

# The HONKER

## Newsletter of the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club

November 2011



Okanagan Bighorn Sheep - photo by Michel Castro

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE NOW PAST DUE
PLEASE PAY ASAP



#### South Okanagan Naturalists' Club Mailing Address: PO Box 23050, Penticton, BC, V2A 8L7 Website: http://southokanagannature.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:Vacant

Past President:Bob Handfield 250.497 8702

bobnmaggie@shaw.ca

Treasurer: Frank Focken ffocken@shaw.ca

Secretary: Marlene Hikichi 250.494.8731 mhikichi@vip.net

#### **Directors:**

Jim Bryan 250.492.0312 jebryan@shaw.ca Doreen Olson 250.49.6889 threegates@telus.net Dennis St. John 250.498.6651 dsjohn@hotmail.com JimTurnbull 250.496.4195 jkpturnbull@gmail.com

#### **Newsletter Submission Dates:**

The 15th of: JanuaryMarchJune Septemberand 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 Ginns 250.492.9610 ginnsj@shaw.ca Conservation Committee:

Jim Bryan (for contact see Directors)

Gordon Howat 250.493.7232 m2ghow4t@shaw.ca

Dennis St. John (for contact see Directors)

JimTurnbull (for contact see Directors)

Jim Shaver jim\_shaver@telus.net

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Honker Editor: Bob Handfield (contact see Officers)

Meeting Programs: Anthea Bryan 250.492.0312

adbryan@shaw.ca

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Mits Hikichi 494 8731 mhikichi@vip.net

Evalyn Wood (mail out) 250.487.7577 eleven21@shaw.

ca

Publicity: Jack Somers penj63@shaw.ca

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 - Michel Castro took this photo of **Ovis canadensis californiana** (California Bighorn Sheep) on the east side of Skaha Lake. California Bighorns are confined to the dry interior valleys and mountains of south and central BC while Rocky Mountain Bighorns are found only in the southern and central Rocky Mountains. As the name implies, California Bighorns are found as far south as southern California.

#### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As the snow is now falling I look forward to the Christmas Bird Counts. Check out the dates in this issue and come help out where you can – contact Dick Cannings

dickcannings@shaw.ca. We can always use more "spotters" to look for birds. Everyone is welcome to join the fun - if you can't make it out for the day, come join us for "count up" after 4pm at Penticton United Church, bring a potluck dish to share about 4:30pm as the count up gets underway.

I also urge you to get active on our Board of Directors. Keep in mind we have our AGM in February where we will be looking to top up our Board. We are in need of fresh blood to fill a few seats that will be opening up. You can get in touch with myself or any Director - Please give it some consideration. If sitting on the Board is too much of a commitment you can still get involved with your club and volunteer for various projects - such as: 50th Anniversary, Conservation Committee, Habitat Garden, or get in touch with Jim or Jean and offer to bring a treat for our meetings. Do you know of anyone whom you would like to suggest for an award? We love to have our volunteers helping as much as possible. Some do stand out and with that it is a small jester to recognise their efforts. Please give me some input with what outstanding work has been done. I would also appreciate if your input with our Website. Please send pictures and articles to Bob Handfield.

Our dues must be paid to BC Nature. As a reminder, if you haven't already paid up your SONC membership please do so as soon as you can. And if you can help us grow, ask a friend to join our club!

Keep in mind there is no meeting in December, see you at the Christmas Bird Counts. We return to our meetings on January 26th. At this time I would like to extend my warmest wishes for a Very Joyful Christmas Season to all. May the Spirit of Christmas be with you, one and all! Glenda Ross – President



#### **Coming Events**

#### December

Christmas Bird Counts will be taking place throughout the Okanagan Similkameen. As usual, our regular monthly meeting will be replaced by the Penticton CBC count-up pot-luck dinner. The count-up will be **Sunday, Dec 18th** beginning about 4:30 with dinner at 5PM. Bring a dish to share and come hear about the trials and tribulations of counting birds in less than ideal weather conditions. Every CBC brings some surprises as to what birds are here and missing. See elsewhere in this issue for all the CBC dates.

#### January

The speaker at our January meeting will be **Tanya Luszcz**, BC/Yukon Great Basin Program manager for Partners in Flight. Tanya is also an acknowledged bat expert and her talk will focus on bats of the Okanagan.. Did you know that the Okanagan is home to

#### **February**

February is AGM month so our usual meeting format changes somewhat. Our meeting is preceded by another great pot-luck dinner and the business meeting is followed by members' slide show time. Bring some of your favourite digital photos or old fashioned slides to share.

