



FRIENDS OF THE
HELENSCHULER
NATURE CENTRE SOCIETY

2023
ANNUAL
REPORT



**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world,
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has"**

- Margaret Mead



OUR FOCUS

ADVANCING NATURE APPRECIATION IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA!

Friends of the Helen Schuler Nature Centre Society supports a community of environmentally-responsible citizens with interactive, nature-based educational experiences.

Our Society builds appreciation and connection with nature by:

- Supporting environmental education programs and special projects;
- Enhancing the resources of the Helen Schuler Nature Centre;
- Fostering the importance of nature!

Our Society advances education by providing workshops and presentations about the local natural environment to the public.

We are proud to partner with a network of nature and environment focused organizations to offer and support nature-based programming in our community.

We are always seeking grant and partnership opportunities for our programs, projects, and initiatives for nature-based education in Lethbridge.

In many ways our efforts make the Nature Centre better! However, our Society does not offset the capital and operational requirements of the Helen Schuler Nature Centre. Instead, we provide enhancements for the benefit of the community that would not otherwise be available.





MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

"My first year as President of the Friends of HSNC has been a wonderful experience! I work with a dedicated group of volunteers and Helen Schuler Nature Centre staff members who help flesh out the Friends Board. They serve as a constant reminder of something that I thought I'd lost when I joined the Business School: It was the sheer joy of being out in Nature! I am once again the boy who waded in creeks, dipped for crayfish and listened intently to birds. I thank you for this opportunity and encourage anyone also interested to come and join me!"

John Usher
President

"I can't believe another year with the Friends of the Helen Schuler Nature Centre has passed already. It has been wonderful to witness the changes occurring in and around the Nature Centre. Almost every day, I observe someone checking out books from the Little Library at the brand new information kiosk. I am eager to see the exciting materials that will be featured in our new Play Pods in front of the building. I always enjoy hearing about everyone's exciting journeys during our Travel Adventures series. This year, I was fortunate to share my own adventures biking around Europe. I can't wait to see what next year brings. Thank you to all of you for your continued support!"

Taylor Hecker
Secretary & HSNC Representative

"I've been with the Friends of as the Treasurer for four years now. So many cool things have happened in that time! To name a few: 'Welcome to Canada' a program to help new Canadians adjust and learn about their new way of life; 'Nature Play Pods' our loose parts playground, and countless activities and programs for everyone no matter the season! We look forward to continuing to connect with nature and our growing city!

Kristen Aspden
Treasurer

"The Friends of HSNC Board is the first board I've joined. It remains my favourite board of all. The exemplary people at the Friends of HSNC demonstrate wonderful character and behaviour that is truly inspirational. My reasons for joining stemmed from wanting to give back to my new community. (Sometimes, being unselfish can feel selfishly good.) The Friends of HSNC make it so fun and easy that participation is always something to look forward to and enjoy."

Vincent Fournier
Director

"Because I hate meetings with a passion, I was very reluctant to join The Friends of the HSNC Board. When I finally did, I was pleasantly surprised. Meetings are short but get lots accomplished. This coming year, I am looking forward to helping out with the Extreme By Nature summer program for 6-10 year old children, seeing what the new Play Pods contain, and making my annual donation through Shaw Birdies for Kids."

Deb Kellett
Director

"THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND!"

IMPACT IN 2023

1

PUBLICATION REPRINT:
CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF THE LETHBRIDGE AREA

76

ACTIVE FRIENDS MEMBERS

270

CITY NATURE CHALLENGE OBSERVATIONS

1,527

PROGRAM ATTENDEES & PARTICIPANTS

4,600

UNIQUE WEBSITE VISITORS

\$26,265

TOTAL AMOUNT RAISED WITH
SHAW BIRDIES FOR KIDS

145%

ENDOWMENT FUND GROWTH
THANKS TO DONORS LIKE YOU!

\$47,722

TOTAL FUNDS RAISED IN 2023

See our full financial report, available at
NatureCentre.ca/2023



WHAT YOUR SUPPORT MAKES POSSIBLE

Since 2014 our Society has delivered 141 programs directly to the community, benefitting over 15,000 attendees and participants. In that time, we also helped realize multiple capital improvement projects, produced several publications, and engaged our community in conservation efforts that preserve and protect our river valley. Our work provides lasting benefit, enriching the experience for more than 58,000 annual visitors to the Helen Schuler Nature Centre.

