



The HONKER

Newsletter of the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club

Nov. 2012



Presenting our cheque to The Nature Conservancy of Canada. Photo by John Taylor

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Membership Renewal Time



South Okanagan Naturalists' Club
Mailing Address: PO Box 23050, Penticton, BC, V2A 8L7
Website: <http://southokanaganature.com>



Mission Statement:

"To provide a dynamic local focus for experiencing the natural world of B.C. and for promoting its conservation"

Membership: \$30 Individual \$40 Family (yearly - September to August)

• **Indoor meetings** are held on the 4th Thursday of the month, September to May (except for December) at 7:30 PM in the basement of the Penticton United Church, 696 Main Street (blue church on the corner of Main & Eckhardt). Please bring your own coffee mug --- New members always welcome.

• **Executive meetings** are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Please contact any Executive member if you wish to add an item to the agenda.

• **Our birding, wildflower, geology, social group** meets every Thursday in the north parking lot of Cherry Lane Mall (north of Warren Ave. and east of Atkinson St.) at 9:00 AM. Be prepared to car pool and offer a donation to the driver (see elsewhere in this issue). Trips range from 'car birding' to easy strolls to moderate hikes. Bring a lunch and dress for the weather. Everyone welcome! For more info, please contact Joyce Hoglund or Charmaine Foster.

• **Field Trips** are generally made in the spring and fall. A list of forthcoming trips will be placed in the Honker. Notify the trip leader of your intention to participate and inquire about trip duration, degree of difficulty and other requirements. Dress for the prevailing weather conditions, wear appropriate footwear, bring lunch and drinking water". Pets are NOT appropriate.

• BC Nature is our parent society. SONC is affiliated with Nature Canada & Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA)

Executive Officers:

President: Glenda Ross 250.493.7500 glendaross@shaw.ca
 Vice-President: Bob Handfield
 Past President: Bob Handfield 250.497.8702
bobnmaggie@shaw.ca
 Treasurer: Frank Focken ffocken@shaw.ca
 Secretary: Marlene Hikichi 250.494.8731 mhikichi@shaw.ca

Directors:

Joyce Hoglund 250.492.0512 joyceh21@shaw.ca
 Doreen Olson 250.497.6889 threegates@telus.net
 Dennis St. John 250.498.6651 dsjohn@hotmail.com
 Jim Shaver Jim_shaver@telus.net

Newsletter Submission Dates:

The 15th of: January March June September and November
 We welcome any nature-related articles (about 1/2 page in length), artwork/photos (both cover art & smaller pieces), poems or cartoons.

Please recycle - pass the newsletter on to a friend

Coordinators / Representatives:

Archivist: Jim Gimms 250.492.9610 gimnsj@shaw.ca
 Conservation Committee:
 Jim Bryan 492.0312 jebryan@shaw.ca
 Dennis St. John (for contact see Directors)
 Jim Turnbull 496.4195 jkpturnbull@gmail.com
 Jim Shaver jim_shaver@telus.net
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 Refreshments: Inez Neimeyer; Jim Shaver
 South Okanagan Habitat Garden Joyce Hoglund
 Thursday Birding: Charmaine Foster (gramfos@shaw.ca);
 Joyce Hoglund (joyceh21@shaw.ca)

Cover photo - Ten Club members came out last week to help present our donation to The Nature Conservancy of Canada represented by local manager Barb Pryce and National Director Dick Cannings. Club members were extremely generous in adding \$1,660 to the Club donation of \$1,000. See more elsewhere in this issue.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This winter brings an end of our 50th anniversary year celebrations, AND what a celebration it was. We had some exceptional exhibits along with wonderful comradeship, gaining new members along the way. Our last exhibit promises to be a great display of local artists that will run at the Museum from this Friday (Nov 23rd) until Dec 20). I hope you will get a chance drop in.

Thanks so much to all who made our year's celebrations such a success – and for all the past members who have kept SONC active & such a fun club to belong to. A special thanks to Helen & Lou Poncelet for all the work they did to bring the art show to fruition and a big thank you as well to Doreen Olson and Bob Handfield for all they work they put into the celebrations.

While I am thanking people I want to give a big welcome and thank you to Ann Keifer who has taken on the membership duties from Mits.

As one door closes another opens, and with the end of our last exhibit we begin our Christmas Bird Counts.

Penticton's count will be on, December 16th. There have been some very interesting birds seen around our area this fall so I'm looking forward to a great day. Please get in touch with Dick Cannings if you can help out, even if it's just watching a feeder. There will also be a count-up and potluck dinner starting about 4:30 at our meeting space (Penticton United Church); bring along something warm and delicious and enjoy a few hours of great stories of the day's adventures.

