

The Southern Yarn

Nov.-Dec. 2025

NEWSLETTER OF THE DOWN UNDER CLUB OF WINNIPEG INC.

downundercalendar

NOVEMBER

Annual General Meeting
Friday November 28, 7:00 pm
Munn's Residence
86 Clonard St, Winnipeg

Join us at the home of Peter and Margaret Munn for a comfy meeting where we'll look back at the year that was and see what's in store for the year ahead. We will elect our 2026 executive, and invite you to consider standing for a role. We welcome your ideas and suggestions, so come along, and enjoy snacks and drinks.

DECEMBER

Family Christmas Party
Sunday December 7, 4:00 pm
Scandinavian Cultural Centre
764 Erin Street, Winnipeg

A wonderful event for families and friends to celebrate the Christmas season! Children 12 and under are invited to attend and receive a special present from Santa. So please let Head-Elf, Margaret Munn, know their names and ages by MONDAY DECEMBER 1 so we can give Santa's elves plenty of time to pack everything into the sleigh. Contact Margaret at info@downunderclub.mb.ca or 204-237-1805. This is also a potluck supper, so please bring to share a main or veggie dish, salad or dessert. The bar will be open, and we are looking forward to celebrating together.

2026

JANUARY

Australia Day and Waitangi Day
Saturday January 31, 5:00 PM
Scandinavian Cultural Centre
764 Erin Street, Winnipeg

Ah, mid-winter in Winnipeg! The perfect time to warm up and gather with friends – maybe even some new Aussie or Kiwi members. As always for this event, come for the food and stay for the fun and compete or just enjoy this year's cook-off – Stew or Casserole. If you're not taking part in the cook-off, please bring a plate – either a main dish, or veggies, salad or dessert for the potluck supper. The social time will include a trivia mini-quiz, two-up, prizes and, yes, the bar will be open.



The picnic in the park was amongst wonderful autumn colours. Indoors, Bailey's was delicious!

DUCW Dining Not-so-formal and autumn al-fresco

It was a perfectly overcast day in late September when a group of 23 members and friends gathered in Assiniboine Park to mark the end of our 75th year of celebrations. It has been an extraordinary milestone for all of us, and that we welcomed 4 new members – the McMo family – and welcomed back two members we haven't seen for a while – Debbie and Jim Hoglund – was the perfect way to celebrate.

The selection of salads and desserts provided by everyone was amazing, Emma and Sam expertly managed the barbequing, the frisbee was a popular activity – both to play and to watch – and the autumn foliage was a beautiful backdrop to our gathering.

Thanks to Emma, Sam and Jodi for providing the BBQs, and thanks to everyone who attended. #3 picnic site in the Park was just right for us, and hopefully we can hold another event there next year ... and maybe take in some cricket in the Park as well.



Excellent dining! Wow, what a wonderful night for our not-so-formal dinner at Bailey's Restaurant. Twenty members and friends gathered in the Board of Governors Room, which was the perfect spot to accommodate all of us.

As well as the members who attended, we were delighted to welcome Rachelle and Dan Schott to their first DUCW not-so-formal dinner. As the MLA for Kildonan-River East and on behalf of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, Rachelle formally presented the Club with the framed Member's Statement on behalf of our 75th Anniversary. The statement was accepted by Jenny Gates on behalf of all of us.

As always, the Bailey's menu and service was excellent, thanks to François and his team who looked after everyone in our group, and additional thanks to John who helped organize the event for us.

Land Acknowledgement

The Down Under Club of Winnipeg meets on Treaty 1 in the Province of Manitoba and the homeland of the Métis Nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we live and gather, and all the lands from whence we came, including Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the elders past, present and emerging.



find us on facebook or the web
www.downunderclub.mb.ca
email: info@downunderclub.mb.ca

editorially yours

Charlie Powell



Many of you know, of course, that our Down Under Club meets for several of our events in the Scandinavian Cultural Centre. This has been a happy and convenient arrangement for many years now. For those who haven't been there, we meet upstairs in a central open area adjoining the kitchen. Around that area are five other rooms dedicated for each of the SCC member countries – Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland. Those rooms are mini-museums and serve to help keep their cultures alive and educate and entertain the public, especially during Folklorama.