Inspiring Nature Appreciation

Spending time outside is an important part of growing up! We support environmental programs like 'Coulee Cleanup' and 'Natural Leaders Project' that help families and groups spend more time outside together. In partnership with the Rotary Club of Lethbridge East we also sponsor the 'Inspired by Nature: Youth Art Exhibition' showcasing the next generation of artists.

Improving the Experience

We help to offer a world-class experience at the Nature Centre! We have published free printed resources, including 'Checklist of the Birds of the Lethbridge Area' and 'Lethbridge Through the Seasons'. We also contribute to capital improvement projects like the new Little Free Library, the new Nature Play Pods, and the Co-op Community Outdoor Classroom.

Investing in the Future

Thanks to Friends like you, our Endowment Fund doubled in 2023! The Fund generates a stable source of annual revenue, providing long-term support for nature-based interpretive programming in Lethbridge. This allows us to support programs like 'Welcome to Canada' for new Canadians, which helps to foster a community of environmentally-aware and responsible citizens.



NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In the past year, our efforts have resulted in significant support of nature-based programs, capital enhancements at the Nature Centre, and awareness of our role in the community.

In March we partnered with Environment Lethbridge to convene the inaugural Lethbridge Urban Nature & Environment Round-table (LUNER). This brought together nature and environment-focused organizations to share information and encourage collaboration within our local sector. Based on the success of the initial Round-table we plan to work with Environment Lethbridge to convene LUNER twice per year going forward.

We partnered with Environment Lethbridge to offer *'Moving beyond Climate Anxiety Workshop'* in April. Using an appreciative inquiry model, the workshop used personal storytelling to help participants explore their connection to the natural world and build confidence to make future contributions as a climate leader. The workshop was well-attended and generated a lot of interest in the community.

We offered several Snake Safety – *'Working in Snake Territory'* presentations in the early spring. This provided an opportunity for solar farm operators and their staff to learn about the snakes found in our region and what can be done to protect yourself while working in snake territory. This is part of our outreach efforts towards rattlesnake conservation in Southern Alberta.

In April we were thrilled to see the expansion of the *'Welcome to Canada'* program! Our initial program support in Fall 2022 set the conditions for more broad collaboration among Helen Schuler Nature Centre, Transit, Community Social Development, Lethbridge Public Library, Recreation & Culture, and Lethbridge Family Services. The expanded partnership developed a more robust interactive day of programming to welcome newcomers to Lethbridge. To date the *'Welcome to Canada'* program has helped to connect 138 participants from many different countries, including: Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Myanmar, Venezuela, Chad, CRO Congo, Somalia, Eritrea, among others. *'Welcome to Canada'* will continue into 2024 – we look forward to seeing how this program continues to grow!

During the last weekend of April, we hosted an iNaturalist *'City Nature Challenge'* in Lethbridge. This was the third time that Lethbridge took part in this global bioblitz. We are proud to share Lethbridge's results:

- 270 plant and animal observations submitted; 141 species observed.
- 18 observers took part; 116 identifiers assisted to confirm species.
- 85% of observations were research grade, meaning they were high quality and could be used by researchers.





Congratulations to Charlie Myles for recording the most observations and greatest number of species! Everyone is encouraged to participate in the next City Nature Challenge taking place on the last weekend in April 2024 to help us increase understanding of our river valley's biodiversity.

In June we were proud to announce a significant donation received in support of the Prairie Living Roof from the Lethbridge Garden Project Society (LGPS). They chose to support the Living Roof to inspire appreciation and understanding of plants through demonstration, education, and research in an engaging outdoor learning environment that preserves our sense of place. We hosted a media event to share the news of LGPS' \$35,000 donation, resulting in great local media coverage. We extend our sincere thanks to all LGPS members, including longtime members Phil North, Bob Giesbrecht, and Jim George. We look forward to enriching the Nature Centre experience by cultivating the connection between people and plants thanks to the tremendous support of LGPS!



Also, in June we hosted an activity at the annual 'Nature Play Fest' at Henderson Lake Park. Every year 'Nature Play Fest' offers outdoor games, loose parts playground, hammocks, kayaking, crafts, food trucks and more! The event provides families with the opportunity to try diverse outdoor activities that are free for everyone to enjoy throughout the afternoon. Our team enjoyed lots of great conversations throughout the day – it was great to see so many families enjoying time outside together!

