



The Honker

Newsletter of the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club

January 2022



When you are a big bird, it takes significant effort to get airborne. This photo by Peter Maser shows well the running take-off necessary to get a Trumpeter Swan in the air.

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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:

Christine Klus christineklus@gmail.com

Eric Newton ernewton81@gmail.com

Patrick Parenteau dpixinternational@gmail.com

Edward Steltman edsteltman@gmail.com

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:

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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

S Okanagan Habitat Garden: Marlene Hikichi (temporarily)

Thursday Birding: Wendy Stewart, Alex Bodden and Jim Shaver

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.

Cover photo: In the November issue we had a photo of a Tundra swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) whereas this is a Trumpeter swan (*Cygnus buccinator*), a much larger bird; actually more than 50% larger by weight! Tundra swans have never been considered endangered in North America unlike Trumpeter Swans which came extremely close to extinction in the early 1900's. See note elsewhere in this issue, Crusoe of Lonesome Lake.

President's Message

Happy New Year to everyone! I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas season and got out into nature whenever you could. I am looking forward to a great 2022. The weather has offered up a few challenges the last couple of months, with a generous accumulation of snow followed by some very cold days. January has been pretty good so far, even with the low clouds and fog that has been around the last couple of days and I have met many of you out on the trails. The humidity and cold created a pretty spectacular display of frost on the trees yesterday.

The Christmas bird counts fun events again this year. I and other club members participated in five of the local counts, which generally had above average results. The one exception was the Vaseux count which took place on a particularly cold and windy day. My day in the White Lake sector started off at about -24 degrees and by days end I had only seen 19 species. It was one of the lowest counts ever made in this circle with just over 70 species recorded for the day. A highlight though, was to sighting of a Great Grey Owl. This was not my coldest outing though. It was -29.5 in Meadow Valley when I took part in the Peachland count, but I did get to see a Northern Goshawk and the Red Crossbills seemed to be everywhere this year.

For those of you who are fairly new to birding, the winter is a great time to get out and develop your skills. There are fewer species about and the lack of foliage makes it a lot easier. A total of 113 species have been recorded in the Okanagan Similkameen on e-bird so far this year. Any of the local dikes or lake fronts are easy to walk and offer lots to see.

The AGM was held on December 8th via ZOOM and I'd like to thank all of you who participated. There were no real changes to announce or vote on, so establishing the new board was the only business. I am very happy to announce that we have a board of 10 members with a broad set of leadership and naturalists' skills. Two of our newer members, Patrick Parenteau and Christine Klus put their hands up to join as did Rick McKelvey and Eric Newton. The rest of the board is an echo of last year with Wendy Stewart, Val Fenn, Tim Gray, Colleen Simmons, Ed Steltman and myself. We will be holding our first board meeting on January 31st, so if you have anything that you wish to have brought up, please contact any of the board members.

I would like to offer the Club's gratitude to Bob Handfield, who stepped back from the board after seventeen years, including ten as President. He has been a driving force in the club and we owe him a lot. He will still be our "Honker" editor so please feel free to forward him pictures and items of interest.

The Nature Journal sales have gone well and we only have about 100 left. They represent at least \$2,000 in potential funds for club projects, so please do your best to spread the word. Our next step will be to work on a project(s) that will advance natural awareness and conservation in our area.

As a result of our reduced face-to-face time over the last year it appears that some of you may have missed the opportunity to remember to pay your dues. If you cannot recall if you have, please check. This does impact your and the club's insurance coverage. We have been fortunate over the last couple of months to have some new faces join the club and I hope we can make it a positive experience for them this year. I really hope we can get back to normal in February.

Alex Bodden

Coming Events

February 24 - Club monthly meeting subject of course to covid restrictions.

Christmas Bird Count Results

Normally we print the results of the local bird counts in the January issue of The Honker but with so many other items this month, there was only space for the Penticton count which is on page 4. Other counts will be posted to the Club website.



Busy as a beaver takes on a new meaning when you see the tracks they leave in the snow. This photo by Patrick Parenteau was taken along the ricer walkway south of Oliver near Road 9.

Penticton Christmas Bird Count: 19 December 2021

Weather -3 to +2C, calm in morning, light north wind in afternoon. Overcast at dawn, clearing by afternoon. 0 to 10 cm snow in valley, most oxbows frozen. 47 observers in 23 parties, 140.5 party-hours.