This year marks 150 years of settlement by the Icelanders in Manitoba. The *Winnipeg Free Press* has recently run a few nods to this major milestone. A good one to read is "Icelanders' Manitoba saga marks Year 150", by Conrad Sweatman (WFP 16Oct2025).

Meanwhile, as we've been highlighting throughout the year in the *Yarn*, our little Club has been celebrating 75 years! We will reflect on this achievement at our upcoming AGM – hopefully there will be a good turnout to help inform our start for the next 75.

In this issue there is the usual mix of Club news, travel, remembrance, trivia and birding. Thank you to my editorial assistants Jenny and Brian and our other contributors and advertisers. And, in case you have wondered – yes, we do make extensive use of AI to produce the *Yarn* – Actual Intelligence. 🤖

1968 Canada stamp
honoring John McCrae



In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields, the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

— Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae

president's ramblings

Peter Munn



The last time I wrote this president's message, Margaret and I were heading off to Australia for the month of September. You will find a few nuggets of our recent adventure down under on pages 6 and 7.

Coming up on November 28 is our Annual General Meeting – more details in the Calendar on page 1. The meeting is being

held at my home, and we would really like to run out of chairs. All positions are open, and I would like to hear any nominations or suggestions. If you would like to take on the position of President, I will gladly mentor you, if requested. My phone number at home is 204 237-1805, or cell is 204 228-8644.
—Peter

Did you know ...

Australia's rakali (water rat) can quite safely chow-down on the highly toxic cane toad. Research published in Australian Mammalogy has shown that the rakali have learned how to kill the cane toads, get the parts they want (heart and liver) and avoid the poison glands. Cane toads were introduced to the Queensland cane fields to help control snakes. They have now dispersed as far as Western Australia, disrupting native frog populations.

The rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), also known as the rabe, the "Australian otter" or water-rat, is an Australian native rodent first scientifically described in 1804. [Wikipedia]



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Women distribute Christmas billies to men in Cairo, Egypt, December 1915. Driver Jack (John) O. McKenzie, from the 20th Australian Army Service Corps (AASC), recalls, "Every one was delighted to get one. The one I received was from two Melbourne girls. They distributed over five thousand in our camp & as far as I know every soldier in Egypt got one."

ANZAC Christmas Hampers

[Source: Australian War memorial, Alison Wishart, 23 Dec 2014] About this time 99 [110] years ago, the Anzacs who had evacuated from Gallipoli were eagerly awaiting their Christmas hampers. The Christmas goodies were packed in billies, and many came with a cartoon on the front, which were printed and prepared before the Anzacs quietly retreated from Gallipoli. The hampers/billies contained an assortment of items that the Anzacs considered luxuries, but which we might take for granted: tobacco/cigarettes, matches, razor blades, knitted socks, a pencil, writing paper, cake, sauces, pickles, tinned fruit, cocoa, coffee and, of course, Anzac biscuits! They were described as a "fragrant message from home" and according to the distributors were rapturously received. Read more at <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/anzac-christmas-hampers>



Cross the border to visit The International Peace Garden without actually 'entering' the USA.

Borderline peaceful beauty

The International Peace Garden is a 3.65-square-mile park located adjacent to the border crossing south of Boissevain, along the Canada–United States border between the province of Manitoba and the state of North Dakota. It was established on July 14, 1932, as a symbol of the peaceful relationship between the two countries.

The International Peace Garden is a non-profit botanical garden dedicated to the mission of celebrating peace and fostering a more peaceful world. The Peace Garden operates on a combination of public and private funding. Public funding is provided by both the state of North Dakota and the Manitoba provincial government.

