



The Honker

Newsletter of the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club

November 2021



This beautiful caterpillar was “captured” by Doreen Olson at Sickle Point. See the story inside and also find out which butterfly this guy becomes.

In This Issue

President's Report

Sickle Point Update

New Members

Identifying Gulls

Narratives of a Naturalist—Rod McKelvey

The Heavens

A Personal Reading List

IT IS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

South Okanagan Naturalists' Club
193 Westview Drive
Penticton BC V2A 7W1
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 Wendy Stewart 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: Alex Bodden a.bodden@shaw.ca

Vice-president: Wendy Stewart 250 487 1442 wendyastewart@shaw.ca

Treasurer: Colleen Simmons colleensimmons@live.ca

Secretary: Val Fenn ; vfenn@shaw.ca

Membership secretary: Tim Gray timgray9@hotmail.com

Directors at large:

Bob Handfield bobnmaggie@shaw.ca

Edward Steltman edsteltman@gmail.com

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:

To be determined

BC Nature Rep: Alex Bodden; a.bodden@shaw.ca

Field Trips:

Wendy Stewart wendyastewart@shaw.ca

Alex Bodden a.bodden@shaw.ca

Honker Editor: Bob Handfield; bobnmaggie@shaw.ca

Honker mail-out: Evalyn Wood; 250 487 7577; eleven21@shaw.ca

Meeting programs: Bob Handfield and Doreen Olson three-gates@telus.net

Publicity: Tim Gray timgray9@hotmail.com

Refreshments: Jim Shaver Jim_Shaver@shaw.ca

S Okanagan Habitat Garden: Marlene Hikichi (temporarily)

Thursday Birding: Wendy Stewart, Alex Bodden and Jim Shaver

Cover photo: The Western Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio rutulus*) is common in southern BC from the coast to Creston and as far north as Bella Coola. It ranges as far south as northern Mexico. Larval food plants in BC include alder, cultivated apple, poplar, birch and various willows. Adult Swallowtails have generally short lives in the wild the longest documented life being 39 days. Our cover photo of course is a Western Tiger Swallowtail caterpillar.

President's Message

Our hot and smoky summer finally relented and we have enjoyed a fairly pleasant Fall. As a club we enjoyed a few exciting moments, as I hope each of you individually has. Firstly, we were able to enjoy a couple of local outings to see the birds in a more social atmosphere. One of the highlights was seeing eleven Great Blue herons all together in dead trees along the channel. We also lucked out and hit a day when the Okanagan Nation Alliance was doing work on the returning salmon. As always, the field crew were very willing to share information with all who had a question. We have taken a measured return to our outings and kept them local and hopefully we will get to a comfort level where we will travel more afield.

In a similar vein, we moved ahead with our first in person meeting where about 35 of us shared some pizza, conversation and a short PowerPoint of members' nature highlights through pictures. The COVID protocols did not seem to impact our enjoyment of the evening too much. I know that many of you are still understandably uncomfortable with indoor events and it is great to see that our members are staying loyal to the club through all of the challenges. Many of you have already renewed your memberships, which I remind you, must be done before December 31 so that BC Nature has the proper information.

Our fundraising journal, "Nature in Focus -The South Okanagan-Similkameen," appears to be a hit and it pretty well sells itself when anyone looks at it. Even with all of our best efforts there are a couple of errors in the spelling of names which we have to apologize for. We managed to get a table at the recent Christmas market that Val Fenn organized and we have had exposure in the local media and the most recent RDOS board meeting, where each board member was given a copy. Much of our sales success is due to word of mouth and to the work of a very few members, so if you know someone who may want a copy, feel free to be a sales person for your club.

Conservation challenges continue to present themselves as competing interests continue to add pressure on our dwindling natural places. The most recent one that our club has engaged in is the attempt by the Trail of the Okanagan Society to have the West KVR spur at Vaseux lake opened up as a part of their network. We all support and actively participate in getting out into nature and enjoying what it has to offer, however, we do have to remember that nature is not there solely for the use and enjoyment of people. There is a very real need to set aside special places for the continued protection of the biodiversity they hold and simply keep people out. The Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area is such a place and I remind you that all of it is a "no go" area except the boardwalk to the observation tower. One of the threats listed on the management plan is population growth and subsequent recreation pressure. We have all seen the impact that overuse of an area has.

The COVID restrictions that we have all faced have had a real impact on the number of people using our natural places. I

watched with interest an episode of "Nature" this week where they discussed how the unusually large number of campers in a National Park resulted in the local migration of many resident species from their regular places. I have noticed myself how the use of the trails within the White Lake IBA has significantly increased over the last two summers of COVID. The majority of people respected the designated trails. This is the mixed blessing of people becoming more aware of our natural places, but I do wonder how these types of increases impact on the local wildlife. As a club we have to make public education a major goal.