#### Members in the News

**Michel Castro's** photo of Bighorn Sheep (see cover photo) has been selected to hang on permanent display in the CBC offices in Kelowna. Congratulations, Michel!

**John & Mary Theberge** are presenting their book The Ptarmigan's Dilemma at the Penticton Museum on Dec 8 from 5 to 7 PM. Wine & cheese - see page 8.

**Bob Handfield** is giving an illustrated talk entitled the Geology & Natural History of the South Okanagan on Dec 7th at Burrowing Owl.

One of the many invasive species now found in the Okanagan is the Eurasian Collared Dove. It has been one of the fastest spreading birds in North American history, having only shown up in Florida in the 1980's and now found all the way to Alaska. Photo by Bob McKay.



Researcher Catherine Dale shown holding a Mountain Bluebird, also a subject of her research,

#### **Bluebird Update from Catherine Dale**

About this time last year, I wrote to you describing my study of Western Bluebirds in the Okanagan and asking for your help finding wintering birds. I'm writing now to update you on my progress and ask for your help once again.

Last January, I left behind snow-bound eastern Ontario and headed for the Okanagan Valley. I arrived at the beginning of February, and was very excited to quickly find several flocks of wintering bluebirds around Penticton. I immediately set out to catch these birds. However, I soon learned that finding them was the easy part – and catching them was virtually impossible!

While this was undoubtedly frustrating, things started looking up once the migrant bluebirds returned and started to check out nesting sites. Once the birds were defending a nest box, they became quite easy to lure into a net by playing a recording of bluebird song and posing Webster, our bluebird decoy, on top of their box. This definitely annoyed the defending pair – but I think Webster was the one that got the worst of it, as he was often dive-bombed, pecked, and even knocked to the ground. (I've promised him a raise next summer...)

Once we figured out how to catch the birds, things started moving quickly. Between March and August, we managed to band 118 adult Western Bluebirds and almost 400 nestlings at 12 sites stretching between Summerland and Osoyoos.

My second goal for the season was to conduct experiments evaluating two personality traits in bluebirds: boldness and aggression. To evaluate boldness, I put coloured flags on top of boxes and watched how the birds reacted. To evaluate aggression, I used a model of a House Wren to simulate competition for a box. It will perhaps not surprise you to know that I got a lot of strange looks from bystanders.

Overall, I had a great first field season in BC. One of the things I appreciated most was how helpful people were – thank you to all the Okanagan naturalists who helped me out in one way or another!

I also need to ask for your help again. At the end of August, I returned to Ontario, where I'm currently analyzing the data I gathered over the summer. While I'm here, I'm hoping that people can help me by reporting any sightings of banded bluebirds this winter. Here's what to look for:

- -Adult bluebirds are banded with one metal band (on the upper left leg) and three coloured bands (one on the lower left leg; two on the right leg)
- Bands are read left leg-right leg and from top (closest to the body) to bottom
- Even if you don't get all three colours, I'm interested to know what colours you did see!
- -Birds that hatched this past summer are banded with one metal band (on the upper left leg) only

You can contact me at Catherine\_Dale24@hotmail.com or 613-484-1217. Thanks in advance for your help – I look forward to hopefully hearing from many of you!



This immature Western bluebird is only 15 days old and according to Catherine had been out of the nest only a few days..

#### The Heavens

For planets in the evening sky this winter, Jupiter is IT. He shines like a great beacon high in the south as darkness creeps in, shifts to the west as night progresses, and pretty much dominates the celestial scene. Only the Moon, when it's around, provides any competition.

Jupiter is in the constellation of Pisces all during this time, meaning the stars of Pisces appear all around him. Those who are astrologically inclined should note that the sign of Pisces is different from the constellation. The two coincided several thousand years ago, when the astrological system was made up, but precession of the Earth's axis has slowly moved them apart. The stars of Pisces form two rather faint straggly lines in a V, like tree branches, with the Great Square of Pegasus, above-right of Jupiter, plunked in the crotch.

Towards the end of January Mars will move into the evening sky, rising in the east about ten o'clock.

A major event this season is a total eclipse of the Moon, early in the morning of December 10. At that time the Moon will pass through the shadow of the Earth.. We will be deprived of the light of the full moon -- a lunar eclipse can happen only when the Moon is full -- but will be compensated by the fascinating sight of the Earth's shadow moving slowly and steadily across the face of the Moon. Despite the fact the Moon is plunging into the shadow at several thousand kilometres an hour, it takes about an hour and a quarter to complete the job, culminating in total eclipse,.