December also brings a Solstice celebration. Please join Chris Purton and RASC (Royal Astronomical Society of Canada) on Munson Mt about 3:30. Naturally this takes place on Dec 21. After witnessing the setting of the sun and the promise of "the return of the light" as the days will start to get lighter, join us at Shatford Centre about 4 pm to warm up and enjoy talks & displays. Margaret Holm is working on a wonderful winter slide show.

Winter is typically a time for inner reflection as some of us stay indoors and keep warm. However it is also exhilarating to get out and enjoy the winter activities – it is a beautiful season. Take time to think how fortunate we are to live in such a great region. What can we as individuals, or as a Club, do to keep it this way? I feel there is still a lot of work to be done.

As I reflect on the past years I think of all the fun things the Christmas Season brings. Over the holidays I hope you too have the pleasure of family and friends – Wishing All the Best to all.

Glenda Ross – President

Coming Events

South Okanagan Impressions November 23

Join fellow SONC members and south Okanagan artists at the opening reception. This is the last major event of our 50th anniversary celebrations. 7 PM Penticton Museum

Wednesday Dec 19 - Anniversary Wrap-up Wine &

Appie Party. 6 PM Penticton Museum - SONC Members only; \$3 pp; **Reservations required!** E-mail Bob Handfield or Doreen Olson by Dec 15.

Dec 21 - Solstice celebration - Munson Mt at 3 PM and Shatford Centre at 4 PM. Details on our website.

Thursday, January 24: The Summerland Ornamental Gardens: Brief Historical Overview and a Look into the Future Eva Antonijevic, Community Programs Director for the Friends of Summerland Ornamental Gardens, will talk about the Gardens, and the Pilot Water Conservation Project that was launched in July 2012.

Thursday February 28.

AGM and members' slide presentation. Please let Anthea know by Monday February 25th if you have slides to show, how long you need, and equipment required (email adbryan@shaw.ca).

Members in the News

Long time Club member Melody Hessing was awarded a three-week residency at the Banff School of Arts for Mountain and Wilderness Writing. She will devote this to walking along the Bow River watching for crossbills and gray jays, and writing about themes such as: Ecology: A Walk on the (Not So) Wild Side, Aging (Over the Hill?), and Adventure Writing for the Non-Extreme.

Another long time Club member and former Penticton Mayor Dorothy Tinning was commissioned to paint "The Guardian Spirit" as the Province's gift to BC's retiring Lieutenant Governor Steven Point.

Bob McKay is, unfortunately, still in Penticton Regional Hospital - this is now over 4 weeks! He would be pleased to have visitors.

Congratulations to Dick Cannings who became the NDP nominee for the Penticton riding to run against Dan Ashton in the Provincial election next May.

John Taylor's wife Alethea is still in hospital after complications from a total knee replacement.

Conservation Committee Report

Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resources held an open house about the WMA (Wildlife Management Area) proposed around Skaha Bluffs Park. This event was attended by several SONC members. Designating Crown Land as a WMA under BC's Wildlife Act allows the cabinet minister to better control the allowable uses of that parcel of land in order to manage it in accord with the needs of the wildlife, fish, or habitat values sufficiently significant to warrant the designation of WMA. This designation can be used in a number of circumstances to conserve or manage:

-habitat for endangered, threatened, sensitive, or vulnerable species,

-habitat required for a critical life-cycle phase of a species such as spawning, rearing, nesting, or winter feeding,

-migration routes or other movement corridors, and/or

-areas of very high productivity or species richness.

The proposed WMA around Skaha Bluffs comprises 6400 ha. It would protect the herd of California bighorn sheep resident in the area and species at risk such as gopher snake, Western Screech Owl, and tiger salamander. In the northwest corner of the WMA there are some important native plants. This WMA will be named the McTaggart-Cowan WMA after the renowned wildlife biologist and long time faculty member of UBC.

We received a reply to our letters about abuse of the Trans Canada Trail by ATV riders and about the long overdue legislation to control ATV use in BC, one of the few jurisdictions with no requirement for licencing. The reply letter said that this ATV use is being reviewed by a committee in Naramata attempting to resolve conflicts among users of that section of the KVR and that model will be applied to the Summerland section. This does not give much hope for resolution as Jim Turnbull has been attending these meetings and reports that there is considerably more disagreement than resolution. The letter dodged our question about controlling ATVs. The summer issue of BC Nature reported that the Bill for ATVs is stalled because the government cancelled the autumn sitting of the legislature. We have not had a reply to either of our two letters to Environment Minister Kent about Canada's Plan to protect Sage Grouse. How to best follow up on this issue will be discussed at our Conservation Committee meeting. During the summer, Henk Saaltink expressed concern about transmission of viruses from farmed to wild salmon and asked that we do something to protect our wild salmon. Since this is a provincial issue it was decided that we should draft a letter on behalf of BC Nature which speaks for all of our naturalist clubs. We drafted a letter to Prime Minister Harper urging him to implement all 75 of the recommendations made by Justice Coehen.



