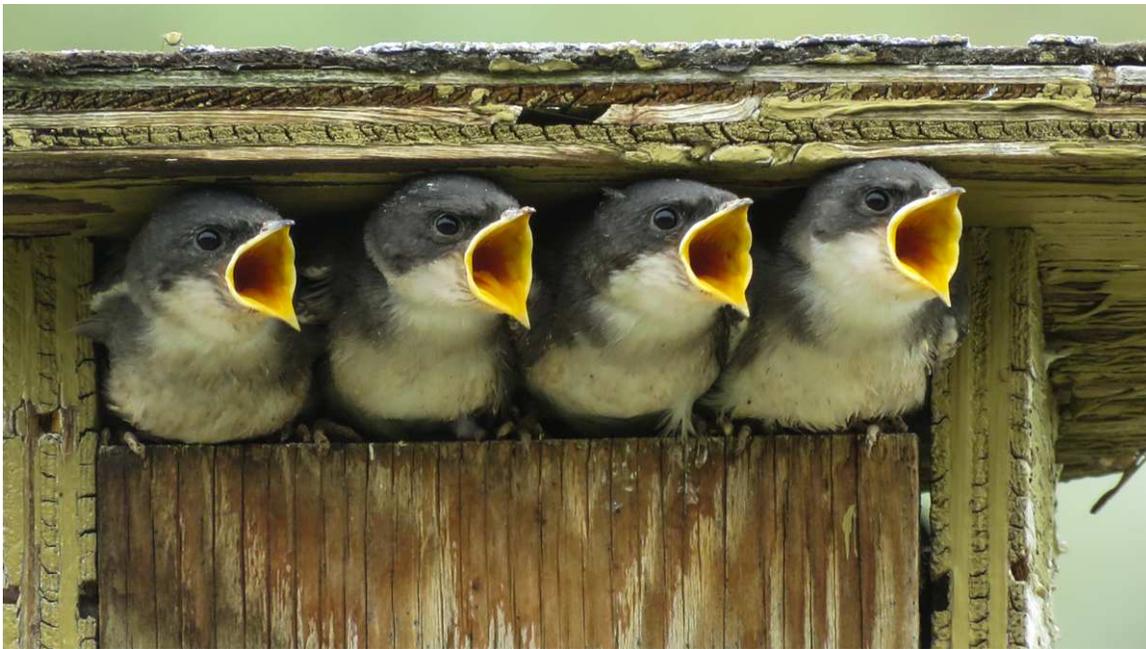




The Honker

Newsletter of the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club

November 2018



Paul Graham's photo "Waiting for Mom" was chosen by the readers of the Penticton Western News as the winner in the Western's Readers' Choice Awards. Congratulations Paul!

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South Okanagan Naturalists' Club
8517 Prairie Valley Road
Summerland BC V0H 1Z4
www.southokanagannature.com



Mission Statement:

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

Membership: Individual: \$32; Family: \$43 (membership year is Sept 1 to Aug 31)

Monthly meetings are held on the 4th Thursday of each month from September through May (except December) at 7PM in the basement hall of the Penticton United Church, 696 Main St. (corner of Main and Eckhardt). Please bring your own coffee mug. New members always welcome.

Board meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of the month. Please contact any Executive or director 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 (northeast corner of Warren & Atkinson) at 9AM (hours may change in summer & winter). Be prepared to car pool. Trips range from 'car birding' to easy strolls to occasional more moderate hikes. Bring a lunch and dress for the weather. Everyone welcome. For more info contact Charmaine Foster or check out the birding page on the website.

Field Trips are generally held in the spring and fall and may be all day or occasionally overnight. Check the website for details. Please notify of the trip leader if you intend to participate. Dress for the prevailing weather conditions, wear appropriate footwear, bring a lunch and drinking water. Pets are not appropriate for field trips or Thursday outings.

SONC is a society under the BC Societies Act and a federated club of BC Nature

Executive Officers:

President: Bob Handfield, 250 497 8702; soncbob@shaw.ca
Vice-president: Lisa Scott, 250 404 0115; ecomatters@shaw.ca
Treasurer: Colleen Emshay 250 490 0952; emshayco@outlook.com
Secretary: Val Fenn ; vfenn@shaw.ca

Directors:

Christine Anderson (*ex officio*) chrisko8517@gmail.com
Alex Bodden a.bodden@shaw.ca
Gerry Buzzell 250 328 8143; grbuzzell@gmail.com
Paul Graham poppa08@telus.net
Wendy Stewart 250 487 1442 wendyastewart@shaw.ca

Newsletter Submission Dates:

Please submit material for publication by the 15th of January, March, June, September and November. Any item relevant to the Club is welcome as are photos taken by club members.