Gr. White-fr. Goose	2	Belted Kingfisher	12
Snow Goose	2	Downy Woodpecker	9
Cackling Goose	1	Hairy Woodpecker	4
Canada Goose	2884	Northern (Red-sh.) Flicker	370
Trumpeter Swan	37	Northern (Intergr.) Flicker	1
Wood Duck	14	Pileated Woodpecker	7
Gadwall	27	Northern Shrike	5
American Wigeon	184	Canada Jay	2
Mallard	1450	Blue Jay	1
Northern Shoveler	1	Steller's Jay	85
Redhead	40	Clark's Nutcracker	24
Ring-necked Duck	19	Black-billed Magpie	237
Greater Scaup	80	American Crow	121
Lesser Scaup	11	Common Raven	305
Bufflehead	135	Black-capped Chickadee	107
Common Goldeneye	61	Mountain Chickadee	34 (low)
Barrow's Goldeneye	12	Red-breasted Nuthatch	92
Harlequin Duck	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	4
Hooded Merganser	21	Pygmy Nuthatch	146
Common Merganser	13	Brown Creeper	8
Ruddy Duck	2	Canyon Wren	5
Ring-necked Pheasant	12	Bewick's Wren	8
California Quail	2048	Pacific Wren	3
Common Loon	10	American Dipper	5
Pied-billed Grebe	6	Golden-crowned Kinglet	8
Horned Grebe	39	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	7
Red-necked Grebe	9	Western Bluebird	247
Great Blue Heron	20	Townsend's Solitaire	33
Bald Eagle	48	Hermit Thrush	1
Northern Harrier	5	American Robin	161
Sharp-shinned Hawk	14	Varied Thrush	3
Cooper's Hawk	10	European Starling	4081
Northern Goshawk	2	Bohemian Waxwing	3582
Red-tailed Hawk	54	Cedar Waxwing	258
Rough-legged Hawk	5	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
Golden Eagle	8	Spotted Towhee	24
American Kestrel	19	American Tree Sparrow	14
Merlin	7	Song Sparrow	280
Virginia Rail	count week	White-throated Sparrow	4
American Coot	930	White-crowned Sparrow	38
Short-billed (Mew) Gull	1	Dark-eyed (Sc) Junco	6
Ring-billed Gull	61	Dark-eyed (Ore) Junco	899
California Gull	147	Red-winged Blackbird	83
Herring Gull	95	Western Meadowlark	3
Thayer's Gull	4	Pine Grosbeak	3
Glaucous-winged Gull	77	Cassin's Finch	4
Glaucous Gull	1	House Finch	824
G-w. X Western Gull	5	Red Crossbill	55
Herring X Glaucous Gull	1	Pine Siskin	17
gull, sp.	82	American Goldfinch	218
Rock Pigeon	506	Lesser Goldfinch	1
Eurasian Collared-Dove	147	Evening Grosbeak	11
Mourning Dove	77	House Sparrow	708
Great Horned Owl	8		
Great Gray Owl	1	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	22434
Long-eared Owl	count week	TOTAL SPECIES	102
Anna's Hummingbird	11		

Bighorn Sheep on Campbell Mountain

We in the Penticton area are fortunate to be able to see California Bighorn Sheep so close to the built-up areas of the Okanagan Valley. One location they can often be seen is on Campbell Mountain, just a short hike from the parking area on Spiller Road. I go there regularly with the intention of shooting a few (photographically speaking of course) and usually see some sheep, or at least lots of sign they have recently been where I am now hiking. On my last sheep hunt, in the recent heavy snow, I got to thinking about how precarious the existence of those sheep is, in part because of how close they are to Penticton. So not only is it easy for us to see wild sheep whenever we wish, it's also easy to see what impact our presence can have on Bighorn Sheep.

Consequently, I did a bit of research on sheep in our area, by reading what government reports I could find, and by contacting Craig McLean, Wildlife Biologist at the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (aka the Ministry of Everything) here in Penticton. Craig has agreed to speak to SONC at some point, hopefully in person, but via Zoom if necessary. What follows is hopefully a bit of a primer for such a talk, and a short synopsis of what I see happening to our local sheep.

