



Saskatoon Nature Society Newsletter

February 2024

Vol. 46 No. 2

Eat Prey Love With Catherine Scott

McGill University, Montreal and Memorial
University, St. John's

Online Only!
7:30 PM Thursday February 15, 2024

Dr. Catherine Scott is an arachnologist, behavioural ecologist, and natural historian whose research has focused primarily on the communication and sexual behaviour of black widows and the foraging ecology of candy-striped spiders. Catherine completed a BSc in mathematics at Queen's University, an MSc in biology at Simon Fraser University, and a PhD in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Toronto. She is currently a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at McGill University and an honorary Postdoctoral Fellow at Memorial University. A former arachnophobe, Catherine is passionate about trying to shift perceptions about these fascinating creatures by engaging in science communication online and in person.



Photo: Sean McCann

There are far more reasons to be fascinated by spiders than to fear them. In this talk, Dr. Catherine Scott will provide a window into the private lives of spiders, highlighting their remarkable strategies for predation and defense, the critical role that they play in food webs, and their weird and wonderful mating and parenting habits. The talk will also include highlights from Catherine's research on the sexual behaviour and communication of

black widow spiders, using iNaturalist to study the ecology of introduced candy-striped spiders, and the spread of myths and misinformation about spiders in the media. You can find more information about Catherine and her research at spiderbytes.org and join the Spider Hunters iNaturalist project by visiting spiderhunters.ca.

*All members who have registered an email address with SNS will receive an **email containing the link to join the meeting through Zoom**. If you have not registered an email address with us, but would like to do so, please contact Claire Bullaro at c.bear@sasktel.net.*

Field Trips

Participants are free to depart early if they wish. Members with FRS radios should bring them on out of town trips. Bus Information: 306-975-3100. Many of our trip destinations are described in the 3rd edition of "A Guide to Nature Viewing Sites in and around Saskatoon" available from <https://saskatoonnature.org/special-publications/>

No Registration required for these trips.

Winter trips may be cancelled or postponed if the Environment Canada temperature 2 hours before the start of the field trip is less than -20C or if the wind speed exceeds 30 km/h. Check with the leader. Check <https://saskatoonnature.org/> website for any updated information

Saturday, February 10, 8 AM – 7 PM Northern Saskatchewan Birding Trip

We plan to drive north to Christopher Lake region to look for northern winter birds.

Leader: Marten Stoffel

Register by text to 306-230-9291



Northern Hawk Owl May Haga

Saturday, February 17, 10:00 AM – 12 Noon

Forestry Farm Birding Trip

We will meet in the parking lot at the end of the road to the Forestry Farm.

Leader: Monica Salles (306-202-6687)

As a volunteer or participant in the activities of the Saskatoon Nature Society (SNS), you are fully responsible for your own safety, and for your own personal insurance in case of injury. Please exercise great caution and care on field trips or any other outings. The Saskatoon Nature Society is not responsible for damage incurred to vehicles or other personal property while participating in any SNS activity. If going onto private land, always ask for permission, be friendly and respectful, exercise caution, and please be aware that participants may be responsible for damage to landowners' property.



President's Message

Dinner and a Dance?

We are not the only ones looking forward to spring. As the days gradually grow longer and warmer, the thoughts of many birds turn to one thing – sex! However, before this can happen, birds engage in a variety of fascinating courtship behaviours.

While courtship behaviour can help birds distinguish between different sexes or species and can reduce the level of aggression displayed by other animals when defending their territory, in the end, it all comes down to attracting and finding a suitable mate at the appropriate time. Not surprisingly, this may be harder than you think. Songs, displays, dances, sharing food, and preening feathers are some of the ways birds can show off their strength, health, intelligence, and ability to produce and raise healthy offspring.

One of the most common ways to attract a mate is by singing. Usually, it is the male who sings, although with some birds, both males and females will sing as a way of bonding. Females generally seem to prefer males with varied and intricate song repertoires, in which song structure, loudness, and frequency can all play a role. Singing can also define the territory of a bird, warning off weaker competition.

Bright plumage and flamboyant displays of colourful feathers can also show how strong and healthy a bird might be (see also "The Colourful World of Birds" in the December 2023 SNS newsletter). Subtle changes in posture can show off plumage to the best effect, such as raising a crest or hunching shoulders.

Of course, one of the best ways to show your stuff is through dance. Head nods, nose dives, wing flaps, and intricate steps are just some of the dance moves used by birds to show off their physical prowess. Generally, a male will dance for a female while she watches. Indeed, a male Northern Cardinal will try to attract a female through dinner and a dance, first by singing, twisting his body, and displaying his chest, leading to an exchange of food if she is still interested.