Coordinators/Representatives:

Archivist: Jim Ginns 250 492 9610; ginnsj@shaw.ca
Conservation Committee:
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Brian Horejsi b2horejsi@shaw.ca
Jim Turnbull (for contacts see Directors)
BC Nature Rep: Alex Bodden; a.bodden@shaw.ca
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Publicity: Christine Anderson; chrisko8517@gmail.com
Refreshments: Jim Shaver Jim_Shaver@shaw.ca
S Okanagan Habitat Garden: Marlene Hikichi temporarily
Thursday Birding: Charmaine Foster (see above)

Cover photo: The baby birds waiting for mom are Tree swallows,. Being cavity nesters, they often take possession of bluebird nest boxes. Paul was looking for bluebirds but found baby swallows, their heads out, hungry for food. Up went the tripod about forty feet away. Mom swooped in then flew away as I was deemed a threat. This went on for a bit but when I was no longer seen as a threat, Mom made multiple trips to the box. I'm not sure how many shots I took or how long I was there but "Waiting for Mom" was well worth the wait!

President's Message

Last month was our AGM and I have to say I have a renewed sense of optimism about our Club going forward from here. I'm pleased to welcome three new members to our Board of Directors: Alex Bodden, Val Fenn and Paul Graham. Alex has been our Club's BC Nature representative for the past several years and Paul and Val have both been avid Thursday birders for a number of years. Paul served as our Treasurer for a period in the past. Val has agreed to serve as the Club secretary. So a real big THANK YOU to these new Board members and an equally big THANK YOU to the three retiring members, Jim Turnbull, Myrna Bosomworth and Bobbi Bodden. Last, but definitely not least, a big THANK YOU to the continuing Board members Lisa Scott, Wendy Stewart, Jerry Buzzell, Chris Anderson and Colleen Palmer.

I'm pleased to say that we are now officially a society under the BC Societies Act (note however that we are not a registered charitable organization so we still can't issue tax receipts for donations). Being a society won't really have any effect on our normal operations or activities. It will however provide some additional protection for directors and will allow the Club to do some things it couldn't do before and to apply for sources of funding not available to non-societies.

For many years after Maggie and I joined SONC, the Club had a number of field trips each year including overnight trips (some as much as three nights). Places visited included Mt Revelstoke National Park, Soap Lake in Washington, Boundary Bay and Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Richmond/Delta, Shuswap area and Wells Grey Provincial Park. These trips were well attended and really a great opportunity for members to see some different areas and spend some time getting to know one another. For some reason these trips seem to have fallen by the wayside and I really don't think it is due to lack of organizing on the part of our trip leaders.

A number of us think it would be great to get such trips going again and an effort is going to be made to find out what would most appeal to our membership. Wendy Stewart has agreed to be involved in trying to revive our trips and to rejuvenate our birding trips. If you have any ideas, please get in touch with Wendy: wendystewart@shaw.ca

A reminder that there is still time to vote for your favorite photo in our Nature in Focus exhibit at the Museum. The Museum has extended the exhibit until Feb 15 so voting for the People's Choice Award has been extended into January.

Many of you may know that Charmaine has recently undergone serious surgery. She is now at home recovering and I'm sure would appreciate your phone calls or cards. She says it will be January before she is out and about.

If I don't see you between now and Christmas, have a joyful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Bob Handfield

Coming Events

December 16th: Penticton Christmas Bird Count and pot-luck dinner at the Church Hall for the count reports. Time 4:00 pm. Everyone welcome - bring some food to share for dinner.

December 22nd: Vaseux CBC

December 29th: Oliver-Osoyoos CBC

January 24 SONC monthly meeting: Lisa Scott is going to thrill us with fabulous photos of her recent safari trip in South Africa.

February 28 SONC monthly meeting. This will be members' night giving any member the chance to show some photos or talk about something dear to their heart. It will also be a pot-luck get together—it's been quite awhile since we've had a usually very popular pot-luck. It's never too early to start thinking about those photos you have been meaning to dig out and show off. Well, this will be your chance. Stay tuned for details.



Two photos from the photo contest. Above by Andrew Morrissey and below by Michael Dunn.



