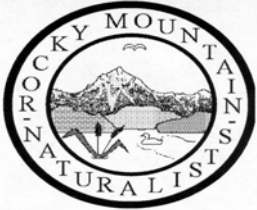


# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

RM naturalists newsletter is published quarterly  
Volume 4, Issue 4

Winter 2007



## Editors corner

Please send any articles or comments to  
scoutfir@shaw.ca



Also, note that the deadline for articles  
for the spring issue is **March 21**

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## CLUB NEWS:

Check your e-mail for agendas and final locations of  
upcoming meetings.

**Next meeting: January 16, 2008**

**Community Service Room @ Super Store**

**Annual General Meeting at 7pm and followed by regular  
meeting at 7:30 pm**

**Outing leaders: Don't forget to jot down quick notes on  
your outing and pass them into the newsletter. Humour  
highlights, sightings and pictures work just fine.**



# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

## **The 108th Christmas Bird Count,**

Fernie, December 15<sup>th</sup>,  
Cranbrook, December 29<sup>th</sup>,  
and  
Kimberley, January 5th.

### *The tradition continues as a new season approaches*

The 108<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count season is rapidly approaching; compilers and participants are finalizing their plans and eagerly anticipating what birds, weather, and exciting times will come their way.

As the fall migration winds down, and winter conditions wind up, Rocky Mountain Naturalists are eagerly anticipate the upcoming count. Where will the winter raptors or finches be found? What late-lingering migrants will remain in our areas? And, perhaps most important, what will counting conditions be like during the critical weekend days? Time—and the Christmas Bird Counters—will tell.

### **Get Involved**

You are welcome to join in on the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, the oldest and largest citizen science event in the world. For over a hundred years, people have gathered together during the winter holiday season to count birds. For many people, this is an annual tradition that has passed from one generation to the next. In the process, they have created a vast pool of bird data that is the most comprehensive available for mid-December to early January. It is a fertile source of information on the status and distribution of early winter bird populations and is studied by scientists and interested people the world over. And it all starts with you!

While there is a specific methodology to the CBC and you need to count birds within an existing Christmas Bird Count circle, everyone can participate! If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher. If your home is within the boundaries of a Christmas Bird Count circle, then you can stay home and report the birds that visit your feeder or join a group of birdwatchers in the field. If you have never been on a CBC before and you want to participate in a count this year, including feeder counting, please contact your count compilers.

Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season is December 14 through January 5 each year. This year your local count dates are for Fernie, Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, Cranbrook, Saturday, December 29th and Kimberley, Saturday, January 5th.

If you would like to participate in the 108th count, please contact in Fernie, Bob Livsey 423-6699, in Cranbrook, Greg Ross 489-2566 or in Kimberley, Ruth Goodwin 427-5404 Feeder Counters are needed!

Greg Ross  
CBC coordinator Cranbrook/Kimberley  
RMNats FBCN Co-ordinator.  
Ross  
489-2566

# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

## Feature species: **Harris's Sparrow**

One of our members has recently had a Harris's Sparrow visiting her feeder near Fort Steele. The Harris's Sparrow is unique in Canada because it is the only bird species that breeds here and nowhere else in the world. This sparrow also has interesting behavior while at feeders. In winter flocks, Harris's Sparrows maintain linear dominance hierarchies that determine access to food and roost sites. The most dominant birds are the oldest males, and they also have the largest bibs. If first winter birds have their feathers dyed black, creating an artificially large bib, they rise in the dominance hierarchy.

While a regular visitor to the East Kootenays in the winter, it has never been that common. I remember birding Slaterville a few years ago and seeing 3 HASP together in a lilac bush but all were first year birds. Haven't been so fortunate since.



# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

## Meeting and Outing listings

**Dec. 29th**

Cranbrook Xmas Bird Count  
Meet: Elizabeth Lake 8:45  
Pot Luck - Greg & Sue's  
5:30 - 6:00 Ph - 489-2566

**Jan. 5th**

Kimberley Xmas Bird Count  
Meet: Platzl 8:45  
Pot Luck - Ruth's  
5:30 - 6:00 Ph - 427-5404

**Jan. 27th**

Snowshoe and Cross-Country Skiing  
Meet: Happy Hans Campground  
10:00 - 12:00 noon  
Laura & Jim  
Ph: 427-2600

**Feb 9**

Moyie Lake birding 2 km hike or snowshoe  
Meet: Elizabeth Lake parking lot  
1000 to 1200 hrs  
Tony and Pam  
Ph:489-1813

