

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21



*Nature*  
SASKATCHEWAN

# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

*Submitted by Ed Rodger, President*

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it's my pleasure to introduce the Nature Saskatchewan Annual Report for 2020-21.

The ongoing pandemic of the past year continued to provide many challenges, both for our own work and especially for the wider community where we live. This has created an extra need for natural areas as places of recreation and education, and extra challenges in maintaining a focus on the importance of nature conservation. Within that context, the Annual Report describes an impressive range of work in wildlife conservation and research, habitat protection, citizen science, education, publishing and public events. Nature Saskatchewan collaborated widely with other organizations, both national and local, and the organization's work has been honoured in awards and commentary, most recently with the Conservation Partner Award from Nature Canada, and two program awards (with partners) from the Regional Centre of Expertise for Education in Sustainable Development.

The accomplishments you will read about here would be impossible without the dedication and talent of the Nature Saskatchewan staff. The Board would like to thank them very much for their commitment, especially with the continuing disruptions that came with the pandemic - their ability to maintain continuity of focus, and the results produced, continue to be remarkable.

I'd also like to thank my fellow Board members, who have given freely of their time to complete tasks and provide valuable guidance. Though I don't have space to give the personal thanks deserved of all staff, board members and volunteers, I would like at least to thank two whose great work stands out in our publications: Donna Bruce as Special Publications Editor, and Annie McLeod as Blue Jay editor.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I invite you to read about and enjoy our work as described in the Annual Report, and I invite you to join us in that work as a member, volunteer or supporter. Also please feel free to stay in touch with us on a more regular basis, through our electronic newsletter, and presence on various social media channels.

## **VISION**

**Humanity in Harmony with Nature.**

## **MISSION**

**We engage and inspire people to appreciate, learn about and conserve Saskatchewan's natural environment.**

# REPORT FROM THE CONSERVATION DIRECTOR

*Submitted by Lorne Scott, Conservation Director*

During the 2020-21 year Nature Saskatchewan board and staff members continued to work on a number of conservation issues. Thanks to their dedicated efforts, Nature Saskatchewan remains an effective and respected Voice for Nature.

Nature Saskatchewan is represented on a number of committees including; Fish and Wildlife Development Fund, Chronic Wasting Disease Working Group, South of the Divide Conservation Action Program (SODCAP) Board, SaskTip (Turn in Poachers), Breeding Bird Atlas Steering Committee, Habitat Advisory Committee, Wildlife Advisory Committee. Jordan Ignatiuk, Executive Director once again represented us in Nature Day on the Hill, encouraging MP's continued support for the Nature Fund and Protected Places initiative.

During the past year the three former PFRA pastures in the southwest corner of Saskatchewan were transferred to Environment Canada. The 200,000 acres will be managed for livestock grazing with extra attention to biodiversity management. Other former federal and provincial pastures remain intact with the pasture patrons managing the pastures under lease agreements.

Our biggest threat to grassland conservation remains with the provincial government's policy to sell Crown land under the Ministry of Agriculture jurisdiction. Over a million acres of public land has been sold in recent years. Some of the land under formal designation in the Wildlife Habitat Protection Act has been sold with Conservation Easements, while other land with low ecological integrity has been sold without Conservation Easement protection.

This is an issue that Nature Saskatchewan has and will continue to focus on in the coming year. We currently signed on to a letter asking Government to cease the sale of Crown Lands. The most recent statistics conclude that only 13.7 % of our native grasslands remain intact. Sadly, another report states that less than 10% of our grasslands remain. Wetland drainage continues to be an ongoing issue, even in these dry years. Government policy assumes that only farm land and producers should dictate water management in Saskatchewan. Jeff Olson, Managing Director of the Citizens Environmental Alliance (CEA) has led efforts to have other concerns such as wildlife values, carbon storage, flood control, etc. recognized in water management in Saskatchewan. Nature Saskatchewan has been a working partner in these meetings and will continue to work with local groups to address this issue.

Nature Saskatchewan has also been monitoring the progress of the Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation Expansion Development and expect to partner with several other organizations to petition the Federal Impact Assessment Agency to have a full Environmental Assessment conducted. Key Biodiversity Areas Canada, an IUCN initiative being coordinated by a coalition of organizations in Canada lead by the Wildlife Conservation Society, has been making progress in identifying important ecological areas across the country to be designated as KBA's. The hope is that they will become an effective tool to inform conservation in Canada over the next decade. Nature Saskatchewan has committed to assist in the identification process for the province.

## STEWARDS OF SASKATCHEWAN



Our voluntary Stewards of Saskatchewan (SOS) suite of programs is designed to conserve habitat for prairie species at risk. The SOS staff work in cooperation with over **900** rural landowners and managers, as well as other organizations, volunteers, and professionals. The main program activities include encouraging and facilitating stewardship, education and awareness (e.g., to prevent the inadvertent destruction of habitat), and population surveys and monitoring (e.g., through census reports).

Operation Burrowing Owl (OBO), active since 1987, is currently working with **335** participants to conserve just over **160,000 acres** of prairie habitat for Burrowing Owls. Launched in 2003, there are currently **275** Shrubs for Shrikes participants conserving nearly **120,000 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. Since 2009, there are **60** participants conserving over **220 km (137 miles)** of shoreline habitat for Piping Plovers. The Stewards of Saskatchewan banner program, that celebrated its 10th anniversary, works with **176** participants conserving nearly **92,000 acres** of habitat supporting a number of nationally and/or provincially listed SAR. Initiated in 2002, Rare Plant Rescue (RPR) focuses on nine nationally listed plant species at risk in Saskatchewan and seven species that are provincially rare. RPR currently has **83** participants conserving nearly **150,000 acres** of habitat.

