Norway and Sweden, the bat community has marveled at this event, checked in with information and advice, and watched with mixed joy, envy, and concern at the process. Our little Saskatoon rehabilitation facility was the epicentre of something marvelous, and we are bursting with pride at our accomplishment.

Young Writers' Corner

Our Adventures at Nicolle Flats

Tyler Farquhar (9) and help from brother, Jack (11)

Our family started hiking to get out of the city to see nature and get fresh air. We decided to go Nicolle Flats (Buffalo Pound) because we had never been there. On the way to Nicolle Flats our Dad spotted a coyote in a field. It was really hard to see because he was camouflaged. When we got to a bridge, we looked out the window and saw a big flock of pelicans. We stopped to have a look. There were about 6 pelicans by the dam. Further down there were about 30 more pelicans. The pelicans by the dam were scooping up water with their bills. I think they were scooping up minnows. We enjoyed watching them. On water and on land they looked all white but when they were flying, the tips of their wings were black. Then we drove a tiny bit more to get to Nicolle Flats and started hiking. There was a boardwalk to look over a marsh to watch birds.



Photo: YFBTA member Lois Farquhar

We were excited about it but then we saw a sign that said "Closed due to low water levels". We kept on hiking. Then our dad said to stop and be quiet and pointed to a bird on the fence post.

It was a bluebird! It was bright blue and very pretty. We think we saw a female bluebird. It flew away when we got close to it.

We continued on our hike. We found a snake skin, cacti and crocuses. It was a very fun hike. I hope the boardwalk to the marsh is open soon. When we got home, we found out that the bluebird was a Mountain Bluebird. It was a male because the males are bright coloured and the females are dull gray-brown. I think they are gray-brown so they can hide easy. The pelicans were American White Pelicans. We can't wait to go back and next time we are going to take our binoculars.

Wilson's Warbler



Submitted by YFBTA member Morley Maier

Bearly Believable

Ken Lozinsky alerted us to this amazing story.

<https://jamesriverssmallmouth.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/bear-quints-once-in-a-lifetime-photo/>

Editor's note: I took the above link from an email sent to members of the Kelsey Ecological Society. Searching out the included photo will be worth your while.

A stabbing: documented in Texas

Photo: YFBTA member Susan Stevenson

**What's Flying Around: Newsletter Group Volunteers**

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Ruth Smith: Friend of the YFBTA

YFBTA member Carol Bolt

Ruth celebrated her 100th birthday in August. She is still keenly interested in education and young people. Because of her interest she has donated \$2000 to the YFBTA Summer Student Program.

Ruth was a teacher for many years and then she became head of library services for the Yorkton School Division. As a young person she was the typist for the first edition of *The Blue Jay*.

Isabel Priestly was a family friend who took Ruth's brother Harvey Beck, and his friend, Stuart Houston, under her wing as she was doing research. She encouraged their interest in the natural world. They spent many hours exploring Anderson Lake. Because of this Ruth donated a bench in Harvey's memory which was placed along the Leflay Trail.

Thank you Ruth. We are grateful.



Photo: Submitted by YFBTA member Carol Bolt

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