Both the Canadian and United States federal governments have provided funds throughout history, but not on a yearly basis. In addition to a full-time administration and horticulture staff, the Peace Garden is governed by a volunteer board of directors. [Source: Wikipedia, travelmanitoba.com and peacegarden.com]

Down Under Christmas Songs

One on a Tractor

— John Clark

We three kings of Orient are
One on a tractor, two in a car
One on a scooter
Tooting his hooter
Following yonder star, oh, oh
Star of wonder
Star of light
Star of bewdy, she'll be right
Star of glory, that's the story
Following yonder star.

Sticky Beak the Kiwi

— Bob Edwards & Neil Roberts

Now Sticky Beak the kiwi,
that bird from way down under
He's caused a great commotion
and it isn't any wonder
He's notified old Santa Claus to notify the deer
That he will pull the Christmas sleigh
in the southern hemisphere.

Lots of toys for girls and boys
load the Christmas sleigh
He will take the starlight trail
along the milky way.
Hear the laughing children
as they shout aloud with glee:
"Sticky Beak, Sticky Beak,
be sure to call on me."

Now every little kiwi, and every kangaroo, too,
The wallaby, the weka, and the platypus and emu,
Have made themselves a Christmas tree
with stars and shining bright,
So Sticky Beak will see the way
to guide the sleigh tonight.
Now Sticky Beak the kiwi, that Maori-land dictator,
Will not allow Rudolph's nose
this side of the equator
So when you hear the sleighbells ring
you'll know that he's the boss,
And Sticky Beak will pull the sleigh
beneath the Southern Cross.

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Welcome to the 2025/2026 Winnipeg Touch Rugby Winter Season

The countdown is on – November 28th we TAP OFF!

I'm so excited to see familiar faces back on the pitch and to welcome new players to the Winnipeg Touch Rugby community. Touch Rugby is played in over 50 countries and offers something for everyone, from our U12s and U19s right up through our Masters Division. Whether you're new to the game or a seasoned player, there's a place for you here. Looking ahead, our big goal for 2026 is to roster a Mixed Team to represent Winnipeg at the Canadian Nationals, typically held over the July long weekend.

This is a fantastic opportunity to showcase our talent and grow the sport right here in Manitoba. If you are looking to play and/or to join a team, and if you're new and would like to learn more about Touch Rugby, reach out to me directly, and I'll help connect you. Let's gear up for another fantastic season of competition, community, and fun. See you on the pitch!

Caleb Stick

Founder & Director, Winnipeg Touch Rugby

winnipegstouch@gmail.com

facebook & instagram: winnipegstouch

Did you know ...

Which New Zealand town is permanently staying with daylight saving time?

None of them, but Te Anau, in the Southland region of the South Island, proposed the idea in 2021. By making daylight savings permanent in the town, locals claimed it would give visitors an extra hour in the afternoon to enjoy the various tourist attractions. Several people even wanted to call it "Te Anau Time".

DAYLIGHT SAVING — In case you missed it, the clocks sprang forward on Sunday September 28 in New Zealand, and on Sunday October 5 in Australia. So if you haven't clocked in already, now's the time. Tick tock!

But where's my footy news, mate?

The final AFL article of the 2025 season by Michael Workman will appear in the January/February edition of the *Yarn*.



A REMINDER ABOUT MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR 2026

DUCW memberships are due. Still the best value in town at only **\$20 for an individual** membership, or **\$30 for a couple or family**. If you have renewed already, or have paid for two years, THANK YOU!

If you are unsure if your membership is paid up, email me at info@downunderclub.mb.ca.

And if you are still to pay, it's never been easier to do that.

You can pay by **E-TRANSFER** — register the Down Under Club as a new interact recipient, use our email address – info@downunderclub.mb.ca – and pay the appropriate membership amount due – individual \$20 or family/couple \$30. Your payment will go directly into the Club's bank account at RBC.