The eclipse starts at 4:46 am PST, when the Earth's shadow just tickles the left-hand edge of the Moon. Totality lasts from 6:06 to 6:57 am, but the Moon will set (for us in the Okanagan) while the eclipse is in progress, the detailed timing depending on what sort of horizon you have to the west. The Moon is visible while totally eclipsed, faintly illuminated by sunlight refracted through the Earth's atmosphere, which acts like a giant lens. Colour of the Moon when it's totally eclipsed is usually a deep coppery red.

Winter solstice will be at 9:30 pm PST on December 22. The occasion will be marked by RASC types watching sunset at Pen Henge, trying again to check the alignment of the stones. The official beginning of winter, aka solstice, marks the date when sunset point is at its farthest south. Time of sunset on Dec. 22, as seen from Munson Mountain, is 3:27 pm.

At roughly 5:00 pm on January 4 the Earth will be at the point in its orbit when it's closest to the Sun.



The weather may disguise that fact -- it's ironic it should happen in early January, and that it should coincide with our departure for Hawai'i.

Chris Purton

#### Christmas Bird Count dates in South Okanagan-Similkameen:

Apex-Hedley: Dec 15 Kelowna: Dec 17 Penticton: Dec 18 Cawston: Dec 20 Vaseux Lake: Dec 27 Bridesville: Dec 30 Oliver-Osoyoos: Dec 31

Princeton: Jan 2

Contact Dick Cannings for more information and to participate.

Dr Karl Larsen, of Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops is heading a study of the invasive Eastern Grey Squirrel which is becoming established in the Okanagan. This species is ranked as one of the Top 100 Invasive Species in the world.

He has asked if we could record any sightings of the Eastern Grey Squirrel as we do our Christmas Bird Counts (as well as at other times). Email him at: klarsen@tru.ca



WiTS summer assistant Christoph Mayer and a new wildlife tree hosting Lewis' Woodpeckers discovered just uphill from the Campbell Mtn landfill.

#### WiTS Report

To the South Okanagan Similkameen Naturalists Club,

I am Christoph Mayer, and I am a 4th year student from UBC Okanagan. I have one year left to finish my Bachelors of Science majoring in Earth and Environmental Sciences. Thanks to the financial support of your club, I was able to take advantage of a grant received by BC Nature through the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) Program. The funding made available by SONC provided the top up funds required to meet the grant obligations of the CSJ program.

I spent the summer working as an assistant with the Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program in the Okanagan-Similkameen. The program largely focuses on monitoring the use of wildlife trees by bird species that are federally classified as threatened or endangered. The two species focused on this year were Lewis's Woodpecker (LEWO), and Western Screech Owl (WSOW). A large portion of my field hours were spent on a study put together by the Canadian Wildlife Service, in which a series of LEWO nests were monitored throughout the summer, in attempt to find out how easy it is to detect these birds if the nest location was unknown.

The second major focus of the year was to find new LEWO nests. With the help of fifteen volunteers throughout the region, we were able to find 15 new nests. We also monitored 56 old nests, of which 22 were reoccupied. Thanks to the study, I was able to witness the progression of these birds from incubation through till they fledged.

As part of the Western Screech Owl project I was able to witness juveniles just before they fully fledged and left the area. Together with volunteer monitors, I was able to detect WSOW responses to call playbacks in two regional parks in the Central Okanagan.

This position has been very valuable for my education. I was in charge of coordinating the volunteers, which included providing equipment, training, and making sure they understood what was required of them. The opportunity was also excellent opportunity for increasing my understanding in fieldwork, as well as broadening my view of the multidisciplinary aspects of the environmental field in general.

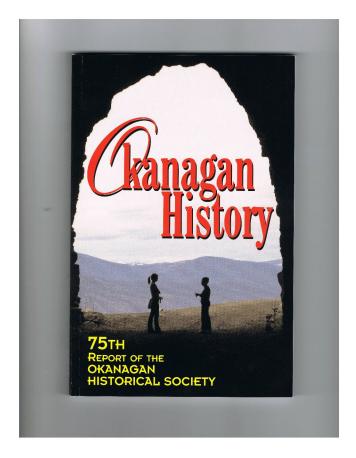
I thoroughly enjoyed my time working for the Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program. I hope that the program continues, as they provide an essential service for at risk and endangered species, and for the excellent opportunity they provide for students to attain field experience. I also hope that the federal government continues to support the Canada Summer Jobs program which helps to make these summer student positions available. Thanks again to SONC for this opportunity.

Sincerely, Christoph Mayer

#### **Editor's Comments**

Next year will be the 50th anniversary of the founding of SONC. That's a pretty impressive achievement for a small group of volunteers to lay claim to. We will be having some appropriate celebrations to mark this milestone.