I have seen several reports where the over exuberance of well-intended people has had negative impacts. A recent sighting of a rare bird in Kelowna resulted in a large gathering of mostly photographers trying to get as close as possible for that perfect picture which resulted in an online plea to stay away. A similar situation has occurred in Delta where Snowy Owls often over winter. We had one owl nest abandoned in the Okanagan last year, probably due to over eager birders. This type of behaviour has resulted in the need for citizen science program such as I-Naturalists to automatically hid the location of many species. As naturalists and birders, I remind you of the "Code of birding Ethics" <https://www.birdscanada.org/discover-birds/code-of-birding-ethics/> that can be broadly applied to any engagement with nature.

The potential impacts of climate change are becoming more of an urgent reality. In a very few months Abbotsford had its highest temperature and then the record setting and devastating rainfall this week. I saw a recent presentation from a person who works for the United Nations dealing with internal migration of people in Africa and she recounted the destructive impact floods, drought and hurricanes have had there just in the past year. We are lucky in Canada that we are able to deal with these catastrophes, so far, but much of the world cannot. The empty shelves in the grocery stores today may offer a brief glimpse of what may yet happen.

It was disappointing to see the major contributors to climate change work the backroom deal that they did at COP 26 that watered down the goals of the final plan. This does reflect the daunting task that nations face to migrate quickly to cleaner energy solutions and try to maintain some degree of economic stability. The scope of the change required is massive. China in fact has plans in place to build over 40 new coal fired plants over the next few years. As Canadians we have to work hard to convince our governments to hold fast to the promise of the elimination of coal use and accept short term pains over the long-term gains.

We are so very lucky to live in the Okanagan where it is easy to go out for a short walk and see the diversity of the area. In the last four days, just walking in the immediate area, I have seen 56 species of birds, including the rare Harris's sparrow, Lesser White-fronted goose and Lesser Black-backed gull. See the article on gulls elsewhere in this issue.

Enjoy

Alex Bodden

Upcoming Events

SONC AGM—December 8th 7pm Zoom meeting. A link to participate was sent by email to all Club members.

Christmas Bird Counts

Penticton—December 19th (see note below)

Vaseux Lake (includes Kaleden, Ok Falls) - December 27th

Peachland—December 29th

Oliver-Osoyoos—January 1st

Plans are to hold an in person count-up review at the Club's usual meeting location in the Church, subject of course to changing covid rules. Watch the website and your email for up-to-date info. For info about the Penticton and Vaseux counts contact Dick Cannings at: dickcannings@shaw.ca

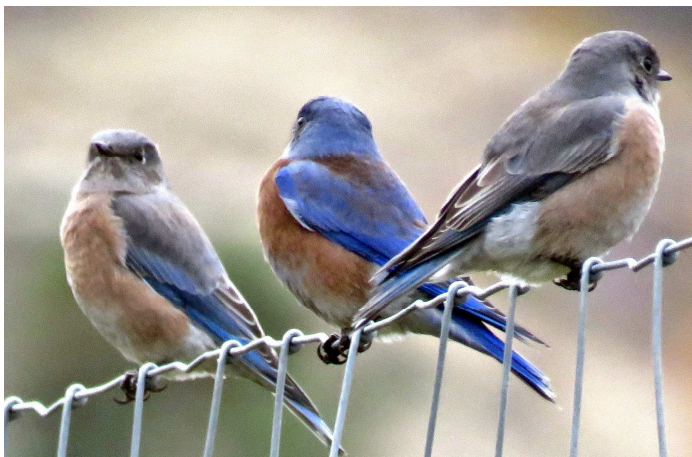
For info about the Peachland count, contact Matthias Bieber mbieber1488@gmail.com | 250-718-7519

January 27th—planned in-person Club meeting subject to changing covid rules.

Time to Renew your Membership

So easy to do—go to our website

www.southokanaganature.com, click on the **Join** icon at the top, fill out the form, press submit and you will be taken to our PayPal page. Super simple.



Yes, Western Bluebirds are migratory, but not all of them go south every winter. These three were photographed by **Jodi Forster** on October 23rd on Allendale Road, Ok Falls. Generally a few hang around the Penticton/South Okanagan area all winter—they are seen on pretty well all the South Okanagan Christmas Bird Counts.

Sickle Point Update

If you have been birding or just walking along the KVR near Sickle Point recently you may have wondered what is happening to the property. The owner hasn't decided yet which land trust Sickle Point will be donated to, but he is committed to protecting this wetland gem. In the meantime, he has given the Penticton Indian Band permission to begin a restoration process.

