

2023-24 Annual Report





As one year ends and another begins we present the 2023-24 Annual Report and invite you to read through it to discover the many activities Nature Saskatchewan was involved in over the past year.

Living on the prairies we are all well aware of the importance of water to everything we do and the impacts of climate change have heightened the challenge to balance responsible use of this vital resource. Much of our time recently has been and will continue to be directed toward the issues of expanded irrigation proposals and the on-going pressure to drain more and more of our pothole wetlands within the agricultural landscape. Working with our conservation partners we will ensure that water gets the attention it deserves.

An addition to our roster of special publications this past year was *Trees Against the Wind – The Birth of Prairie Shelterbelts* by William Schroeder. Though the topic seemed a slight divergence from our regular publications its popularity proved otherwise. A second printing was ordered within the first month of receiving the first. Trees on the prairie definitely resonated with our members and the general public.

It goes without saying that the dedicated and passionate staff, board and volunteers are the key to the successes we achieve. We express our deepest gratitude and thanks to these committed individuals and our appreciation to you, our members and supporters.

In closing, 2024 is the 75th Anniversary of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. Established by a keen group of naturalists in 1949, the Society has grown and evolved to what we see today. We will be celebrating the anniversary at the Spring and Fall Meets with various other small activities through the year. We hope you are able to join us in Saskatoon or Regina (or both).

Lorne Scott
Board President

Jordan Ignatiuk
Executive Director



credit: S. Chernick

NATUREHOOD

Naturehood field trips to the Last Mountain National Wildlife Area and Wascana Migratory Bird Sanctuary were almost double last year's number of field trips! We led 71 Naturehood field trips for 1,893 youth from kindergarten to grade 12. We also hosted 25 public events including the Christmas Bird Count for Kids event, World Migratory Bird Day event, Get Outside! Kids Club events, Indigenous Celebration at Wascana Place in Wascana Centre, participated in Thursdays in Wascana and led activities at Frost Fest Regina at the Wascana Centre Hub reaching 10,692 people. We are supporting partnerships with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders at public events such as Frost Fest. We worked in partnership with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to tan animal hides, create buffalo art and host Indigenous Storytelling with an Elder. We continue to strengthen our relationships with the Regina Open Door Society, YWCA, City Kidz, Regina Immigrant Women Centre and the North Central Family Centre.

LAST MOUNTAIN BIRD OBSERVATORY

Staff observed about 230 species and captured and/or banded 153 species during the spring and fall migration seasons. 3,167 new birds were banded during the spring and fall migration seasons. The peak day for bird banding was May 26th with 69 birds banded (spring migration) and August 23 with 160 birds banded (fall migration). The banding station was open to the public by appointment only. We had a total of 319 visitors and 22 volunteers. We had five school and community group trips to the station. The annual Black and White Warbler newsletter was completed and emailed to subscribers.



credit: J. Rustad

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

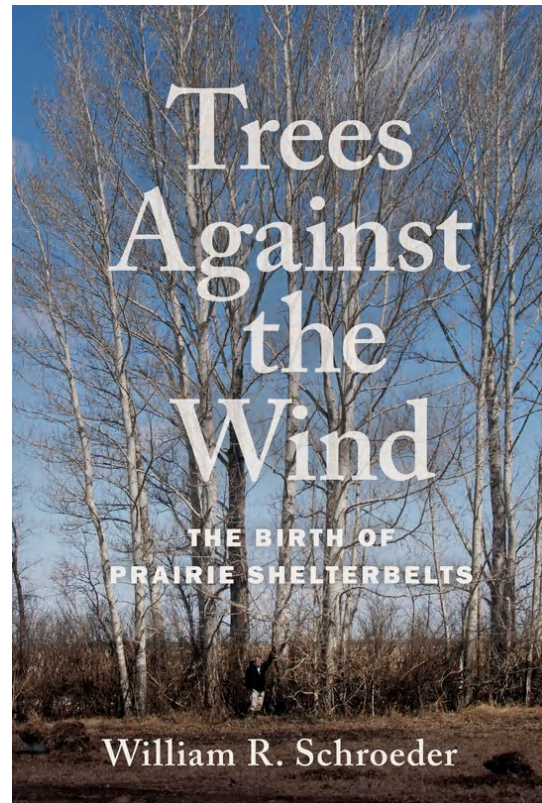
Saskatchewan has 52 Important Bird Areas. These IBAs rely on a Volunteer Caretaker Network to monitor bird populations and environmental concerns in these areas. Our volunteers make the conservation of these areas possible. During the next year, many of the IBAs will be transitioning to Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

Canada is a global leader in identifying KBAs, which are sites that play a critical role in the persistence of species and ecosystems. KBAs will play an important role in our efforts to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. In addition to the species KBAs that used to be IBAs, there will also be areas designated for supporting endangered habitats and to preserve ecosystem services. The KBA transition is expected to take place in the summer and fall of 2024.