Nuttall's Cottontail at home at the Turnbull's; photo by Deidre Turnbull

We also drafted another letter to Premier Clark asking her to cooperate with the Harper government by implementing those recommendations with a BC responsibility and to let us know which of her cabinet ministers would be assigned to each of the recommendations. Our letters have been sent to BC Nature's conservation committee for input, signing, and sending.

There has been an application to purchase Crown Land in order to build an access road to private property at Sickle Point on Skaha Lake. The road would require some filling below the high water line of the lake, destroying riparian habitat in the process. We hope that members will write letters of objection to RDOS and email comments to BC Integrated Land Management Bureau. Bob Handfield will put some background information about this on our website.

On SONC's last field trip, Mits and Marlene pointed out the fencing around the Ritchie Lake wetland where mudbogging had taken place. Some restoration of the wetland was done after the mudbogging and a fence erected around the wetland to prevent further mudbogging. This fencing was carried out under the SOSCP (South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program). There were a number of conservation groups involved but most labor was provided by the Summerland Sportsmen Association. The AGM for SOSCP will be held December 5 at the Penticton Museum. Since SONC belongs to SOSCP, all of us are welcome to attend in order to learn more about projects and natural history in our area. The business meeting will take place from 1.30 to 3 pm and the unveiling of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy will take place from 3 to 4.30 pm. Our conservation committee will have held its meeting by the time you read this report. Look for our minutes on our website.

Jim Bryan, Conservation Committee Chair

The Heavens

Sky News for the next couple of months, featuring the Sun, some meteors, Moon & Jupiter, Taurus, Orion, and Venus . . .

Sol is heading south, hitting its southernmost point early morning December 21, the moment of winter solstice. The event will be celebrated locally by observing sunset at Pen Henge on Munson Mountain later that day (Munson sunset is 3:27 pm PST), followed by "Returning Sun - a Celebration" at the Shatford Centre with SONC, RASC, and others doing displays and presentations. Warm drinks and cookies, too.

The Geminid Meteor Shower will enliven our skies on evening of December 13. New Moon that day so night sky will be good and dark and it could be a good show, although subject, as always, to the weather. This meteor shower is as spectacular as the famous Perseids in August, but not nearly as well known because of the season. Spending a December evening stretched out on a lawn chair under the open sky just doesn't seem to appeal, except -- perhaps -- to the hardcore.

The Moon continues its monthly dance with Jupiter. Next full moon is November 28, and it will appear quite close to Jupiter that evening as the two of them rise from behind the mountains in the east, around six o'clock (roughly). The face of the bull, Taurus, will be a short distance to their left, featuring the bright orange star Aldebaran and a V-shaped grouping of stars known as the Hyades. Then on December 25 (no less!), as the sky darkens in late afternoon we will again be presented with the sight of Jupiter close to the Moon, low in the eastern sky. A fat gibbous Moon in this case, with the face of the bull immediately below. One lunar cycle after that, on January 21, Jupiter and a not-so-fat gibbous Moon once again snuggle up, appearing closest to each other at 7:00 that evening. At that time & date they will be fairly high in the southern sky, with the face of the bull just below. Magnificent Orion, in all his glory, will be off to their left.

These occasions present a good opportunity to watch the Moon move as it shifts leftward relative to Jupiter. Both of them go across the sky to the right during the night, because of the Earth's rotation, but the widening gap between Jupiter and the Moon as they do so reminds us that the Moon is simultaneously moving along in its orbit around the Earth. It's moving quite quickly, almost four thousand km/hr, which is not at all obvious when you consider that what we actually see is the Moon very leisurely pulling away from Jupiter by its own width every hour.

Jupiter and Orion will be there in the evening skies regardless of what the Moon is doing, both of them more obvious later in

the evening and later in the season. Orion really is magnificent, the three bright stars of his belt pointing upward to the right at Taurus (together with Jupiter this winter), and downward to the left at brilliant blue Sirius.

Planet Venus hangs on in the early morning sky during December, stunningly bright shortly before sunrise, but low in the sky. Whether or not you can see it depends on what kind of mountains you have toward the east. It will be gone by January.
Chris Purton



Margaret Focken up close and personal with the Sandhill Cranes on the Club's recent trip to the Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Richmond.