Over the summer we made significant progress on our 'Nature Play Pods Project'. The Play Pods have been constructed and delivered! The team at the Nature Centre is currently working on stocking the pods with loose parts. We are grateful for the support from the Lowe's Canada Heroes Campaign, the Georgina Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta. We anticipate that the Nature Play Pods will be in use in spring/summer 2024 and will provide more nature-based play opportunities in the river valley for families to enjoy.



Last year we reported about our financial support for a new Information Kiosk at the Nature Centre. We are happy to provide an update that a Little Free Library was installed on the kiosk this year! It has been exciting to see how well-used the new river valley library has been – it has been a challenge to keep it fully stocked (keep this in mind if your shelves have nature/environmental-focused books looking for new homes). We know that the Information Kiosk has improved the visitor experience at the Nature Centre and will make a significant impact for many years to come.

In partnership with Rotary Club of Lethbridge East we hosted another successful 'Inspired by Nature: Youth Art Exhibition.' There were 22 participating artists and 26 artworks on display. Since 2015, we have supported 249 young artists with this program! This has expanded opportunities in Lethbridge for emerging artists to develop their craft and understand the process of participating in exhibitions. We are proud to acknowledge Lev Zeinchuk, an 'Inspired by Nature' artist for the past several

years, who was recently recognized with an Allied Arts Council Excellence Award for 'Aspiring Artist'. Congratulations Lev!

We were a proud participating charity with the '*Shaw Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink*,' a non-profit program run under the Calgary Shaw Charity Classic Foundation as part of the Shaw Charity Classic, a Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) TOUR Champions event. The '*Birdies for Kids*' program matched up to 50% of all donations received! Our Friends made the most of this opportunity by donating over \$17,000, which was then matched for a grand total of \$26,265! Thank you to everyone for taking part in this major fundraising opportunity!!

'*Travel Adventures*' programs returned in the fall with another great lineup of adventures! Taylor and Victoria Hecker shared their experience backpacking through Europe; Joanna Fraser shared highlights from her hiking treks in Tasmania; and John and Gayle Krampfl shared their incredible wildlife photography from regular visits to Waterton Lakes National Park. Generally, we host four Travel Adventures every year to inspire more exploration and discovery of natural spaces around the world.

Since 2017 we have sponsored an author reading and presentation to ensure important environmental topics are part of the Word on the Street (WOTS) Festival. In September, with the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE), we sponsored an author presentation at the annual WOTS with the Lethbridge Public Library. We were thrilled to present award-winning author John Vaillant, who shared from his recent book '*Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast*.' It was an incredible event with lots of great discussions!

In partnership with Nature Lethbridge (formerly known as the Lethbridge Naturalists' Society) we distributed 1,000 copies of the '*Checklist of the Birds of the Lethbridge Area*' in 2023! This popular birding resource flew off the shelves!! As a result, we have reprinted another 1,000 copies of this publication so that it remains available for pickup at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre.

Throughout the year we provided letters of support for several community-focused organizations. We are proud to support and encourage the efforts of the Galt Museum & Archives (for land-based learning they are planning for National Indigenous People's Day), Lethbridge Astronomy Society (for a new mobile planetarium), Lethbridge Public Library (for Word on the Street Festival). We look forward to working with these great organizations in 2024!

Finally, we are happy to report that we received two vehicle donations in 2023!! You can donate your old vehicle via Donate A Car Canada – they will take care of everything, sending us a cheque for the value of your vehicle, and you will receive a tax receipt for your donation. Thanks for recycling your old vehicles with us!



Summary of Activities

Friends of the Helen Schuler Nature Centre Society is active year-round - delivering programs, grant-writing and fundraising, engaging in advocacy, and building our capacity.

Travel Adventures Presentations

- *Bikepacking through Sweden and Germany* with Taylor & Victoria Hecker (29-Sept-23)
- *Hiking in Tasmania* with Joanna Fraser (27-Oct-23)
- *Waterton Wildlife in Every Season* with John & Gayle Krampfl (24-Nov-23)

Conservation Initiatives

- Coulee Cleanup – Sponsorship (21-Apr-23 thru 31-May-23)
- Shoreline Cleanup – Shoreline Saturdays – Sponsorship (May 6, June 3, July 8, August 5)
- Invasive Weed Pull – Weedy Wednesdays – Sponsorship (May 17, June 21, July 19, August 16)

Snake Safety Presentations

- *Snake Safety with Curtis Goodman* for Spark Power Corp (31-Mar-23)
- *Snake Safety with Curtis Goodman* for SunGrid Power Solutions (31-Mar-23)