Or you can pay by **cheque** – make out to The Down Under Club of Winnipeg and send to Stn Main, PO Box 1655, Winnipeg MB R3C 2Z6 (Canada).

For more info, go to our Payment page on our website.

We also encourage you to take a moment to fill out the enclosed membership renewal form so we can make sure we have all your information correct, or complete the sign-up form online. Any questions, email me at info@downunderclub.mb.ca or 204-228-9959.

Any issues paying by e-transfer, contact Peter Debenham at pdebenham51@gmail.com or 204-955-0393.

— Jenny Gates



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Before they're all gone ...

As reported by the *Winnipeg Free Press* [28Oct2025], the province of Manitoba's inaugural Circle of Courage awards will honour the rapidly diminishing population of World War II veterans.

Premier Wab Kinew said the honour, which will be given out two days after Remembrance Day, will honour all veterans and military members — with an immediate focus on World War II soldiers.

"While we have the veterans of World War II still with us, I think it's really important to focus on highlighting their contributions," Kinew said at an unrelated news conference Monday. "If you look at everything happening in the world today, the consensus that was achieved after World War II paved the way for us today, but also could probably give us a lot of lessons on international co-operation."

More than 1.1 million Canadians served in World War II from 1939 to 1945. About 42,000 died and about 52,000 were wounded. Another 26,000 Canadians served in the Korean War from 1950 to 1953.

Veterans Affairs Canada estimates there are 5,649 veterans alive — 4,769 men and 880 women — who served in World War II and the Korean War. The average age of veterans of World War II is 100.

An ANZAC in the trenches ...

An Australian soldier is sent to the front lines in France during World War I and the gruff British general meets him saying, "Alright, private, this is the roughest spot in Europe now. Did you come here to die?!" The Aussie says, "Naw mate, I came yes to die."



Gallipoli evacuation ... Rifle rigged to self-fire

110 years ago

[Source; History Guild, Julia Horne, U of Sydney, 25 Apr 2024] Just five days before Christmas, in the early hours of Monday December 20, 1915, the last Anzac troops left Gallipoli in what Australian historian Joan Beaumont called an "elaborate game of deception".

Self-firing guns were rigged to take potshots and camp fires lit to give the impression of there being more soldiers than there were. The Australians and New Zealanders even played a game of cricket to show the Ottomans they were there for the duration. Yet by around 4.30am all had gone. Not one life was lost, an Allied triumph of sorts. Yet most Australians celebrate Gallipoli as a purely Australian achievement, usually without acknowledging that Australians were a minority of Allied troops fighting there. Follow this link: <https://historyguild.org/in-their-own-words-letters-from-anzacs-during-the-gallipoli-evacuation/> to read more from the Diggers' letters.

ANZAC Chaplains

[Source: Faith of the ANZACS by Daniel Renaud] This insightful little book (44 pages) begins with: "The First World War is infamous for its slaughter on the battlefields of Gallipoli, France and Belgium: the terrible stories of soldiers caught in the awful meat-grinder of the war. Despite the horrors, Australian and New Zealand soldiers forged a legend built on their resourcefulness and skill, and their undying mateship, which helped bring the survivors through the conflict. While the Anzac legend focuses its attention on the heroic ordinary soldier, and sometimes the outstanding leadership of particular officers, one group of Anzacs is rarely part of the Anzac story: the chaplains. Chaplains, commonly called 'Padres' by the soldiers, were clergymen attached to army units to care for their spiritual, moral and social well-being. In the Australian Imperial Force, the volunteer army raised to fight in Europe, each Brigade of about 4,000 men had posted to it four chaplains representing the major denominations: one Church of England, one Roman Catholic, one Presbyterian or Methodist, and one other

representing the minor denominations such as Baptists, Congregationalists, or The Salvation Army." It is available as a PDF.