Photo by Frank Focken



"Bird" feeding of a different sort - with the first snow of the season Doreen Olson filled her bird feeders but she got something a little bigger than the usual finches.

Photo by Doreen Olson

Notice of Intention to Hold a Vote to Amend the Club Constitution and Bylaws.

The Club's Board proposes to hold a vote at the February 2013 AGM to amend the Constitution and Bylaws to make the Club's fiscal year and membership years the same period, namely Jan 1 to Dec 31. Currently our fiscal year is Feb 1 to Jan 31 and our membership year is Oct 1 to Sept 30. Additional details will be provided on our website.

Inspiration

Frank & Margaret Focken attended the recent Cesar Milan dog training show at the SOEC. He closed his show with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi which impressed them so much they wanted to share it with us:

"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

Book Review

Donna Finnestad submitted a book review which I didn't have room for but I do want to get her recommendation to you - **Life List, A Woman's Quest for the World's most Amazing Birds** by Olivia Gentile. This is the story of Phoebe Snetsinger, an American housewife and mother of 4 who becomes addicted to birding. She built a life list of 8,400 birds before dying at age 68 while birding in Madagascar. Donna highly recommends this book and says "get busy, life is short".



About 25 members of SONC along with another 75 supporters of Ducks Unlimited Canada enjoyed an evening of food, drinks, fund-raising games and silent and live auctions at the Penticton Lakeside Resort recently. Dick Cannings was the emcee for the evening. Many Club members were seen hauling home various items. A good time was had by all and money was raised for another excellent conservation organization. Photo by John Taylor



An immature Snowy Owl photographed on the Victoria Courthouse in early November of this year.

Snowy Owls

Is this the year to see a Snowy Owl in the south Okanagan? For those of us who are still seeking this "lifer", there is early reason to be optimistic that this might be the year we are successful. Pretty well every year at least one or two Snowy Owls are seen in southern BC, but most often at the coast. However this fall, there have already been reports of 3 Snowy Owls in the Central and southern Okanagan - one at Kelowna and two at Penticton.

Unfortunately the two Penticton birds have both died - the first from unknown causes after it was taken to SORCO because it appeared sick and unable to fly and the second bird was hit by an auto on Hwy 97 just north of Penticton. Dick Cannings believes the last time a Snowy Owl was seen in Penticton was in 1996. Snowy Owls are known to spread out from their normal tundra habitat every so often, especially if lemmings (their favorite food) are in short supply. These fantastic large white birds have been seen as far south as the State of Georgia, so like all flying birds, they are able to really get around! Another Snowy Owl was reported in Victoria earlier this month and just before press time another Snowy Owl was seen at Vernon and yet another at Kamloops so perhaps these birds are an indication of things to come this winter.

I find it interesting that Sibley says Snowy Owls are mostly nocturnal whereas other authorities such as Pete Dunne say they are diurnal - they hunt in the day as well as at night. Certainly the most recent Penticton bird that was hit by the car was seen being active in daylight. So if one does come this way there is a better chance of seeing it than a nocturnal species. They are the largest members of the owl family - being slightly larger than a Great Horned Owl. Great Horned owls weigh in at just a bit over 3 lbs whereas Snowy Owls get up to 4 lbs. They are pretty close in length but the wingspan of a Snowy Owl can be up to 8 inches longer than the Gt. Horned owl's.



Nov 5 2012

Doreen Olson
South Okanagan Naturalist Club
PO Box 23050, RPO Penticton Plaza
Penticton BC V2A 8L7

Dear Doreen:

Thank you very much for your donation to the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

We are grateful for the support of the South Okanagan Naturalist Club for the Burrowing Owl reintroduction program. Much of the work involved in the breeding program, and the raising of the young owls to the point of release to the wild, could only have been accomplished with the contributions and assistance of private citizens that care enough to support this environmental cause.

We had a productive year, releasing 100 owls in the spring, in the south Okanagan and Nicola Valley release areas. The number of offspring produced in the wild were down slightly from our record year of 2011. However, the number of birds returning from migration continues to grow gradually. Each year we have surpassed the previous record for returning birds and we remain hopeful that we will eventually reach the point where there are self sustaining populations once again in southern BC. Our program in the south Okanagan is growing, with more release sites added each year. We have recently worked cooperatively with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to bring breeding birds back to BC. Every year, our connections are growing with other wildlife agencies along the owls' migratory route.