The habitat the Campbell Mountain sheep are using is representative of areas California Bighorn Sheep seem to prefer. They are seen frequently in the Penticton Creek canyon area, where the cliffs provide good escape cover. They tend to feed on the benches above the canyon, which, although quite dry at times, provide forage in the form of the various species of grasses and shrubs that grow there. And the south and south-east parts of Campbell Mountain have the south-facing slopes that sheep prefer in winter. South slopes usually have less snow cover and therefore allow sheep better access to forage. California Bighorn Sheep prefer lower elevation habitats than do the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep seen farther to the east in British Columbia. Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep inhabit alpine tundra to a considerable extent, a type of habitat that is not generally found in the Okanagan.

The Campbell Mountain sheep are part of a larger group that ranges south from Campbell Mountain over the Upper Carmi area and as far south as the highlands east of Vaseux Lake. They apparently do not cross the big lakes, or Highway 97, even though there are sheep on the west side of the valley. They may have intermingled with sheep on the west side in the past, but the lakes and wildlife fences along the highway pretty much prevent any mixing now. The east-side sheep depend on habitats that are protected to some extent, for example the uplands in the Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area, the Skaha Bluffs Provincial Park, the Cowan Wildlife Area owned by The Nature Trust of BC, and other conservation-owned properties. Other important parts of the range of the east-side sheep are not protected, including the Campbell Mountain sheep habitat. Those areas are in most cases unreserved provincial crown land, or in the case of some areas on Campbell Mountain, privately owned.

All the perils that wild sheep face can be seen on Campbell

Mountain. The habitat is essentially unprotected, disturbance levels can be quite high with mountain bikers and dog walkers frequenting the grass benches important for forage, trees are encroaching onto the surrounding grasslands, and ever more development is taking place below Campbell Mountain. In addition, Fortis BC plans to install a new gas pipeline from Ellis Creek to Chute Lake, more or less paralleling the existing powerline right-of-way, in the near future.

But all is not lost yet. Perhaps with the gas line proposal, and the fact that cattle are no longer being grazed on the mountain, there is an opportunity for the South Okanagan Naturalist Club to help protect and restore the Campbell Mountain sheep habitat. I propose that we meet with Craig McLean as soon as we can to see what we can do to assist him in his efforts to protect our sheep. With the above changed and proposed new land uses, perhaps we can push for more formal habitat protection (Wildlife Management Area?), for management of disturbance if this is an important factor, and for range rehabilitation through more active forest management. Let's put our heads together and see what we can do to protect this small band of sheep right in our backyard.

Rick McKelvey



Sheep photos by Rick McKelvey

Crusoe of Lonesome Lake

Whenever you enjoy the majestic sight of Trumpeter Swans you should be very thankful that Ralph Edwards decided in the early 1900's that he wanted to escape civilization and live a remote peaceful life in the wilds of the Chilcotin. In 1912 Ralph began to establish a homestead at a remote lake in what is now Tweedsmuir Park. He called the lake Lonesome Lake. The only way to get there was by foot or float plane, although float planes weren't available for some years to come. Ralph noticed that every winter a flock of Trumpeter Swans came to spend the cold weather at Lonesome Lake. By the early 1930's there were only an estimated 100 of these swans left in North America and about one-third of those wintered at Lonesome Lake. The cold winters of the thirties were very hard on the swans and Ralph began packing in 100 lb sacks of barley to feed the swans. He was single-handedly responsible for us enjoying seeing the swans today. His story and how the swans were saved is fully told in several books: **Ralph Edwards of Lonesome Lake** by Ed Gould; **Crusoe of Lonesome Lake** by Leland Stowe, **Fog-swamp** by Trudy Turner (Ralph's daughter and also critical to saving the swans) and finally **Ruffles on my Longjohns** by Isabel K. Edwards. This last book is not directly connected to the swan story but is about a lady Isabel who marries into the Edwards family and begins homesteading in what was then the very remote Bella Coola Valley, an interesting read on its own.

There is obviously more to the story than what my brief summary above outlines but this is truly one of the conservation success stories of the last 100 years and makes for very interesting reading.