Community Events, Outreach, Programs, & Workshops

- Shaw Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink fundraiser (01-Mar-23 thru 31-Aug-23)
- Lethbridge Urban Nature and Environment Roundtable (06-Mar-23 & 25-Nov-23)
- *Welcome to Canada* with Lethbridge Family Services Immigration Department (17-April-23 & 17-Nov-23)
- Lethbridge Astronomy Society Letter of Support for Mobile Planetarium grant (21-Apr-23)
- *Moving beyond Climate Anxiety Workshop* with Environment Lethbridge (22-Apr-23)
- *City Nature Challenge* – Community-wide Citizen Science BioBlitz (28-Apr-23 thru 01-May-23)
- Media event with Lethbridge Garden Project Society on HSNC Prairie Living Roof (01-Jun-23)
- *Nature Play Fest* – Event Participation & Promotion (10-Jun-23)
- Nature Canada Letter of Support for 2 Billion Trees program advocacy (15-Jun-23)
- *Inspired by Nature: Youth Art Exhibition* – Program Sponsorship (19-Sept-22 thru 30-Oct-22)
- *Word on the Street* – John Vaillant, *Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast* – Author Presentation (23-Sep-23)
- *Inspired by Nature: Youth Art Exhibition* – Galley Closing Event (04-Nov-23)
- Galt Museum & Archives Letter of Support for Celebrate Canada grant (08-Nov-23)
- Lethbridge Public Library Letter of Support for Word on the Street Festival (14-Dec-23)
- *Checklist of the Birds of the Lethbridge Area* (reprint) with Lethbridge Naturalists' Society (12-Dec-23)

Governance

- Annual General Meeting (12-Mar-23)
- Executive Meeting (24-Jan-23)
- Executive Meeting (29-Mar-23)
- Executive Meeting (07-Jun-23)
- Executive Meeting (22-Nov-23)

Learn about our upcoming programs and events online at [NatureCentre.ca/events](https://www.naturecentre.ca/events)

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

11 YEARS OF INCREDIBLE GROWTH

Our organization was incorporated as a society on December 31, 2012. Nearly five years later we became a registered charity.

We have accomplished so much over the past 11 years thanks to the support of our Friends!

Your generosity helps us advance education on the local natural environment through events, programs, publications, and workshops.

Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement; we wish you a wonderful 2024 ahead!



We remember Rick Parker, founding Director of our Society, and super-supporter of the Helen Schuler Nature Centre. Rick, you will be missed!



Photo Captions

- Cover - Black Crowned Night Herons photo by Al Daiken
- Page 2 - Saint-Laurent/Lethbridge exchange participants in Co-Op Community Outdoor Classroom.
- Page 3 - Families having fun at Nature Play Fest at Henderson Lake Park.
- Page 4 - Joanna Fraser delivers a Travel Adventures about Hiking in Tasmania.
- Page 5 - (Top) Pelican in flight over Oldman River by sdzobell (via Getty Images)
(Middle) Friend Joanna Fraser takes a closer look at Elizabeth Hall Wetlands
(Bottom) Junior Naturalists exploring Coulee Climb trail
- Page 6 - Program participants spot a deer at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre
- Page 7 - (Top) Welcome to Canada program participants walking in river valley
(Middle) Group program at Co-op Community Outdoor Classroom
(Bottom) Fireweed growing on the Prairie Living Roof
- Page 8 - (Top) Media event at Nature Centre to announce Prairie Living Roof donation
(Middle) Kids having fun at Nature Play Fest
(Bottom) Inspired by Nature participant Rockson W. shows off his painting
- Page 9 - (Top) Lazuli Bunting photographed by John Krampfl as part of Travel Adventure
(Middle) John Vaillant delivers an engaging talk at Word on the Street
(Bottom) UofL Exchange Students participate in Shoreline Cleanup
- Page 11 - Rick Parker, a founding Director, canoeing the Oldman River
- Page 12 - Nicolas Sheran Park viewed from a hot air balloon

THANK YOU!

Join us in our mission to connect people to the benefits of the great outdoors!

Get involved:

- Become a Friends Member
- Donate
- Volunteer with us
- Consider joining our Board of Directors
- Attend a program, event, or workshop
- Visit the Nature Centre
- Share a testimonial about the Nature Centre
- Spend more time outside
- Encourage your friends and family to join you



FRIENDS OF THE
HELENSCHULER
NATURE CENTRE SOCIETY

SUPPORT • ENHANCE • FOSTER

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