Many thanks again for your contribution to our environmental stewardship program.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Mackintosh
Director, Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC.
111 365 E 1st St
N Vancouver, BC, V7L 4W5

Regional Christmas Bird Count Dates

Kelowna: Dec. 15
 Penticton: Dec. 16
 Apex-Hedley: Dec. 18
 Vaseux: Dec. 22
 Big White: Dec. 27
 Oliver-Osoyoos: Dec. 29
 Cawston: Dec. 30
 Princeton: Jan. 2
 Bridesville: Jan. 5



Members of the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club take a break while picking up trash along White Lake Road, where four large bags of garbage were collected on October 11.

Photo credit: Barb Pryce

Naturalists' club cleans up road

A sunny day raised the spirits of sixteen Club members as they took on the task of picking up roadside trash along White Lake Road near the Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory on Thursday, October 11. This area is a designated IBA, one of nearly 600 across Canada.

The recent fire at White Lake exposed beer and soft drink cans, bottles, and other items like paint cans which had been hidden in the tall grass prior to the fire. A thorough scouring of a 4 kilometer stretch of the road harvested 4 large bags of trash along with one large bag full of recyclable bottles that had been thoughtlessly disposed of. The group also noted many cigarette butts littering the roadside.

Nick Burdock the local BC Nature Trust rep came out to give a hand with the clean-up and Sean Dougherty, Director of DRAO welcomed SONC members and was part of a photo opp.

Thank you from the Nature Conservancy of Canada

This fall the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club and an impressive number of individual Club members made financial donations to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) latest land acquisition, the 1,284-acre Sage and Sparrow Conservation Project. The project features two distinct areas: Sagebrush Slopes and Sparrow Grasslands. The lands will be open to the public for non-motorized access.

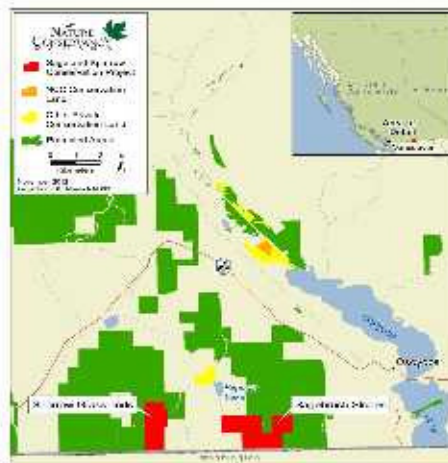
Sagebrush Slopes is named for the fragrant shrub that dominates the property. Pockets of trembling aspen woodlands flourish in gullies, providing important cover habitat for a variety of species. Two mouse species of conservation concern – the western harvest mouse and Great Basin picket mouse – thrive there.

Sparrow Grasslands is notable for the abundance of bird species, including at least seven species of sparrow. The rolling hills of the property are covered in grasses and wildflowers, offering a significant contrast to Sagebrush Slopes. Species at risk that occur on the lands include Lewis' s woodpeckers, grasshopper sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, western rattlesnake, gopher snake, western yellowbelly racer, half moon hairstreak butterfly, and others.

NCC is tremendously grateful to the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club and its members for their support of these wonderful projects. We are privileged to have local support from an organization that has worked diligently for 50 years to promote conservation.

Again, thank you for your important contribution to the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Project.

Barb Pryce
 Southern Interior Program Manager
 Nature Conservancy of Canada
barbara.pryce@natureconservancy.ca





Club members enjoy the view of Okanagan lake from the old fur Brigade Trail north of Summerland. This was the last hike of the season. Photo by John Taylor



Jim Ginns captured this two headed avocet at Robert lake in Kelowna. Photo by Jim Ginns.



Greg & Terry Tellier enjoy Grand Canyon National Park in AZ. Photo supplied by them



Mits Hikichi snapped this GBH along the river near Oliver last week. Photo by Mits Hikichi.



In arid AZ even muddy water is thirst quenching as evidenced by these bluebirds. Photo by G. Tellier

www.southokanagannature.com

This is our Club's new website and you should be checking in at least once a week. This will now be one of the main ways of communicating with all our members especially between issues of the Honker. Pretty well everything about our Club will be posted there. Of course we will still continue to publish The Honker five times a year.



Don't let our membership secretary get all tied up in knots. Pay your annual SONC dues in a timely manner.

Its membership renewal time - pay at the meeting in cash or cheque; mail a cheque to our PO box or pay on our website with PayPal.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

SONC Membership application/renewal form

South Okanagan Naturalists' Club, PO Box 23050 Penticton BC V2A 8L7

Individual.....\$30

Family.....\$40

Date: _____

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email address: _____

Do you wish to receive your Honker by email? _____