Bob Handfield

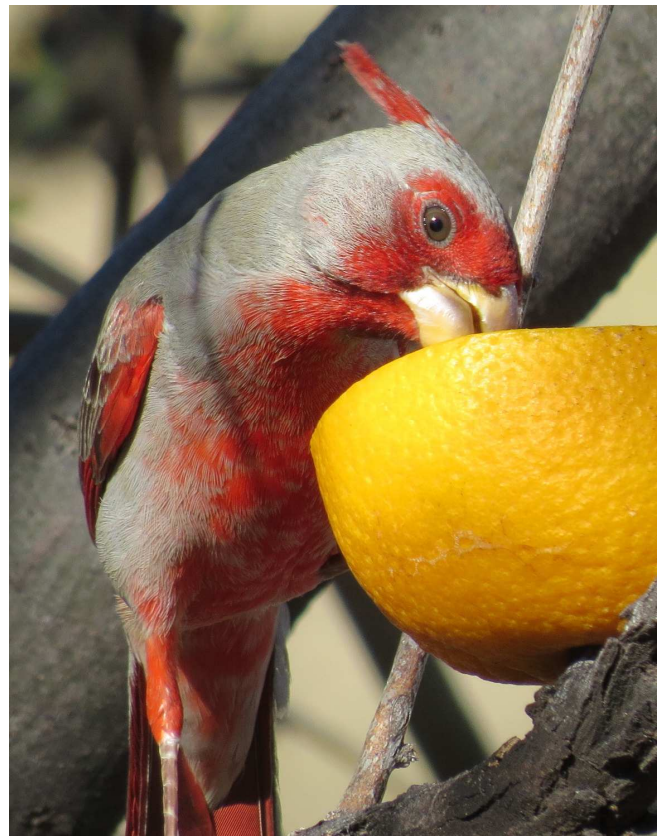
Species Identification Contest

Well it pains me (the editor) to admit that the gull ID contest last issue was a complete failure. Not a single entry! Several possible reasons for that come to mind, one being that many people find gulls extremely hard to identify. Of course, another reason could be that most Club members just aren't interested in such contests. We'll see. This month's contest covers a variety of flora and fauna and all photos were taken in the Okanagan Valley - see the six photos on the following page.

The prize for the winner is a copy of our recent Journal, Nature in Focus, a \$25 item and a best seller. If more than one person gets all six species, then species number 7 on this page will be the tie breaker. If there is still more than one person with all the right answers, names will be placed in a "hat" and a draw will determine the winner. Common names are okay.

The purpose of this contest is to keep Club members at least somewhat involved during this covid times and also to give the non-experts a shot at identifying things that aren't zipping about in the bushes.

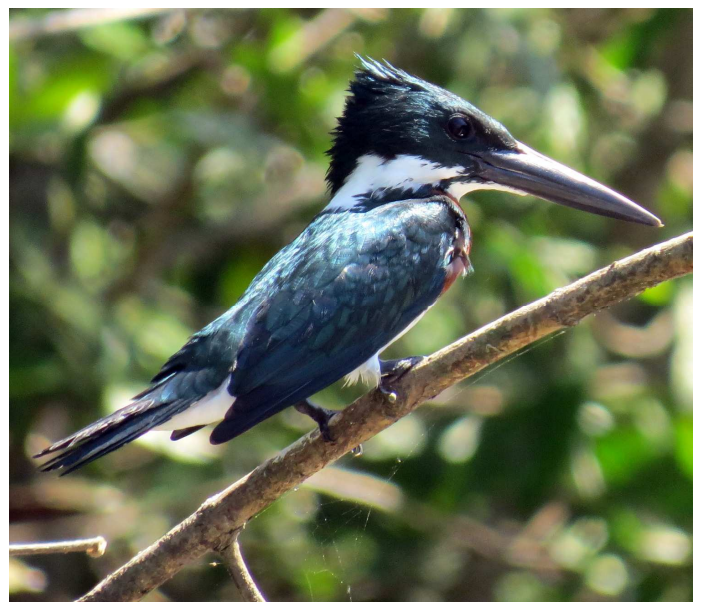
Good luck. Send your entries to Bob Handfield or Alex Boddin.



7

Credit: B. Handfield

This photo was NOT taken in the Okanagan Valley.