Bringing food to female shows that the male can provide for chicks. He may simply bring the food for her to eat, or he may put it directly in her mouth, just as he would for hungry chicks. The ability to feed his partner may also demonstrate that he can provide for the female as she may not be able to leave the nest for long periods while incubating her eggs.

Feather preening and close contact show potential mates they are not going to harm their partner as well as erase territorial boundaries. For example, Mourning Doves show mutual interest by gently nibbling each other's head and neck feathers in a form of mutual preening.

For some birds, however, property takes precedence. For example, House Wren females are more interested in the quality of the male's house and surroundings. When she arrives in a male's territory, he will take her to one or more of his prepared nest cavities, where she can inspect each one and the area around it, only sticking around if she likes what she sees. Does this sound familiar?

Bowerbirds (found throughout Australia and New Guinea) take this notion of property to the next level. When courting, bowerbirds will build an elaborate structure from grass and twigs (called a bower) to attract females (sort of a love shack!). Furthermore, the area around the bower will be decorated with a variety of objects such as shells, flowers, and stones. The Satin Bowerbird will decorate its bower exclusively with any objects that are blue, including blue berries and even manmade objects such as pieces of blue glass, blue pen caps, and blue clothes pegs!

Birds-of-paradise (found in New Guinea) are considered to be at the pinnacle of courtship extravagance. To get a taste of their truly amazing rituals, some of which are just too weird and wonderful to describe, have a look at one of the many video clips freely available on the internet, such as the one from the TV program, "Our Planet", narrated by Sir David Attenborough <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX40mBb8bkU&t=3s>.

Other birds that have impressive courtship displays include some of our very own here in Saskatchewan. The courtship of Western Grebes begins with one bird mirroring the other's movements, twisting and bowing their long necks behind them. And then, when the moment is right, they simultaneously leap out of the water like ballerinas in a precisely choreographed wingtip-to-wingtip duet, dancing like skipping stones across the surface of a lake. Sharp-tailed Grouse, on the other hand, are the tap dancers of the bird world. At dawn, males gather on a specific patch of ground (called a lek) and begin their show to try and impress a female. With wings outstretched, heads bowed down, and tails up, they rapidly stamp their feet up to 20 times per second while inflating yellow combs over their eyes and expanding their purple air sacs. Indeed, they look like synchronized wind-up toys as they move forward, backward, and in tight circles.

The SNS often has a field trip in the spring to view sharp-tailed grouse dancing on a lek. If you haven't seen this ritual, it is truly an amazing sight to behold. And if you thought that human courtship rituals were complicated, birds certainly don't have an easy time of it either!

Jim Lee



Sharp-tailed Grouse

Bob Godwin

Call for Nominations to the Board of Directors - Secretary

The Board of Directors of the Saskatoon Nature Society will be elected at the March Annual General Meeting. We are looking for members who would be interested in the role of Secretary. The Secretary is responsible for recording and storing Board Meeting minutes. If you are interesting in serving on the Board in this capacity or for more information, please contact the President, Jim Lee, as soon as possible at: president@saskatoonnature.org

Call for Nominations to the Board of Directors - Vice-President

The Board of Directors of the Saskatoon Nature Society will be elected at the March Annual General Meeting. We are looking for members who would be interested in the role of Vice-President. The Vice-President is responsible for representing the President in various capacities when he/she cannot attend and would be willing to assume the role of President in 1-2 years. If you are interesting in serving on the Board in this capacity or for more information, please contact the President, Jim Lee, as soon as possible at: president@saskatoonnature.org



Young Naturalists

The Young Naturalists is all about nature activities for kids and their families. Each program offers interesting activities geared for children aged 5 to 11 years. Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Advanced registration is required. To register or for more information e-mail: naturekids@saskatoonnature.org. Visit the Young Naturalists web page for more details. <https://saskatoonnature.org/young-naturalists/>

- Chickadee Pishing – Saturday, February 3, 2024
- Owl Pellet Dissection – Saturday, March 16, 2024

Gardenscape 2024

Join us at **Gardenscape 2024** on March 22, 23 or 24 as a volunteer for the Saskatoon Nature Society booth.

There will be a variety of exhibitors and events including the **Superdogs, Media Challenge and the Art Show** as well as the **Speaker's Theatre and Gardening 101**.

Just **3 ½ hours** of your time is needed to meet and share with others the appreciation of nature and value of the natural world. <https://www.gardenscapeshow.ca/show-guide/>

And best of all, you'll receive a **free admission pass**.