The Heavens

Mars is the favoured planet this season, still gracing our evening skies and prominent in the south, characteristically red, as darkness falls. Its intensity is slowly fading but for the next couple of months it will continue to rival the brightest stars in the sky. The planets it was keeping company with during the summer, together with the summer stars, have long since disappeared to the west, but Mars' motion eastward, relative to the stars behind it, is rapid enough to overcome that. In early December it will be in the constellation of Aquarius, with the Y-shaped configuration of stars that mark the water jug a short distance above it. By Christmas time Mars will have moved into Pisces, with the small faint circle of stars that marks one end of that fishy constellation just above it, and the Great Square of Pegasus above that. Through January Mars will continue to move eastward past the long string of faint stars that outline the other end of Pisces. In contrast to the rapid movement of Mars, it takes Jupiter, the next planet out, a full year just to move through one constellation.

The rest of the planet show is in the morning, featuring Venus which will appear in the south-east sky, very bright, as the sky starts to get light. It will be reasonably prominent through December, but slowly sinking during the month of January and may be hidden by the mountains then, depending on where you are. Venus will be joined by Jupiter late in January, Jupiter pushing in below-left of Venus mid-month, and passing Venus, just below, on the 21st. The two brightest planets appearing so close together should be quite a sight, if the mountains (and the clouds) don't get in the way.

We get a full moon every month, but this December is special in that Full Moon occurs on the 22nd, within a day of winter solstice. That's when the Sun is lowest in the sky, and as the full moon is opposite to the Sun in the sky — that's what makes it full, after all — that means we will have a full moon riding particularly high, following (roughly) the same path across the sky as is taken by the Sun at midsummer. With any luck from the weather, we can expect the longest brightest moonlit nights that are possible around that time.

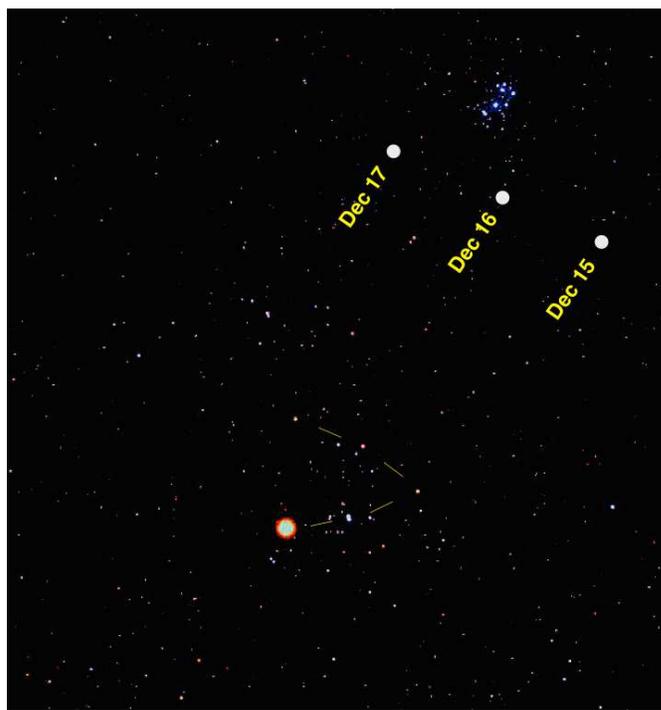
As for the stars, we are between seasons right now. Late evening in early December, around 9 o'clock, Cygnus will be prominent in the north west, appearing as the rather magnificent Northern Cross standing huge and upright on the horizon with the bright star Deneb, the last vestige of the Summer Triangle, at its head. Simultaneously Orion, the quintessential winter constellation, will be making its appearance in the eastern sky. The combination of constellations from different seasons will stay with us well into winter, but each month that particular configuration will present itself a couple of hours earlier in the evening.

Comet Wirtanen, the brightest comet of 2018, will be making a brief appearance in early December, but at best it will appear as a small smudge, a "fuzzy blob", *perhaps* visible to the naked eye. The use of binoculars is strongly recommended. It will be easiest to locate on the evening of December 16 when it appears close to the Pleiades, as shown in the picture, and it will

be at its brightest then, although competing with the light of a first quarter Moon. Its location the day before and the day after is also shown, which you can extend to other dates if you're feeling brave, and earlier is better because of the Moon. This comet, at heart a chunk of frozen gravel only 1 1/4 km across, comes around every 5.4 years. It never gets farther from the Sun than Jupiter, nor closer to the Sun than does the Earth, but when closest the Sun's heat causes it to release a prodigious quantity of gas and dust, which is what makes it visible at all.

On previous occasions it has shown a small tail, so we may be lucky this time.