Commonwealth Corner

New Zealand in the Commonwealth

New Zealander Sir Don McKinnon was Commonwealth Secretary-General from 2000 to 2008.

Six New Zealanders have won overall Commonwealth Writers' Prizes: Witi Ihimaera in 1987 (Best First Book); Janet Frame in 1989; John Cranna in 1990 (Best First Book); Lloyd Jones in 2007; Craig Cliff in 2011 (Best First Book); and Emma Martin in 2012 (Short Story Prize).

Australia in the Commonwealth

Australia provides support for the Secretariat's Countering Violence Extremism Unit. The Commonwealth Secretariat is uniquely placed to assist member countries in sharing good practice and harnessing the role of governments and individuals to prevent terrorism through early prevention and increased resilience.

Canada in the Commonwealth

Canada champions the Blue Charter Action Group on Ocean Observation. The Action Group held its first meeting in May 2019 in Ottawa, Ontario. Members outlined priorities and an action plan and agreed to hold annual meetings to review progress on the various initiatives planned.

In September 2019, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Jonathan Wilkinson, announced a tranche of \$2.7 million to advance ocean observation through innovation and development, and to promote the sharing of data, knowledge and best practices amongst Commonwealth countries.

Canada is also a member of the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, Ocean and Climate Change and Sustainable Blue Economy Action Groups.

Did you know ...

The Pitcairn Islands have the smallest population of any democracy in the world. European settlement started in 1790 with the HMS Bounty mutineers, along with some Tahitians. In 2023 the population was only 35, but in the 1850s there were too many for the island to support and so some moved to Norfolk Island. More online.





Sydney from the Heads. What a beautiful city.



One of many memorials to Dame Nellie Melba and her family at Coombe Yarra Valley, 50 km north of Melbourne. With Club members Ian and Catherine Bowering.



Melbourne grew up when I left. This is the "shorter" end of the square mile of downtown.



Waiting for the chainsaw gang.

When Mr and Mrs Munn Went to Oz ...

For a change and a better fare, we crossed the Pacific both ways with Air New Zealand. Their routings were through Auckland, which added to the travel time because you change planes there, and the waiting time through Vancouver is long on the flights we had. However, that was our choice, and the ability to walk around the Auckland airport was good for cramped legs. Their service, food and personnel was up to the standard you hear from other Air NZ travellers.

As usual, we booked through Jason from Downunder Travel in Calgary to make our arrangements, and once again we were extremely satisfied.

Once we arrived in Sydney airport, we picked up a month's worth of phone and text time on a SIM card. About \$27 Canadian, includes call and text to Canada, and we only used maybe 20% of the SIM. It sure beat our past days in India wandering around for 3 months where you were basically incommunicado with the rest of the world and mailing a letter and guessing where the Poste Restante would be in 2 months' time for the reply.

Our friends Terry and Marie, who you may remember when they attended our not-so-formal dinner 3 years back, picked us up

and drove us about an hour north of Sydney on the northern beaches. Our best man at our wedding 50+ years ago was there for one of our "memorable" dinners, and a lot of forgotten stories were recalled.

Then we flew to Merimbula on the far south NSW coast, a little southeast of Canberra. We stayed with my brother and SIL, and spent many days whale watching as the great trek south of Humpbacks and Southern Right whales had started. They travel from the Antarctic up to north Queensland waters to mate, then they head back south for a fine Krill dinner.

As a matter of interest, after measures against hunting and other conservation efforts took affect about 20+ years ago, the declining population of these two whales on the east coast has risen from about 10,000 to more than 60,000. They swim close to the coast, so you get great visuals of breaching and spouting. We spent time with one person who had launched a drone, and it hovered the legal distance above the whales, and broadcast the images back to his hand-held screen.

Spectacular stuff, especially the dolphins swimming alongside the whales in perfect tandem formation, as if guarding them.