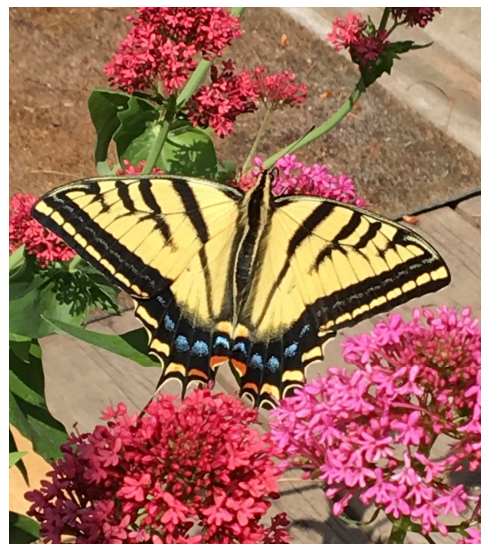
Photographic maps of Sickle Point, before it was cleared by the former owner for a potential development, were used for the first step in a rehabilitation process to document and remove invasive species such as Black Locust, Knapweed, Purple Loosestrife, Burdock, Hoary Alyssum, Toadflax, and others. Over 1200 pounds of non-native plants were removed. There is still more removal to be done but removing these plants will eliminate seeds that would germinate next year. It is a huge task. A seed bank already [exists](#), so this will need to be an annual job for years to come. This [year](#), the invasive Russian Olive was not removed to leave some food for birds over winter.

The next step was to begin [replanting](#) some native riparian shrubs and other plants which were obtained from the En'owkin Centre Nursery. Removing the [invasives](#) will give these young plants a better chance of survival and the recent rains will also give them the extra boost they need to establish.

Those who have been supporting the protection of Sickle Point appreciate the collaborative initiative undertaken by the Penticton Indian Band Natural Resources Department and their Restoration Crew to begin the process of returning Sickle Point to a more natural state.

This summer, due to the lower lake levels, birds were seen at Sickle Point that are not common to this site. The pictured Western Swallowtail caterpillar observed this past September at Sickle Point will hopefully become one of many [butterflies](#) at the site next spring.

Doreen Olson and Randy Cranston
Save Sickle Point Committee



The Sickle Point caterpillar on the cover will turn into this beautiful Swallowtail butterfly. Photo by Doreen Olson

Yuletide at the Penticton Trade and Convention Center

November 5,6,7 2021

Eight SONC volunteers represented our club at this show. Covid protocols were observed including masks and Vaccination passports. It was very busy, as this is the first event of this kind for over a year. It was a great opportunity to showcase our club and the beautiful area we live in. Jim Shaver's birds were a hit. We sold 20 journals and 25 Birding Trail books for a total of \$585.

Val Fenn



Val Fenn and Lois James with the Club display at the Penticton Xmas market.

New Members

The Club would like to welcome Joanne Scofield and Fred Worm of Penticton, new family members.

Identifying Gulls

In my humble opinion, there is no greater birding challenge in the South Okanagan than trying to identify the various gulls that frequent our area. On the plus side, one of the benefits of birding is said to be that it helps to keep our brain active which is important as we grow older. So taking some time to frequent the various beaches in the South Okanagan and trying to identify the gulls you see is a great way help keep your brain young! Mind you, trying to identify the various sparrows of the Okanagan can also be a real challenge. The beauty of gulls is that they are large and they generally sit still so you have time to assess their various characteristics.

The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America lists 25 gulls as possible. The Checklist of the Birds of the Okanagan Valley lists 12 gulls as possible in the Okanagan with another 3 listed as extreme rarities. That's pretty impressive when you think about it—basically 50 percent of Western North American gulls can be seen in our backyard!

If you haven't spent much time looking at gulls, now is the time because the winter months are when we get the greatest variety of gulls in our area. Several things make the identification of gulls a challenge: many of them are very similar in appearance and most gulls don't reach their adult plumage until the third or fourth year and to make matters worse, many gulls vary in appearance in their first and second winters so you have three plumages to deal with. And of course, adults in breeding plumage can look different than when not in breeding season. But gull ID is not impossible, just challenging!

Birding experts do give some clues to help and the first clue is to focus on the birds that are expected in your area at the time of year you are looking. So for Penticton in winter there are 3 really common gulls: Ring-billed, California and Herring and one other (Glaucous-winged) that is fairly common. So start with those four before you start looking for the rarest gull ever to visit our area. One of the highly recommended guides to id'ing gulls is: **Gulls Simplified** by Pete Dunne and Kevin T Karlson.