PUBLICATIONS

In 2023, Nature Saskatchewan published one book, *Trees Against the Wind: The Birth of the Prairie Shelterbelts* by William R. Schroeder.



MARGARET SKEEL GRADUATE STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

In 2024, the Margaret Skeel Graduate Student Scholarship was awarded to Jessie Bainbridge. Jessie's project is to better understand the relationship between landscape features and Ord's Kangaroo Rat movement throughout their range in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

MEMBER SERVICES

The 2023 spring meet was held in Kindersley, SK and was well attended. The meet included a BioBlitz of Nature Saskatchewan's newest sanctuary, the Meyers Sanctuary. In the fall, members gathered in Indian Head for the fall meet. The weekend included field trips to the Heritage Tree Farm, Cherry Lake and Red Fox Lake.



Questions specific to Blue Jay were asked to ensure that the publication continues to serve the needs of members. We found that, of the members who responded, there was a good mix of rural and urban residents with 56% residing in an urban setting and 44% in a rural setting. Several respondents were members of a local society, however just over 40% said that they do not belong to any local group.

At the end of the survey, members were asked for suggestions or comments and several good ideas were brought forward.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete this survey. The Nature Saskatchewan board of directors will be reviewing the report and the results will be considered during upcoming strategic planning sessions.

MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS

As part of our three year strategic plan, Nature Saskatchewan surveyed current members to determine members and supporters expectations and motivations. The response rate was good with 39% of members responding either through mail or via an online form. Overwhelmingly, members stated that they became a member of Nature Saskatchewan because they are interested in conservation and the environment. The survey showed that members are active in a variety of ways from responding to a call for action to making donations and attending events.

CELEBRATING NATURE SASKATCHEWAN'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

2024 saw the beginning of the 75th Anniversary celebrations of Nature Saskatchewan. To start the year, an exhibit called *Conservation at the Core: Key Moments at Nature Saskatchewan* was on display at the Regina Performing Arts Centre and will be on display at other locations in the province throughout the year. Other 75th anniversary events this year will include celebrations being held in Saskatoon and Regina.



STEWARDS OF SASKATCHEWAN

With three Coordinators, one Species at Risk Manager, and seven summer staff, in cooperation with partner organizations, volunteers, and professionals, the Stewards of Saskatchewan programs worked with and supported over 1,200 stewards in 2023-2024.

Operation Burrowing Owl, active since 1987, is currently working with 348 participants to conserve over 216,000 acres of prairie habitat for Burrowing Owls.

Launched in 2003, there are currently 325 Shrubs for Shrikes participants conserving over 157,000 acres of grassland and shrub habitat for the threatened Prairie Loggerhead Shrike.

Plovers on Shore focuses on conserving and enhancing shoreline habitat for the endangered Piping Plover.

Starting in 2009, there are currently 67 participants conserving 342 km (213 miles) of shoreline habitat for Piping Plovers.

The Stewards of Saskatchewan banner program works with 283 participants conserving over 346,000 acres of habitat supporting several nationally and/or provincially listed SAR.

Initiated in 2002, Rare Plant Rescue currently has 99 participants conserving over 268,000 acres of habitat. In 2023-24, staff conducted 308 visits with current



and potential program participants to discuss the stewardship programs, species at risk, management options, and conservation, staff welcomed 96 new participants to the programs, and distributed 70 SAR Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) plans and rare plant reports to program participants.

Through the 2023 census, program participants reported 27 pairs, 14 singles, and 13 young Burrowing Owls; 102 pairs, 116 singles, and 60 young Loggerhead Shrikes; 1 pair, 11 singles, and 8 young Piping Plovers; approximately 1,322 adult Barn Swallows; 68 adult Ferruginous Hawks; 3 adult Short-eared Owls; 44 adult Badgers; 92 male Sprague's Pipits; 7 male Bobolinks; 92 Common Nighthawks; 235 Northern Leopard Frogs; 44 Tiger Salamanders; and 45 Monarchs!