My brother lives 4 miles out of town, surrounded on two sides by a state and a national park, so he gets an abundance of wildlife. Kangaroos feed on his lawn, and allow him to get very close. When we were there, one younger roo bought her little joey there to show off the baby.

From Merimbula, we rented a car, and headed off to Melbourne to stay with club members Ian and Catherine Bowering. As you will recall, Ian had some health issues that kept him in Health Sciences for many months while the medical profession came to grips with his condition. He was eventually medevacked back to Australia. We can report that he has made many good steps in his continuing rehabilitation and hopes to be back driving shortly.

After leaving their home in Lilydale, we drove east to Warburton, and deliberately took a bush track north, with final destination that day of Mansfield. The start of this road leads to the mountainous climb up to Mt. Donna Buang, where many Melbournites flock to see their very first snowfall. However, we were taking the road less travelled, and within 1 mile we knew exactly why.

We were on the edge of what is called the High Country in Victoria, and this track gradually reduced to cracked asphalt about 8 feet wide, filled with potholes and mud to both sides. And the mountain was to one side of you, and clear sky and gum treetops to the other side. The mountain basically dropped straight down on one side, with zero guard rails.

There had been a bad storm blow through the night before, and beside the leaf/bark debris on the track, quite a few trees had fallen, with evidence of chainsaws everywhere. Getting close to the lower end of the track, we passed a shire work truck with multiple chainsaws in the back. They slowed and waved us through at one point, which



Emu Ballet, act 2.



Echuca paddle steamers.



Historic house "Nimmitabel".



Roos in the backyard,
Galah in all its splendour.

was great timing, because around the next bend, we saw a motorist on the far side of a fallen tree across the road. We informed him help was around the corner, and right on time the shire workers turned up to clear the large tree off the road.

One intention of this little expedition to northern Victoria was to do a little pie tasting. One great thing about Australia is that so many smaller towns have their own bakery, and most of them bake their own meat pies. I have tasted many, but not enough, and my favorite pie came from Beechworth Bakery. So that was the original destination for this journey north, until destiny stepped in. We were stopped at a beautiful lookout, enjoying the scenery, and got talking to a man who was setting up a fire (legal circumstances) to bake some damper (like bannock) for 20 students who were spread out in the bush for some outside education. I told him the end of this journey was at Beechworth Bakery where I would get one of the best pies on the planet.

"Oh no, mate", he said. "That's wrong. Fifteen miles east of Beechworth is a smaller town named Yackandandah, and that little bakery has the absolute best pies."

Well, he seemed trustworthy, but as our schedule for the day was blown, we decided to head to Echuca before twilight and make another trip to Aus to check out the Yackandandah pie shop. With a town name of Yackandandah, the pies would have to be good, wouldn't they.

In Echuca, which in the 1860s was a bustling town of commerce, sheep skins and

grain were sold there from all over Vic and NSW. On a 900 feet long wharf, parts of which today are still in tandem with the newer wharf, multiple paddle steamers plied their trade. One of which, P.S Adelaide, still runs today, 160 years after it was built. Unfortunately, a few years later, a rail line was built from Melbourne, which ended a lot of the steamboat traffic.

Our trip on the Murray was peaceful, and extremely enjoyable. We also lucked in to free tickets to another Murray Interpretive tour boat, run by Ralph, an Aboriginal elder, who hosted on a smaller vessel in a Murray backwater. He explained the aboriginal history in that area, the local bird and wildlife, and how his forbears came to the area and settled. We were lucky to make the tour – it was about 15 miles out of town on the NSW side of the river, and the entrance was on a narrow road.

And then a problem. Seven of the goofiest emus you could ever come across. First, they all wandered on the road right in front of us, then started to play a game. Four slowly crossed ahead of us, and we tried to sneak through. But then the remaining three did the same thing, and the original four returned to their start off point. It was like a circus, but we did eventually get through, late as usual.

