

SOUTH OKANAGAN NATURALISTS' CLUB - CRESTON VALLEY FIELD TRIP 2026

SONC members completed a multi-day excursion to the beautiful Creston Valley on May 19, 20 and 21, 2026. It was wonderful to have continuing SONC members Alice Unruh and Christine Anderson join us after recently moving to Calgary. Our group of 17 naturalists were eager to explore the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area guided once again by Marc-Andre Beaucher, CVWMA Head of Conservation Programs. Marc-Andre's friendly, knowledgeable support provided us with a conservation history of the region, identified major CVWMA conservation initiatives, and escorted us through amazing wetland and forest habitats where a wide variety of birds, plants and insects were observed or heard (despite the Pine Siskins constantly dominating the forest conversation).

For our Day 1 outing we hiked the Wood Duck Walk located in the south sector of Corn Creek Marsh. The cool morning had a few mosquitoes buzzing us through the forested section, but warm sunshine, a gentle breeze and open terrain cleared the air as we entered a beautiful area of sloughs and ponds. Marc-Andre pointed out an isolated knoll surrounded by wetlands, comprising the Creston Valley's only remaining old-growth coniferous forested area. It is occasionally accessible with frozen ground in the winter.



58 bird species were identified on the morning hike, with a total of 322 individuals observed. Highlights included Black-headed and Evening Grosbeaks, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Least and Hammond's Flycatchers, Ring-necked Ducks, Northern Harrier, Hooded Merganser, Ruffed Grouse,

Sora, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, American Kestrel, Western Wood-Peepees, Cassin's Vireo, Pacific and Marsh Wrens, Warblers (Nashville, MacGillivray's, Northern Yellow, Wilson's), Bullock's Oriole, Common Yellowthroat and Western Tanagers. Marc-Andre was able to point out an American Redstart's song—a lifer for some of us! In the afternoon, a group did a little car birding and were rewarded with additional bird sightings, a herd of elk and a black bear. At the same time a few hiked elsewhere or relaxed on the Valley View grounds.

On Day 2 we enjoyed the Duck Lake conservation areas lying north of Creston. Our first stop, along Six Mile Slough, rewarded us with Trumpeter Swans, Wood Ducks, dozens of Western Painted turtles sunning on logs, and a juvenile bird (unidentified) peeking out of its nest in a dead tree. Bullock's Orioles were singing from the tall deciduous trees but chose not to show themselves. This place is really a lucky dip, as visits throughout the day can reward one with a completely different selection of birds, both on the water and in nearby trees.



We then walked the core dyke with Duck Lake to the east and vast wetlands to the west. Marc-Andre explained that the area's water levels are strategically controlled with the landscape altered to accommodate both farming and wildlife. Significant conservation priorities in this area include monitoring of a threatened Northern Leopard frog population, and a protected corridor for Grizzly movement between the Selkirk and Purcell mountain ranges.



The afternoon was spent out on Corn Creek Marsh paddling through the wetland habitat in 2 canoes, with enthusiastic biology students as guides. It was a beautiful, serene environment enhanced by Yellow-headed Blackbird and Osprey sightings.

Day 2 bird observations included 43 species with a total of 289 individuals recorded. Highlights included a Sora (heard), Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Sandhill Cranes, Pied-billed and Red-necked Grebes and a beautiful pair of Redheads (ducks).

For our last evening, we gathered for dinner on the patio of the Creston Valley Golf Club. As a thank you for his invaluable insight, local knowledge and delightful company, we invited Marc-Andre and his wife, Gillian Cooper (local elementary school teacher) to join us. Gillian told us Marc speaks highly of our group, always enjoying SONC's field trips to the Creston Valley.

Once again, Gillian Kemle hosted our group at her Valley View Cabins. We were excited to meet the newest member of Gillian's team - her delightful son, Kaysen, now 16 months old. We always enjoy staying here as the property offers cozy accommodations, inviting porches and plenty of outdoor space to gather as a group. The gardens are lovely and the valley vistas, with towering Selkirk mountains to the west, provide a stunning backdrop. The group spent off-birding time around the summer kitchen and picnic tables where we enjoyed lots of great conversations, laughs and easy meals on the BBQ.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to Alex Bodden, Rick McKelvey and Marc-Andre Beacher for sharing their deep knowledge, naturalist expertise and keen skills finding and identifying an incredible variety of birds, plants and insects. As wonderful as the naturalist sightings and scenery were, the group

camaraderie and shared experiences made this field trip enjoyable and memorable. Thanks also to those who have posted their pics on the SONC FB site. Patrick, your Creston Valley field trip album provides a detailed, wonderful graphic synopsis of the event (the rainbow pic looking south during a good storm cell is gorgeous).

See you on the naturalist trail!

Elaine & Rod Malcolm

111 recorded birds May 19-21, 2026 (thank you Alex Bodden & Marc-Andre Beaucher for recording):

American Coot	Eurasian Collared Dove	Red-breasted Nuthatch
American Crow	European Starling	Red-eyed Vireo
American Goldfinch	Evening Grosbeak	Redhead
American Kestrel	Gadwall	Red-naped Sapsucker
American Pipit	Golden Eagle	Red-tailed Hawk
American Redstart	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Red-winged Blackbird
American Robin	Gray Catbird	Ring-billed Gull
Bald Eagle	Great Blue Heron	Ring-necked Duck
Bank Swallow	Hammond's Flycatcher	Ring-necked Pheasant
Barn Swallow	Hooded Merganser	Rock Pigeon
Barrows's Goldeneye	House Finch	Ruddy Duck
Belted Kingfisher	House Sparrow	Ruffed Grouse
Black-billed Magpie	Killdeer	Sandhill Crane
Black-capped Chickadee	Lazuli Bunting	Savannah Sparrow
Black-Headed Grosbeak	Least Flycatcher	Song Sparrow
Blue-winged Teal	Lesser Scaup	Sora
Bonaparte's Gull	Lincoln's Sparrow	Spotted Sandpiper
Brewer's Blackbird	MacGillivray's Warbler	Spotted Towhee
Brown-headed Cowbird	Mallard	Tree Swallow
Bufflehead	Marsh Wren	Trumpeter Swan
Bullock's Oriole	Merlin	Turkey Vulture
California Gull	Mourning Dove	Vaux's Swift
Canada Goose	Nashville Warblers	Violet-green Swallow
Cassin's Finch	Northern Flicker	Western Grebe
Cassin's Vireo	Northern Harrier	Western Meadowlark
Cedar Waxwing	Northern House Wren	Western Tanager
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Western Warbling Vireo
Chipping Sparrow	Northern Shoveler	Western Wood Peewee
Cinnamon Teal	Northern Waterthrush	White-winged Crossbill
Cliff Swallow	Northern Yellow Warbler	Wilson's Snipe
Common Loon	Osprey	Wilson's Warblers
Common Raven	Pacific Wren	Wood Duck
Common Yellowthroat	Pied-billed Grebe	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Comon Goldeneye	Pileated Woodpecker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Dark-eyed Junco	Pine Siskin	
Double Crested Cormorant	Red Crossbill	
Eastern Kingbird		