This Amazon Kingfisher is considerably smaller than our native kingfisher but in proportion, its bill looks to be twice the size. Photo taken in Costa Rica by B, Handfield



Credit: B. Handfield

1



Credit: B. Handfield

4



Credit: D. Olson

2



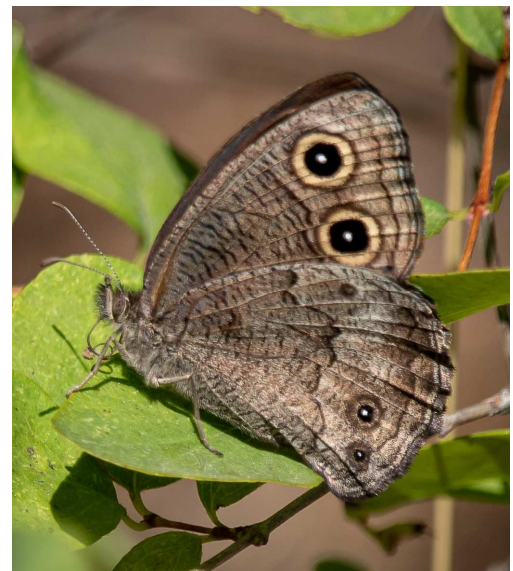
Credit: A. Bodden

5



Credit: D. Bersea

3



Credit: A. Bodden

6

The Heavens

There is not much to see in the way of planets for the coming season. Jupiter is still visible in the evening, low in the southwest as the sky darkens but only for a short time before it sets, and even that brief nightly appearance will not continue much beyond the first week in February.

Venus has made its way into the morning sky, appearing low in the southeast before sunrise looking very bright . . . **very** bright, the kind of thing that people see by accident and wonder what the heck it is . . . but that won't continue much past mid-March. And that's it. That's all the planet action for the next couple of months — if you don't count Mars, which is actually in the morning sky below Venus but difficult to see against the morning twilight glow.

For the coming season there is more to be gained by concentrating on the stars. Winter time is known for its display of bright stars. There is the disadvantage of the cold, which is not much of an inducement for standing around outside for any length of time, but that is offset by having darkness settle in early so you don't have to stay up late waiting for the stars to come out.

Prize of the winter sky is the constellation Orion, standing proudly and prominently in the south. The accompanying photograph doesn't do justice to his magnificent appearance, but it does serve the purpose of illuminating a few details. The most prominent feature, instantly recognisable, is the three bright stars of the mighty hunter's belt. The body of Orion is marked by a large rectangle around that, with the bright star Betelgeuse ("the armpit of the giant") in the upper left and Rigel ("the left leg") at the lower right — noting that Orion faces us so his left leg appears on the right. Those two stars present a wonderful contrast in colour, Betelgeuse a deep orange/red and Rigel a bright blue. The colours of stars, noticeable only in the brighter ones, indicates their temperatures, red being relatively cool and blue quite hot.

As a constellation Orion is familiar to many, second only to the Big Dipper in that regard.

Betelgeuse sits at the centre of the 'winter hexagon' of bright stars, a large feature which encircles pretty much all of the southern sky in the winter. In the summer you have the 'summer triangle', in the winter the 'winter hexagon'. Together, those two features account for two-thirds of all the brightest stars that you can see.

Here are the six stars of the winter hexagon, going counter-clockwise from the top:

Capella ("the little she-goat") directly above Betelgeuse, virtually overhead [in the constellation Auriga, the Charioteer]. A small triangle of fainter stars to its right marks "the kids".

Pollux ("the pugilist twin") above-left of Betelgeuse [in the constellation Gemini, the Twins]. The

slightly fainter star Castor ("the horseman twin") sits directly above it.

Procyon ("preceding the dog star") below-left of Betelgeuse [in Canis Minor, the Lesser Dog].