Interested? Contact Valerie Martz at vmartz@shaw.ca or 306.249.0468.

Golden Eagles

Membership in the Golden Eagles is open to retirees and partners interested in the natural world – birds, plants and more – and in its multicultural and historical context. Participants should be members of the Saskatoon Nature Society and consider membership in Nature Saskatchewan. Note the departure times vary with the season and the destination. Please contact the trip leader if you have any questions. Leaders may request pre-registration.

Thursday, February 15, 10:00 am: Gabriel Dumont Institute Museum: 917 – 22nd Street West. We will have a tour of the Gabriel Dumont Institute's Museum, now housed in a new building. It includes a display of Christi Belcourt's art. Meet at the Institute, parking at the rear of the building and on the street. We have been asked to collect the \$3 admission fee (cash please) at the start of our visit.

Leader: Valerie Martz, vmartz@shaw.ca, 306-229-0419.
Lunch to follow at the Old Spaghetti Factory, 221 Idylwyld Dr N. Please contact Valerie if you wish to join us for lunch.

Heads up!

The Nature Saskatchewan spring meet next June 21-23 will be based in Saskatoon. We'll be celebrating the 75th anniversary of Nature Sask. Mark your calendar and think about volunteering! Please contact Sara Bryson, 306-261-6156 if you are interested.

Great Backyard Bird Count February 16 to 19

Your help is needed every year to make the GBBC successful. For at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world, for as long as you wish. Want to get involved and help scientists get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations? Visit <https://www.birdcount.org/> for more information.



Sustainability Speakers Series

The Sustainability Speakers Series is hosted by the Saskatoon Public Library in partnership with the Saskatchewan Environmental Society. These free events are held in the Meeting Room in the basement of Frances Morrison Central Library (311 23rd Street E). The events start at 7:00 p.m. and end at about 8:30 p.m. These are in-person events. Recordings of some of the presentations are posted on the Library's YouTube channel several days after the event.

Tuesday February 27

Forests: The Understory is the Story

Doug Racine, a resident of northern Saskatchewan, challenges the forest industry perspectives on clear cutting in the boreal forest. Doug is a Metis lawyer, and he has experienced the consultations associated with logging.

Tuesday March 26

Energy Crisis from the 1970s to Today

We are living through an energy crisis with global and local dimensions, but not for the first time. **Justin Fisher** from the University of Saskatchewan History Department will explore the 1970s energy crisis in Saskatchewan, how it relates to our current crisis, and some lessons we might consider.

Recordings of previous presentations in the series are available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRUK7BHZUVfrHCxuJyBeO0IgjjeqBwseY>

Saskatoon Nature Society

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<https://saskatoonnature.org>

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Newsletter



The deadline for the next newsletter is Feb. 17. Please send any announcements or articles to Kathy Meeres. Please email: godmee@sasktel.net or call 306-343-8590. The editor would appreciate if articles are complete and submitted electronically.

Please consider switching from a paper to electronic copy of the SNS newsletter. You will help us save on paper, stamps, and volunteer time and you will get information more quickly and get pictures in colour.
Please contact Claire Bullaro (c.bear@sasktel.net) with your email address to switch. Thank you.

Chairs and Coordinators


Conservation	Sara Bryson	306-261-6156	
Display	Greg Fenty	306-370-8839	
Facebook Editor	Sara Bryson	306-261-6156 (text please)	
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Young Naturalists	Greg Fenty	306-370-8839	naturekids@saskatoonnature.org

Board of Directors


President	Jim Lee		president@saskatoonnature.org
Past President	Blair McCann	306-653-2958	
Vice President	Robert Johanson.....	306-653-2610	
Secretary	Diane Wells.....	306-229-0328	
Treasurer	Laurette Lefol		treasurer@saskatoonnature.org
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Director	Kathy Meeres	306-343-8590	
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Director	Sara Bryson.....	306-261-6156	
Director	Joshua Erikson		
Director	Heather Brenneman		
Director	David Forbes		
Director	Bill Robertson		
Director	Jan Spencer		

The board of directors meets about once a month, usually in the week before the monthly meeting. If you wish to bring an item to the attention of the board, please contact the president.

FEBRUARY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3 YN:Chickadee Pishing
4	5	6	7	8	9	10 N. Sask. Birding Trip
11	12	13	14	15 February Meeting ----- GE: Dumont Museum	16	17 Forestry Farm Birding
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

MARCH

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16 YN: Owl Pellet Dissection
17	18	19	20	21 March Meeting AGM	22 Gardenscape Mar 22-24	23
24/31	25	26	27	28	29	30

YN: Young Naturalists; GE: Golden Eagles