

OUTDOORS

The joys of birdwatching



**GERALD
VANDER PYL**

The arrival of spring weather in Calgary brings with it an influx of birds during the annual migration.

That makes it an ideal time for birdwatching, a fun activity that can lead to a lifetime of enjoyment.

Andrew Hart, president of Nature Calgary and chairman of the organization's popular Bird Study Group, remembers being interested in birds even as a child, but got serious about birdwatching about 10 years ago when he joined the organization.

"I enjoy it because it's relaxing, you're out in the country. You enjoy watching birds, they're quite splendid when flying around, some have spectacular colours or spectacular hunting habits," says Hart.

It's easy to get into birdwatching, according to Hart. A great way to start is by going on a Nature Calgary field trip with a birding focus or attending one of the monthly meetings held by the Bird Study Group.

Interested people can attend a few events for free before deciding if they want to join Nature Calgary and become a regular member of the study group, Hart says.

"You don't have to be an expert to attend one of our meetings or field trips," he says.

Introductory birdwatching courses are also offered by the Friends of Fish Creek and the City of Calgary.

Sid Andrews, interpretation co-ordinator with the city's parks department, says the Learn to Birdwatch course is great for beginners.

"(It's) the basics to birdwatching; it includes about half the time in the classroom and half the time outside to practice the skills you learn in the classroom," says Andrews.

The course covers basic bird-



Linda Vaxvick/Nature Calgary

Joining a Nature Calgary field trip with a birding focus is a great way to start birdwatching.

watching while offering advice on things such as choosing binoculars and field guides.

The city also offers programs for more experienced birders and several special birding events.

International Migratory Bird Day takes place on Mother's Day, May 11, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary.

To mark the day, birding exhibits will be set up while speakers will discuss birdwatching, Andrews says.

More advanced programs include early morning bird walks in May, a course to birdwatch at wetlands in northeast Calgary, one on spring birdwatching on the prairies or in the mountains west of the city and another on

specialized topics such as identifying birds by sound, Andrews explains.

To find out what events the city has on tap, go to calgary.ca/parks and enter the search term "birding adventures." The top result will include a list of events and courses.

With a trained eye and some new skills, birders are ready to hit the city's wilds.

"There are many ways to enjoy Calgary parks," says Andrews, "but this is certainly one way to get to know your local park or a park you haven't been to before, and also get to know why those green spaces are such an important habitat for things like birds."



Gerald Vander Pyl/for Neighbours.

Birds like the grey owl, above, can be observed with a trained eye.

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