However, there is something even more important that each one of you could do - that is resolve to get more involved in your Club. Many of our Board members and coordinators have been doing the same "job" for many years. They need a break and the Club needs new ideas and new faces so make a New Year's resolution to step up and help out. SONC can't continue as a successful Club without members making it happen.



The Okanagan Historical Society records our valley's history in a yearly book entitled Okanagan History. We are including more and more natural history articles, and hopefully next year one celebrating SONC's anniversary! This year's book includes "Fish in Okanagan Lakes and Rivers: A Historical Overview," by Chris Bull, "Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory: 50th Anniversary in 2010," by Dr. Chris Purton, and "The Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary," by Dr. Vivian Merchant. Books are available at the Dragon's Den for \$25.00, all proceeds going to OHS and the production of next year's book.

Suzanne Schmiddem, OHS Penticton branch editor.



#### Weeding on Locatee Lands

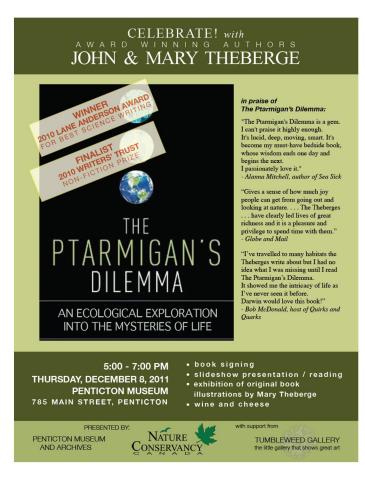
A group of SONC members along with several other volunteers spent two hours removing invasive plants from the former floodplain along the river channel on September 30. Our main targets were burdock, Virginia creeper, and hound's tongue. We had beautiful autumn weather and filled 33 bags. The picture shows Michael Bezner describing some of the programs at the En'Owkin Centre. We wish to thank all of you who helped preserve this wonderful ecosystem: Jim Shaver, Jean Brousser, Marlene Hikichi, Evalyn Wood, Jack Somers, John Lewall, Inez Niemeyer, Michel & Lorraine Castro and Margaret Holm.

Jim Bryan (with apology in advance to anyone who may have been overlooked).



The photo above is of Jim Bryan holding up burdock weeds and gives a good indication of the size of some of these invasive weeds on the Locatee lands.

The photo to the left shows the "Weed whackers" getting prepped and fired up and ready to go.



#### **Conservation Committee Report**

#### Trails in our region

Some members brought to our attention that the Trans Canada Trail around Summerland is being abused and degraded by ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles). The surface of the trail is being rutted and the dust raised by the ATVs is being deposited on the plants growing along the trail. Signs which prohibit ATVs on the trail have been torn down, presumably by ATV users, and other vandalism has occurred along the trail. Additional information about problems caused by ATVs can be found in the latest issue of the newsletter from Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society. We wrote a letter to Premier Clark expressing our concerns. We have an opportunity to improve hiking and biking trails in our area by participating in the following planning process through RDOS, "The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, in cooperation with its member municipalities, is developing a Regional Trails Master Plan (RTMP). The RDOS is asking residents to help set trail priorities in the South Okanagan-Similkameen by filling in an online survey or coming to a future trails open house. A Regional Trails Master Plan Committee has been created to oversee the plan. Committee members include volunteer trail maintenance

groups, government agencies and other stakeholders. You can participate by going to the RDOS trails survey website (http://www.rdos.bc.ca/index.php?id=765 or www. clickhikebike.com.) where you have three options. The first and most important is to complete the Regional Survey on trails in order to let them know that you use and care about having trails in RDOS. The second is to evaluate and recommend improvements to any specific trails (Trail Survey) you care to, and the third is to give them information (Data Contribution), particularly GPS readings, on trails you know about which are not listed on the RDOS website.

#### **More Grasslands Protected**

The White Lake Grasslands Protected Area has been increased by 24 hectares because Mr. Denis Pelletier has donated his property in memory of his parents as an Ecological Gift. We hope that another 800 ha will soon be added to the White Lake Grassland protected for conservation through purchase of the Twin Lakes Ranch by The Nature Trust. SONC has agreed to donate \$1000 of club money toward this purchase and individual members have made personal donations as well. Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society has donated \$10,000 towards purchasing the Ranch.

#### **Local Planning Issues**

The OCP (Official Community Plan) for the Vaseux - East Skaha area is being reviewed and up-dated. There is a need for someone to check these plans to ensure that they provide for protecting species and habitats in those areas. If you would like to be involved with this or want more information about it, let Jim Bryan know and he will give you contact information for the appropriate people.