A review of this book by the National Audubon Society gives it high praise. It isn't all serious either: one of the clues to identifying Ring-billed gull is to look for the bird "standing in the parking lot with the sesame-seed bun in its mouth".

To get you started on your gull id journey, the next page has five photos of gulls taken by Alex Bodden at the Penticton waterfront near the statues of the three children. Alex points out that these birds were all in the same flock—hence it is important to scan all the birds in a flock looking for things that stand out. Try to id these birds and then email your id's to Alex Bodden at: a.bodden@shaw.ca There will be an excellent prize for the winner. Contest deadline is Dec 31st, 2021. If more than one entry gets all five correct, there will be a draw to determine the winner of the prize. Not open to the club birding "pros".

Bob Handfield



1



4



2



5

Here are a few clues to help you id these birds. Only one of them would be considered rare in the South Okanagan. The others are among the most common gulls and they are all adults so don't worry about 1st or 2nd winter birds. Also, they are all in non-breeding plumage. Look at leg colours amongst other things. Best to see these on our website for colour.



3



Bonus bird. This gull is also rare in the South Okanagan but it is usually seen here at least a few times every winter. Hint: it has an island in its name.

Narratives of a Naturalist - Rick McKelvey

Rick grew up in Burnaby. In those days, there was lots of opportunity for roaming in the adjacent forests referred to as “the bush”. This is probably where his interest in biology was first sparked. Rick spent most of his career with the Canadian Wildlife Service (Environment Canada), mainly in the office in Delta. He started at CWS as a Wildlife Technician, counting birds, and retired as the Manager of the Pacific Wildlife Research Centre, on the Alaksen National Wildlife Area, Westham Island. He did many population surveys of waterfowl along the BC Coast and the Interior, including extensive tabulations of the status of Trumpeter Swans throughout BC and the Yukon. His MSc had to do with the winter feeding ecology of swans in the Comox and Port Alberni areas, something that was until that time not documented. He developed and implemented several programs in BC resulting from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. He also worked on Aboriginal Land Claims in Ottawa for a short time. Towards the end of his career, he worked on the development of implementation policy for the *Species at Risk Act*.

He and his wife Paige moved from Coquitlam to Penticton after they retired in the mid 2000s. Not quite ready for retirement, Rick’s experience with program budgeting and planning lead him to a management position with the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program, a program he had previously developed in cooperation with the BC Environment. He fully retired in 2009.

He is finding no shortage of things to do during retirement! In terms of physical activities, which seemed to take a back seat to career and family on the coast, you will find him skiing and snowshoeing in the winter, and hiking and mountain biking in the summer. Less physical activities include birding, both with SONC and on his own, and tons of photography. He continues to be involved in local biological issues, his current pet project being the welfare of the Penticton oxbows (you may have heard about them!)

Rick finds the Okanagan a very nice place to live because there is so much variety in relatively close proximity. One can visit interesting landscapes and encounter a wide range of things biological without having to drive for hours and contend with large crowds.

He joined SONC a few years ago after members had been so cooperative in assisting with bird counts on the Penticton oxbows. To Rick it seemed like a good idea to support the club in some way, after its members had supported him over the years with bird counts.

Rick would like to see some kind of introspection by club members. He would be interested to know if SONC is providing what its members want, and then to ensure we are doing what it takes to fill those wants.

Lisa Scott



Rick enjoying the outdoors on the Nature Conservancy Lands south of Kilpoola Lake. Photo by Bill Therriault



Greater White-fronted Goose seen on the Skaha Meadows Golf course this fall. Photo by Rick McKelvey

The Heavens

The brightest planets are gathered in the early evening sky, and will be for another month. Jupiter currently dominates the southern sky as darkness falls, as it has for the past few months, very bright, directly south. Saturn is some distance to the right of Jupiter and considerably dimmer, but still the brightest thing in that area of sky, looking like one of the brighter stars. The real zinger, though, is Venus, having entered the scene a few weeks ago and now appearing low in the south-west as the sky darkens. Insanely bright. It looks most spectacular when things get really dark, by which time it is very low in the sky and about to set.

By mid-December Venus will have shifted a bit closer to Saturn, the three planets appearing more-or-less in a line. But Venus goes into reverse after that, pulling away from Saturn and getting lower in the sky each evening, to disappear from view altogether by the end of the month. End of show . . . except for Jupiter which will stick around until the end of January.