Chris Purton



Taurus in Eastern sky, Pleiades above and Hyades (face of Bull) below, showing position of comet Wirtanen. Credit (for unannotated): Akira Fujii



On October 18th, the Thursday birding group made its way to the Blue Lake-Kilpoola Lake area in the mountains west of Osoyoos accompanied by the south Okanagan Similkameen Park Establishment Manager Sarah Boyle and Parks photographer Rob. Buchanan It was a perfect autumn day with brilliant sunshine and brilliant fall colours. Although a little late in the season for peak bird numbers, there were sufficient ducks and raptors around with some song birds to make the day truly special.

All photos courtesy of Parks Canada except the bottom left photo by Dianne Bersea.

Muskrats and beaver busy on South Skaha Lake

As a regular walker on the OK Falls section of the KVR, I'm on the lookout for any nature activity. Muskrats are frequent sightings but they can disappear into their bank-side dens with a twist and quick dive. As a semi-aquatic rodent native to wetlands of North America, muskrats build bank burrows where they can hide and raise a family. According to Hinterland Who's Who the muskrat can seek its food "during the winter under a metre of ice and snow, in ice-cold water and almost total darkness—a truly a remarkable feat!"

I've also seen quite a few beaver, and if I don't see the actual beaver their activity is usually evident. The trees in Lions Park at the south end of the KVR trestle are shrouded in chicken wire. I note that the precaution is only a moderate success as most of the lagoon trees have been gnawed. Further along the trail going north, I also notice gnawed tree stumps, either well weathered or sporting fresh bright cleanly carved incisor marks. Nearby I'll see branches stripped of their bark, temporarily parked on a rock awaiting transfer to the den itself.

Interestingly, muskrats and beavers often have a somewhat symbiotic relationship. Muskrats are known to take advantage of beaver dens, apparently even while the beavers are at home. They may also help with housekeeping and aid in making trails through the cattails and other vegetation around the beaver lodge.

At a quick glance I often wonder which one I'm looking at. But the muskrat is generally much smaller than a full-grown beaver. I use these visual cues. The muskrat body is about twice the length of its head. The tail is long and thin for an overall length of 15 – 30". An adult beaver is about four times the length of its head and the tail is broad and flat adding almost half a body length for a full size of 30 -36".

Dianne Bersea



Beaver photo by Jodi Forster



Muskkrat photo by Dianne Bersea. Notice the long skinny tail in comparison to a beaver's flat wide tail.



Newly chewed black birch along the KVR. Photo by D. Bersea.

Some great contest photos that unfortunately did not make the final 100 for the exhibit.



Great Blue Heron Larissa Henschell



Delicate pink Paula Cowen



Summerland Mountain goats Matt Shaw



Big Horn sheep Brenda Campbell



Winter sun Skaha Lake Park Cliff Kuzyk



Ok Falls & KVR trestle Lindsay Pearce

Nature in Focus Exhibit Opening Reception, Penticton Museum



Ava Franklin (only 13) was a winner in the Fauna category



The six category winners and the grand prize winner.



Invasive Species winner Curtis Zutz and OASISS chair Zoe Kirk



A record crowd for a Penticton Museum opening reception gathered to view the 100 spectacular photos, sip local wine and enjoy some nibblies as the winners in the various categories were announced. The official count for the evening was 150 people in attendance.

Originally scheduled to close in early January, the Museum has now decided to keep the exhibit open until the middle of February. As a consequence the voting for the Raymond James People's Choice Award has also been extended and it will now close about January 15th. You must visit the Museum exhibit in order to vote for your favorite photo.



Rick McKelvey took first place in the "Other birds" category.

The *South Okanagan Naturalists' Club* would like to thank our sponsors who made the *Nature in Focus* photography contest such an outstanding success.

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Penticton Golf & Country Club

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Penticton Museum and Archives

Special Media Sponsor:

Penticton Western News

www.southokanaganature.com

If you haven't checked out our Club's website recently, you should do so. Our site has all the latest information on monthly meetings, etc. Glenda has been working on changing the photographs, both on the home page and in the photography section. She is always looking for new photos so why not send her a few of your Okanagan Valley nature photos and let other Club members have a look at your work.



Trumpeter swans flying by the cliffs at Vaseux Lake. Photo by Paul Graham

Membership Application / Renewal Form

Mail form to SONC, 8517 Prairie Valley Rd, Summerland BC V0H 1Z4

Individual.....\$32 per year

Family\$43 per year

Date:.....

Name(s): _____ Phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email address: _____

Do you wish to receive The Honker by email? _____

The membership year is Sept. to August; if joining after February 1st please contact the membership secretary first.