#### Windfarms

There is a wind farm proposed in the Shinish Creek watershed west of Summerland. Wind farms can have undesirable environmental consequences such as noise, heat, bat, and bird mortality. Jim Turnbull plans to assess this particular proposal for environmental impacts. According to Mark Walker (Penticton Western News, November 11, 2011), the project is likely to result in additional monetary costs-- rather than savings-- that will be passed along to power consumers.

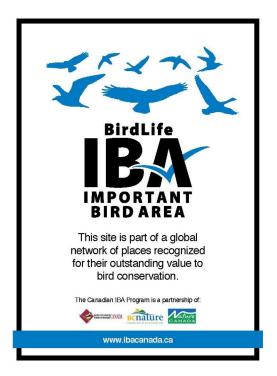
#### **Enbridge Pipeline and Super Tanker Proposal**

A public meeting will be held in Kelowna to receive public input on this proposal. The date has not yet been announced. If you want information about this project, please let Jim Bryan know. He will have some resources to suggest, and he is trying to arrange an information session for interested people, particularly those registered to speak at the Kelowna meeting.

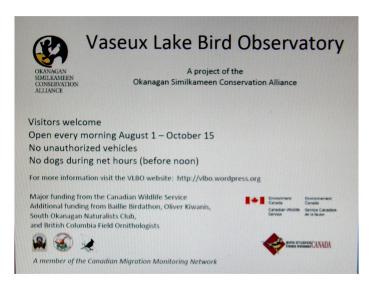
Jim Bryan and the Conservation Committee

The image to the right shows the new Vaseux banding station sign paid for by SONC. It will be posted at the site during the months of operation but removed the rest of the year.

The image below shows the new IBA signs that will be posted at the White Lake IBA and at many other IBAs throughout the province. Unfortunately designation as an Important Bird Area carries no legal standing but it is hoped that posting of these signs will alert people to the need to conserve important areas of bird habitat.







#### Members on the Move

Perhaps it's the age group that so many of us fall into, but SONC members certainly are a crowd on the move. Here's just a sampling of members on the move:

Anthea Bryan is currently in England visiting family and has managed to squeeze in a visit to Charles Darwin's birthplace. Bob & Maggie Handfield just returned from a two month RV trip through the western US, mainly focusing on Colorado and Utah. They spent a couple of days with Frank & Margaret Focken in Idaho and then three weeks traveling with Lawrie and Monica Belliveau who are still on the road in Arizona.

Jack & Norma Howard left this past week to spend the winter in California and Arizona with a two week sojourn in Mexico included. Greg & Terry Tellier are also on the road, currently in Arizona and sending lots of photos (see left) for us to follow along on. Bob & Chris McKay are also off to AZ and points south for December.

Mits & Marlene Hikichi are off in early December on an Eagle-eye birding trip to Trinidad and Tobago. They will be accompanied by Jim & Ann Ginns.

As they have done for about the past fourteen winters, Michel & Lorraine Castro have headed off to Mexico. They claim next year they are going somewhere different. Bob & Maggie will be spending a month in Mexico from just before Christmas and will be joined by Dennis & Adele St John for the last two weeks. The four of them hope to catch up with the Castro's.

I'm certain that other Club members are also traveling. Let me know about your trips and we'll try to fit this section in as a regular feature.

# www.southokanagannature.com

This is our Club's new website and you would do well to remember it. This will now be one of the main ways of communicating with all our members especially between issues of the Honker - want to renew your membership - go to the website; want to know what the next meeting is about or where the next field trip is going - visit the website. Do you want to look at a past Honker or reread a Nature Wise column - go to the website. Virtually everything about our Club will be posted there. Of course we will still continue to publish The Honker five times a year.

# Field Trips For 2012

Mits, Charmaine and Joyce are getting ready to plan next year's field trips and would like some help. They would appreciate some feedback on the 2011 trips which was your favorite; which ones would you like repeated in 2012; was there one you wanted to go on but missed? Have you got a favorite location that you would like to recommend or perhaps there is somewhere you've always wanted to go but never seemed to find the time to do so. For a complete list of the 2011 trips check out the "Field Trips" section of our website and send Mits an email with your comments.









#### REMINDER: MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE NOW

# SONC Membership application/renewal form South Okanagan Naturalists' Club, PO Box 23050 Penticton BC V2A 8L7 Individual........\$30 Family.......\$40 Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Name(s)\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone:\_\_\_\_\_ Email address:\_\_\_\_\_\_ Do you wish to receive your Honker by email?\_\_\_\_\_\_