From Echuca, we headed south to Bendigo, then on to Inglewood, 15 minutes away. And the next bit requires a bit of an intro.

Our back lane neighbour's daughter has been going out with an Aussie from Melbourne after meeting in Victoria, BC about 3

years ago. He and I played a quite a few games of chess when he was staying in Winnipeg on the other side of our lane.

Anyway, when his parents came to Winnipeg to visit, they dropped over with our neighbour and the two lovebirds for a social evening outside on a beautiful night. They told us about an old, basically derelict mansion they had bought, almost on a whim 15 years ago, and had spent thousands of hours rescuing the house. I am a fan of the small Victorian towns that continue to flourish even after the boom days have gone. Many get their fancy residences back in shape – and their bakeries make meat pies!

They had invited us up there about 4 weeks earlier in Winnipeg, and we took up the invitation. Called Nimmitabel, the place is two stories and was built by maybe the smartest and one of the richest men on the vast Bendigo goldfields. He never dug one hole looking for his fortune, and instead sold the shovels and tools so other men could dig. The place is being restored, not renovated, and much of the painted plaster walls are in original condition, never been altered in a century and a half. It was amazing to see some of the details of the house.

Leaving there, we headed back to Merimbula for a few days, then to Sydney for our final hurrah. It was a great 4 weeks.

Peter Munn



birds*i*view

by Charlie Powell

Gulls

A phenomenon in southern Manitoba skies in the late summer and early autumn that has drawn lots of comments in birding circles is the flocks of seagulls every afternoon. It is certainly the first year that I have noticed it to such a consistent extent. Judging by the many Manitoba Birding Facebook posts, I'm not the only one. From all parts of Winnipeg and surrounding towns, observers were reporting the same thing – hundreds to thousands of seagulls wheeling, soaring and performing aerial acrobatics.

The fact that there are seagulls here at all has always intrigued me. There's no coastal shoreline within coo-ee; even our expansive lakes are too far away for a daily commute by these urban seabirds; and yet, every day when you see them, you have to remind yourself that the beach is NOT just a block away.

The explanation given by some for their recent behaviour was that they were practicing for their inevitable flight south. Others of the more experienced local birders said the birds were catching crane flies that hatch during September. Maybe it's a combination? Anyway, it got me thinking – what do all these gulls eat? What sustains them over the at least 6 months they spend here on the prairies?

I've never seen one alight on our bird-feeder platform, like the chickadees and crows. Nor are they guilty of raiding our apple trees, like the orioles and squirrels.

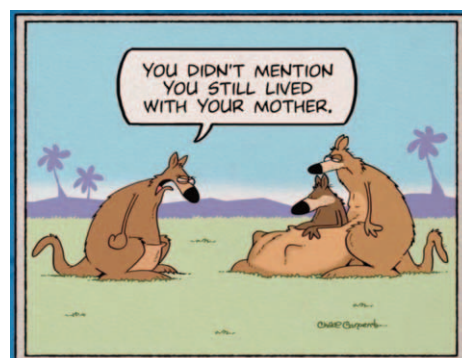
They don't graze the open lawns as the Canada geese do or harvest aquatic plants in the ponds like ducks with tail up. What keeps these land-gulls so energized that they can frolic in the air currents and so contented that they can leisurely spread out across a parking lot?

Gulls need to eat up to 20% of their body weight each day. At up to 2 lbs, that about 6 oz (170 g). They are notoriously opportunistic feeders – scavengers, in fact. One of their favourite "restaurants" here is the Brady Road landfill (city dump).

So, if 1,000 or so of them are daily cleaning up a couple of hundred kilo of food scraps, that's okay. Otherwise, they will patrol the landscape – snapping up anything that moves after the farmers have ploughed or harvested and devouring carelessly tossed fast-food. In their own way, they are as worthy of our appreciation and admiration as any of their colorful little cousins.

Chad Carpenter's Tundra

www.tundracomics.com



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