I get quite a charge from the contrast between the way Venus looks and what it actually is. A beautiful sight from here, for sure, named after the goddess of beauty by the Romans and all that. Up close, though, it is a real hell-hole, having a thick, suffocating atmosphere that weighs down on its surface with a pressure ninety times what we're used to, and a temperature of 470 C. That's twice as hot as a really hot oven. The atmosphere is composed almost entirely of carbon dioxide with a thick layer of clouds completely surrounding the planet, clouds made of droplets of sulphuric acid, not droplets of water like we have. Sulphuric acid, no less ! Ironic that such horrible stuff reflects sunlight so effectively and gives us that beautiful sight.

It's surprising that a planet so like the Earth — same size, same mass, a bit closer to the Sun — could be so different. Apparently it's that "bit closer to the Sun" that does it, coupled with the fact that the Sun has and will steadily warm up during its 12-billion-year lifetime. Venus began life very much like the Earth, with liquid water on its surface that evaporated at an accelerating rate as the Sun warmed, doubly accelerated as water vapour is a very effective greenhouse gas which helped the heating along when it got into the atmosphere. This "runaway greenhouse effect" got a further boost when the carbon dioxide being put into the Venusian atmosphere by volcanoes, and being released from the rocks, could no longer be removed because the atmosphere had become too hot for the water vapour to be condensed into rain droplets. All of this, over time, created the atmosphere we see there today.

It's reckoned that in a few billion years the Sun will have warmed up enough for the same thing to happen on Earth, eventually getting the temperature 500C or more than it is today. That rather dwarfs the 2C increase we're currently worrying about, but the time scale is *TOTALLY* different, as is the mechanism (relying as it does, for the future event, on boiling the oceans dry), and as for the effect on anything human. Making a comparison between our current problems and what's

going to happen a few billion years from now is not a useful thing to do.

Throughout its history the Earth's temperature has varied by 15C or so, accompanied by variations in greenhouse gases. What's different now is a time scale about ten thousand times faster, and the fact that humans are in the loop (for example, burning fossil fuels that puts carbon dioxide into the atmosphere a hundred times faster than do all the world's volcanoes) with an infrastructure very sensitive to change. The human species has its hands on the levers, but we're not very smart, and not very coordinated. Brings to mind the Sorcerer's Apprentice.

Chris Purton



Very rare photo of the surface of Venus, taken by the Russian space probe *Venera* which managed to make it down through the clouds and remain functioning for about an hour in the horrific conditions on the surface.



This image of Venus was taken by NASA's Mariner 10 spacecraft in 1974. It shows the planet wrapped in bands of dense clouds which whip around the planet at 200 miles per hour.



Brown Creeper seen near the Marina on Okanagan Lake.
Photo by R. McKelvey



These strange looking creatures are tiny bats roosting on the underside of a tree branch. Each bat is only several inches long. Seen in Costa Rica. Photo by B. Handfield



Don't recognize this finch with its massive bill—not too worry. It's a Cactus Finch—one of Darwin's finches in the Galapagos Islands. Photo by B. Handfield

A Personal Reading List

Here are a few non-fiction books that I have enjoyed over the past few years. These aren't book reviews, just my personal recommendations if you want something to read.

Living on the Wind—Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds by Scott Weidensaul. This book is naturally all about bird migration—one of the true wonders of nature. Imagine birds (bar-tailed godwits) that fly 7,000 miles non-stop across the Pacific or birds so small and light that you could mail one across country for a regular postage stamp but that flies non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico. Lots of personal stories and observations. A delight to read.

The Canada Trip by Charles Gordon. Have you always wanted to do a road trip across Canada but never got around to it. Read this book and get inspired to get moving. The author and his wife covered 24,800 km in three months. Maggie and I did more or less the same trip but took five months. However long you have get reading and then get driving.

To See Every Bird on Earth by Dan Koeppel Exactly what the title says— a man's obsession to try and see every known species of bird and the human story of a father and his son. A very good read.

The Golden Spruce by John Vaillant. The cover says "A true story of Myth, Madness and Greed". This is the story of the destruction of a sacred tree in Haida Gwaii. An interesting and enlightening read.

Bob Handfield



Every year we get two species of swans that overwinter in our region—generally Vaseux Lake and Skaha Lake are the best places to see them but of course they are also seen on Okanagan Lake. My personal observation (B. Handfield) is that there are more immature swans this winter than I've seen most years. This Tundra Swan was photographed by Paul Graham a few years ago.

www.southokanagannature.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.



Bob and Doreen with the Club display panel and books for sale at the Kaleden Winter Market on November 20th. Sales of both the new Nature Journal and the Okanagan Birding Trail guide were brisk and several people expressed interest in joining the Club. Time will tell.

Membership Application / Renewal Form

Mail form to SONC, 193 Westview Drive, Penticton BC V2A 7W1

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.