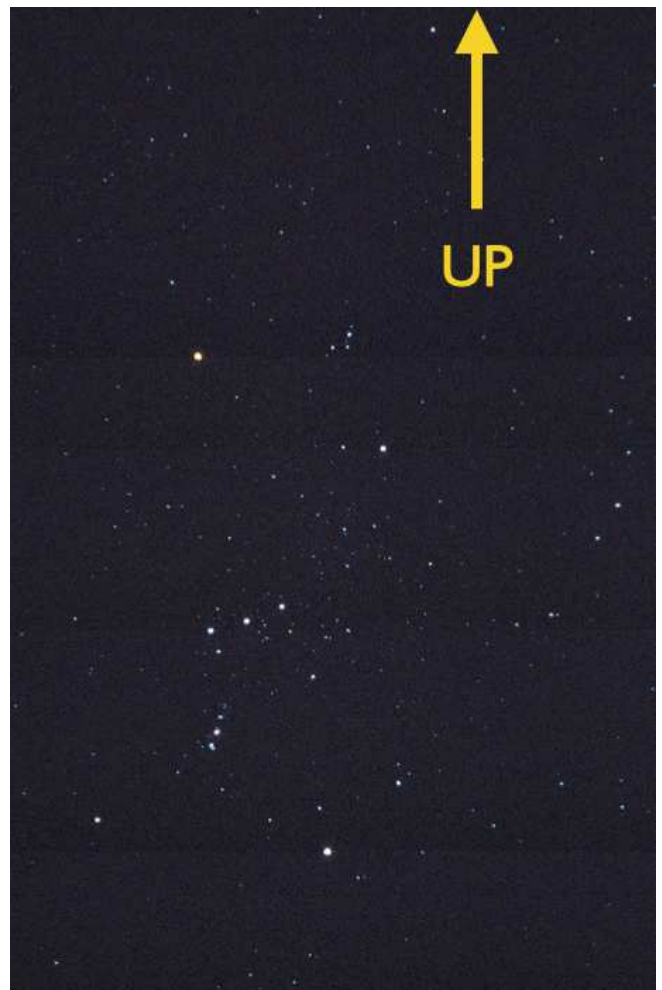
Sirius ("the sparkling one", often referred to as the dog-star) directly below Betelgeuse, fairly low in the sky and lined up with the stars of Orion's belt [in Canis Major, the Greater Dog].

Rigel (mentioned above) below-right of Betelgeuse, just the other side of Orion's belt.

Aldebaran ("the follower" (of the Pleiades)) above-right of Betelgeuse, and lined up with the stars of Orion's belt in the other direction [in the constellation Taurus, the Bull].

Five of the stars in the winter hexagon appear bright mainly because they are relatively nearby (less than 70 light years). The one exception to that idea is Rigel, a hefty 900 light years away, which appears bright because it really is intrinsically bright, churning out more than 2,000 times as much light on a continuing basis as does Sirius.

Chris Purton



Narratives of a Naturalist—Lisa Scott

Lisa was born and raised in the South Okanagan. She always had a strong connection with nature and loved exploring. She also had an affinity for animals, wild and domestic, from a very young age. Through the encouragement of her high school biology teacher, Harold Baumbrough, she opted to head to UBC following graduation from Pen-Hi. At UBC she completed a BSc in Animal Biology. During her third year of university, she discovered an opportunity to travel to Australia to continue her studies. She attended the University of Sydney where she completed her MSc in Zoology.

Back in Canada, Lisa started her own company, Eco-Matters Consulting in 1996. She has never looked back, and has thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated self-employment. Some of Lisa's longer-term contracts have included:

- thirteen years with the South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program, working with private landowners to enhance and protect habitats for species and ecosystems at risk
- nine years leading the Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program in the Okanagan-Similkameen, helping to record sightings of cavity nesting bird species at risk, and working with private landowners and local government to protect bird habitat
- five years with the Ministry of Environment to prepare burn plans, and conduct prescribed burns throughout the Southern Interior for ungulates

However, most people know Lisa through her work with invasive species. She helped to initiate a regional program 25 years ago and she is currently the Executive Director of the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society. The Okanagan-Similkameen region is near and dear to Lisa's heart. She loves the variety of ecosystems, and is particularly fond of grasslands and ponderosa pine forests. She enjoys exploring and kayaking the many lakes and rivers in the region. You will rarely find Lisa without a camera in hand, capturing moments in time of the flora, fauna and landscapes of the region.

Lisa has been a SONC member since 1998. She has assisted with members' nights, organizing and introducing speakers, and served as a Director for five years. Lisa's passion for the region has also led her to volunteer her time on Summerland's Climate Action Committee, the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program, and the Summerland Environmental Science Group.

Lisa would like to see SONC members get more involved with citizen science opportunities.



Lisa at “work” on the beach at Osoyoos with a nasty invasive weed—puncture vine.



Above and below, Lisa not at work.

All photos courtesy of L. Scott



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.



More beaver trails in the snow near Road 9 south of Oliver. Would be interesting to know if these were made by just one busy beaver or a whole family of beavers. Photo by Patrick Parenteau

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.