**Feb. 24th**

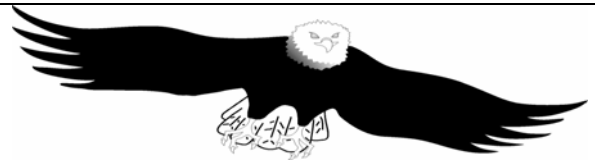
Eagle Watch  
Meet: Staples parking lot  
9:00 a.m.  
Greg- 489-2566

**March 8th**

Owling with Peter  
more info later  
ph:426-2458

**March 22nd**

Snowshoe Ramble with Maryanne & Darryl  
Mother's Day Hill  
Meet: 6km cattle guard 1:30  
Ph-489-1601



# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

## Rocky Mountain Naturalists Elizabeth Lake Activities 2007

(Tara Szkorupa)

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists were busy again in 2007 at Elizabeth Lake. We hosted our annual Elizabeth Lake Festival Day in the spring, and had stations set up where the public could learn about the restoration project, non-native plants (courtesy of The Land Conservancy), turtle conservation and waterfowl diversity. This event was advertised in local newspapers and was well attended.

From spring until fall we held monthly work bees, and focused on a different project each time.

During these work bees we:

- Planted hundreds of shrub and tree seedlings
- Spread mulch on path around restoration site (Elizabeth Lake Lodge provided a back-hoe to assist with this)
- Pulled non-native invasive plants in the restoration site
- Flagged planted trees and shrubs so these would not be damaged during mowing
- Spread mulch around the base of planted trees and shrubs to keep grass from competing with the plantings

We used some of our funding from the Columbia Basin Trust to hire a person to assist with watering planted trees, mowing tall grass and weeds throughout the site, pulling weeds throughout the summer and mapping the site perimeter and planting areas (so that these could be avoided during future mowing). Elizabeth Lake Lodge also constructed a path leading to the trail around the restoration site.

A major task completed in 2007 was the replacement of the interpretive signs at the site. The old signs were in a state of disrepair, and the new signs are a great improvement. The new signs are slanted to blend in to the site. See photos below, as well as the text for the new habitat restoration sign. Funding was provided from the City of Cranbrook and the Columbia Basin Trust. Note that Ducks Unlimited has expressed interest in having their logo on the water control sign. We will plan on re-doing this sign to accommodate this, and will also add logos for the City of Cranbrook and BC Parks.

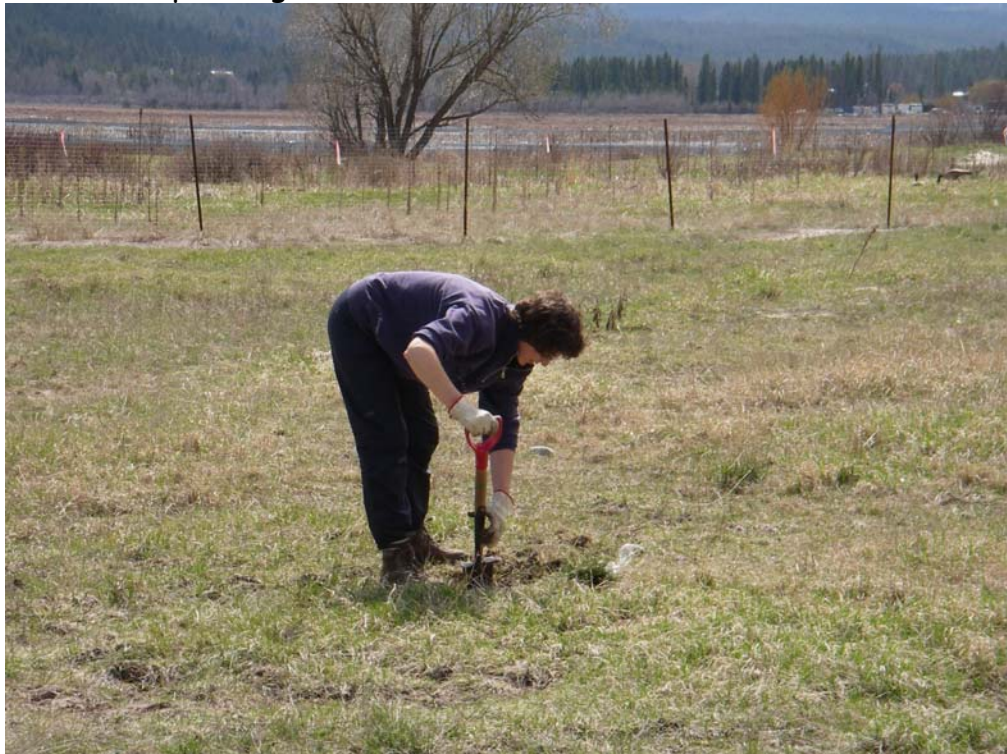
One of our club members took the Community in Bloom judges on a tour of our restoration project. Cranbrook was later awarded a special mention by the judges, for the Elizabeth Lake restoration project.

# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

Photos – 2007



Rocky Mountain Naturalists planting trees and shrubs at Elizabeth Lake



Ministry of Forests volunteer helping with planting trees at Elizabeth Lake

# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter



Tired puppy, sleeping in a hole that was intended for a tree (she was helping dig planting holes earlier)!



**WATERFOWL OF ELIZABETH LAKE** Ducks Unlimited Canada  
 Numerous species of waterfowl breed and raise young in Elizabeth Lake each year.  
 Can you identify the waterfowl pictured below?



**RUDDY DUCK**  
 The Ruddy Duck's eye blue bill and red-rumped tail make her an easy waterfowl to identify. The female's ruddy can be seen on water back from behind and below. These birds are found "over water" within the vegetation stands of Elizabeth Lake.



**AMERICAN WIGEON**  
 The shimmery blue can be identified by the white cap and green eye band on the male. American Wigeon. Look for this duck nesting in the tall grass or shrubs in the upland surrounding Elizabeth Lake.



**COOT**  
 Many of these oily, aggressive birds utilize the wetlands along natural stands for nesting and raising young. Listen to their wide variety of croaks, rumbles and even wild laughing notes.



**CANADA GOOSE**  
 The white chin strap distinguishes the greynose and common loon. The Canada goose is very intelligent and has adapted very well to human settlements when it grazes on forbs and soft meadows. Canada geese pairs mate for life and are common waterfowl around Elizabeth Lake.



**COMMON GOLDENEYE**  
 The prominent white spot in front of the bright yellow eye is a distinguishing identification feature of the common goldeneye male. Female goldeneyes lay in cavity sites in trees, logs and rock banks. In the spring keep an eye out for the double-egg jumping from their nest high above the ground!



**RED-NECKED GREBE**  
 The large grebe is closely related to the loon family. The red-necked grebe nests on "pads" of mud and vegetation in the middle and can often be seen in early summer with several young on its back. Their water diet is small fish, shrimp and other invertebrates.



New water control and wetland management sign at Elizabeth Lake



New habitat restoration sign at Elizabeth Lake

# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter

## Elizabeth Lake Habitat Restoration Project Sign

### *Our Vision*

The Rocky Mountain Naturalist's vision is for Elizabeth Lake to be a healthy, functioning ecosystem, with a diversity of native plants and animals.

### *Help Needed for Elizabeth Lake*

The Elizabeth Lake wetland complex and associate upland provides important habitat for insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals, including species at risk such as the Copper Dione butterfly and painted turtle. However the Elizabeth Lake area is currently under attack from invasive weeds, which threaten the ability of the site to support important wildlife.

### *Steps to a Healthier Ecosystem*

In 2005 and 2006, the site experienced a major transformation. First, we mowed down the weeds and non-native plants. Next, we disked and harrowed the soil to break up clumps, and added rich top soil to create a suitable bed for seeding and planting. Large rocks were cleared and piled to create habitat features for reptiles and small mammals.

We then seeded with a short-lived perennial rye-grass mixed with a blend of native grasses. The ryegrass will provide initial ground cover and erosion protection until the native species are established. Encouraging aggressive plant growth is the best defence against invasion by weedy species!

We also planted dozens of tree and shrub species suitable for dry upland conditions, and irrigated the site regularly during the establishment years.

### *The Future*

We will continue to encourage the transformation to a native ecosystem through mowing, hand-pulling of weeds, and additional shrub and tree plantings.

Get your hands dirty and join us for this important work! Visit our website for contact information (go to [www.kootenaynaturalists.org](http://www.kootenaynaturalists.org) and click on the Rocky Mountain Naturalists icon).

Funded by: Columbia Basin Trust, Tree Canada Foundation, TransCanada Pipelines, and the City of Cranbrook

# Rocky Mountain Naturalists Newsletter



Merry  
Christmas

A red Christmas ornament with a gold cap and a snowflake are positioned below the text.

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Mail to:  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists  
P.O. Box 791  
Cranbrook, B.C.  
V1C 4J5

\$25 for family  
\$20 for individual

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_