There was one Habitat Enhancement wildlife-friendly fencing project completed in 2023 to improve range health for Sprague's Pipit.

Staff also held 5 Conservation Awareness events bringing over 200 local participants, their families, and members of the general public together to discuss conservation and new species at risk management tools, and to share SOS and a number of partner program/project updates.



credit: E.Putz (top), M. Ranalli (centre), K. Mann (bottom)



Nature Saskatchewan's conservation work covered a wide variety of activities in this past year, as usual. The NS Board Conservation Committee, which essentially consists of all members of the board in varying contributions, started the year by defining a list of topics that we had update discussions on at our meetings. This wasn't meant to be an exhaustive list, but instead just a way to give us some continuity and areas to focus on that could take advantage of board members' experience and skills. The seven ongoing discussion areas set at the time for the board were:

(a) Solar farm guidelines (similar to wind turbine placement guidelines ensuring that native prairie or areas important to wildlife are not affected).

(b) Gravel pits and native prairie trade-offs.

(c) Monitoring of, and input to, the assessment for small modular nuclear reactors in Saskatchewan.

(d) Encouraging establishment of a provincial wetland policy, in conjunction with several other organizations.

(e) Measurement of Nature Saskatchewan protected-land sanctuaries, building on the Citizen Science approach taken to recording species at the new Daisy Meyers sanctuary, by the attendees at last year's Spring Meet.

(f) Consideration for non-crop rural areas – i.e. Protection of fragmentary or side areas that are still useful habitat, and especially considering whether we can duplicate the work done by the Yellowhead Nature Society with municipalities on road allowances.

(g) Sales of Crown Lands – continuing to influence policy, and ensuring easements are honoured.

The board Conservation Committee addressed a wide variety of other topics as well through the year, including several specific issues related to wetlands and water use, other types of natural resource exploitation, and habitat protection and management related to particular species.

I'd also like to mention, in a little more detail, a couple of other projects of personal interest that the board discussed as Conservation Committee work. The first of these is to promote Nature Saskatchewan's involvement in the Motus wildlife tracking network. Motus is a Birds Canada program that has become an international standard for electronic monitoring, and that is gaining a worldwide footprint. NS can be involved in both the infrastructure component of setting up Motus tracking stations, and the use of electronic 'tags' to monitor birds.

The other project I'll mention in a little detail is very appropriate for this NS 75th anniversary year: working with researchers and staff at the University of Saskatchewan to digitize the field notes of Stuart Houston. The work is at a preliminary stage and limited scope so far, but if successful and expanded to all the Houston field notes and possibly to those of other observers, it could greatly expand the breadth and availability of Saskatchewan's historical bird data.

This report will be one of my last activities as I complete my 10-year set of terms, in a variety of capacities, on the Nature Saskatchewan board. I'd like to take the opportunity to commend the Nature Saskatchewan staff for their continued great work, and thank my fellow board members, past and present, for being such good people to work with, in a very good cause.

Respectfully submitted,
Ed Rodger



credit: J. Rustad (top), G. Chin (centre), R. Magnus (bottom)

2023-24 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
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| Vice President | Laura Poppy |
| Secretary | Jamie Sparrow |
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| | Branimir Gjetvaj |
| | David Weiman |
| | Rob Wilson |
| | Jacque Bolton |



2023-24 STAFF

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| Executive Director | Jordan Ignatiuk |
| Species at Risk Manager | Rebecca Magnus |
| Conservation and Education Manager | Lacey Weekes (Leave ends June 2024) Shannon Chernick (December 2022-April 2024) |
| Communications Manager | Ellen Bouvier |
| Office Coordinator | Jennifer Moser-Aikman |
| Rare Plant Rescue Coordinator | Ashley Vass |
| Operation Burrowing Owl Coordinator | Kaytlyn Burrows (until September 2023) Grace Pidborchynski (September 2023-current) |
| Plovers on Shore/Shrubs for Shrikes Coordinator | Emily Putz |

Thank you to our partners and supporters for your contributions in 2023-24



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TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

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Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act



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Nature Saskatchewan would also like to thank the many generous individual donors throughout the year.