In 2020-21, SOS staff conducted 153 visits with current and potential program participants to discuss the stewardship programs, species at risk, management options, and conservation. SOS staff also held three Conservation

Awareness and Appreciation Day virtual events bringing nearly **450** local participants, their families, and members of the general public together to discuss conservation and new SAR management tools, and to share SOS and a number of partner program/project updates.

Site-specific SAR Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) plans are created to encourage land stewardship practices that are beneficial to the SAR and other wildlife in the area while allowing for the specific operations at that location to run efficiently. In 2020-21, SOS staff distributed **39** plans to interested participants.

The SOS staff also work with the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Center (SK CDC) and Environment and Climate Change Canada's Species at Risk (SAR) Recovery Teams to document and verify SAR sightings, and to monitor populations. SOS staff monitor species' trends with the help of participating landowners through the annual program census. The census collects population data on target SAR and locational data are shared with the SK CDC each year.

## LAST MOUNTAIN BIRD OBSERVATORY

Staff observed about **100** species and captured and/or banded **43** species (**324** new birds in the spring), and around **130** species were observed and **74** species (**1975** new birds) were captured and/or banded in the fall. The banding station was closed to the public due to the pandemic so visitors to the station drastically decreased. We adapted our education program to offer virtual tours of the station. These were well received and will continue into the future. The annual Black-and-white Warbler newsletter was completed and emailed to subscribers.

## NATUREHOOD

Field trips were limited to school groups that were within walking distance to green spaces. **2** school field trips to the migratory bird sanctuary occurred in the Fall. **150**

NatureHood activity packages were created for families in low-income and racialized communities, as well as **3** NatureHood interpretive signs were produced for the observatory. Two video resources were developed to promote Naturehood activities for teachers, parents, and community groups. Our Covid-19 contingency plan allowed us to hire a coordinator to develop and deliver Get outside! Kids Club with Nature Regina.

Engaging **598** participants in outdoor programming. Virtual World Migratory Bird Day photo sharing event attracted **50** participants, the Christmas Bird Count for Kids in person event had **61** participants and the virtual event had **14** participants. **2** project feederwatch virtual presentations with **4** school groups we delivered and there was also **2** public virtual presentations with Regina Public Library- that had **15** participants.



## NATURE QUEST

Due to the pandemic many of our projects in Northern communities were put on hold. Attention was instead focused on creating online resources for educators. Project planning continued with Makwa Sahgaiehcan and Loon Lake communities. An elder-supported nature studies program with youth in the area is planned for next year. A project with Big River First Nation is also being developed to create long term nature presentations that involves the arts and Indigenous traditional cultural practices. Our Dumble Forest Project is working with a group of local Métis women south of Big River to develop an education program highlighting the importance of this historical site.

## CONNECTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the Covid-19 Pandemic the way Nature Saskatchewan interacts and engages with supporters and members has shifted.

Many of our programs that were based in person such as our classroom visits or in person tours at the Last Mountain Bird Observatory were not able to go ahead as they normally would in previous years.

Thanks to the dedication of staff and a little creativity, many programs were able to make a transition to online delivery and some new ideas were able to take shape. In 2020-21, Nature Saskatchewan offered many online webinars in place of events such as World Migratory Bird Day. While it is always preferable to be out in nature and interacting in person we found that by moving some programming online we were able to connect with people from further away and speak with people who normally wouldn't travel to an in-person event.

In 2020, Nature Saskatchewan also held online Nature Trivia nights in partnership with Mystery Mansion Regina. This was a fun and relaxed way to interact with others and learn about nature from the safety of our homes.

Online programming has allowed us to continue the work of Nature Saskatchewan while abiding by public health rules. While we plan to return to in-person events once the pandemic has subsided it is likely that some form of online programming will remain as a way to connect with more people throughout Saskatchewan.

## IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) caretaker program received monitoring forms for **12** IBAs. Jordan Rustad, the IBA caretaker assistant, updated all the site summaries, and developed resource videos to help assist caretakers in their role.

## MARGARET SKEEL GRADUATE STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

Each year Nature Saskatchewan awards a scholarship to assist a graduate student attending a post-secondary institution in Saskatchewan in the fields of biology, ecology, wildlife management, environmental education and environmental studies. In 2020-21 two scholarships were awarded.

Kelsey Ball received a scholarship for her project titled "Can grazing management be used to improve habitat suitability for declining grassland birds?" and Mercy Harris received a scholarship for her project titled "Land Use and Foraging Habitat Effects on Neonicotinoid Exposure in Aerial Insectivores."

# 2020-21 Board of Directors

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# 2020-21 Staff

Jordan Ignatiuk	Executive Director
Melissa Ranalli	Species at Risk Manager
Lacey Weekes	Conservation and Education Manager (July 2020-present)
Ellen Bouvier	Communications Manager
Becky Quist	Office Coordinator
Ashley Vass	Rare Plant Rescue Coordinator (Sept 2020-present)
Emily Putz	Rare Plant Rescue Coordinator (until Sept 2020) Database Technician (Sept 2020-present)
Kaytlyn Burrows	Operation Burrowing Owl Coordinator
Rebecca Magnus	Conservation and Education Manager (until July 2020) Plovers on Shore/Shrubs for Shrikes Coordinator (July 2020-present)

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2020-21



BIRD STUDIES  
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX CANADA



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