

Friends of Elk Island Society

THE ELK ISLAND BUGLE

FIRST EDITION

DECEMBER 2022

Welcome to the new 2022 Friends of Elk Island Society newsletter. The Elk Island Bugle is the replacement for the the original newsletter, The Trumpeter. We hope you enjoy!



2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



With the reopening of several facilities in Elk Island National Park this year, the Friends were able to hold their Annual General Meeting, chaired by Chairperson Brian Eaton, in the Astotin Theatre on June 4th, 2022. Dale Kirkland, Superintendent of EINP, provided an update on the park and Jenny Foca presented her Master's Research "Camera traps for evaluating ungulate densities in the Beaver Hills Region of Alberta".



Door prizes winners: 2023 Park Pass - Melissa Schaub; Mugs - Clara Schaub; Metal Park Plaque - Kiley Marchuk; *The Ecological Buffalo* book written and signed by Wes Olson - Chery Paran.

Friends of Elk Island Society Past Year's Events

2021 Christmas Bird Count

The 2021 Christmas Bird Count was attended by a few brave souls and even fewer birds. Temperatures dipped down to -30 degrees Celsius during the day. There were ten birders who covered a distance of 116 kms (100 kms in a vehicle) in and around Elk Island National Park. A total of 10 species were reported with a total count number of 49 birds. Thank you Elk Island National Park for supplying shelter and warmth at Tawayik during the event. Hope to see you all back for the 2022 Christmas Bird Count!



2021/2022 FEIS-Assisted Studies Within the Park

Beaver Lodge Occupancy Survey

In the winter/early spring of 2021, some 30 volunteers - including Friends of Elk Island members and some very dedicated Parks biologists, performed beaver lodge occupancy surveys in Elk Island Park. Beavers are semi-aquatic mammals that play a crucial role in shaping the landscape in and around the Beaver Hills. See the whole story by Larry Roy at: <https://www.elkisland.ca/conservation-research/beaver-lodge-occupancy>



Amphibian Survey

Friends of Elk Island Society members assisted Elk Island National Park staff with an Amphibian Call Survey project that started in 2016. Members continue to go out every spring (mid-April to mid-May) and document populations of Boreal Chorus and Wood frogs at designated locations. The calls of the frogs help to identify species and population size.



Photo by Alyssa Metro / 2020 Photo Contest

Friends of Elk Island Society attended five events - two in Elk Island National Park (Canada and Parks Day) and three local events (Purple Martin Festival in Camrose, Swim Drink Fish in Edmonton, and a Federation of Canadian Municipalities tour of the Beaver Hills Biodiversity Trail in Strathcona County).



WEED PULL



Members assisted staff from Elk Island National Park with a Canada Thistle weed pull on the west portion of the park. The group was able to fill the back of a Parks' pickup truck.

VISITOR CENTRE NATIVE PLANT BEDS



FEIS took over the management of the three visitor parking lot medians. The medians have been planted with native plants of Alberta. One of the medians was overrun by weeds and was solarized last year and then re-seeded this spring.

Blast from the Past

Elk Island Softball Team

Submitted by Dennis Johnston



Elk Island Ball Team



Dennis Johnston ~1958



Dennis Johnston 2022

In 1957, my father, Ernie Johnston, and our neighbour, Calvin Petrie, formed a softball team with some of our fellow workmen at Elk Island National Park. I was 19 years old the summer the Elk Island Ball Team was formed. We played games and tournaments against other teams from Strathcona County rural communities like Ross Creek, Josephburg, Ellerslie, Colchester, Clover Bar, Ardrossan, Fultonvale, and Partridge Hill.

Mike Sweedish from Ross Creek played catcher, Calvin Petrie was a short stop, and my brother, Reg Johnston was the pitcher. Alvin Fry played first base and was an excellent first basemen with a wicked swing. He would strike out quite often but it was gone if he ever hit the ball. Ken Olson who came from Manitoba to work in Elk Island National Park in the summers, played third base. I played second base for the first two years the team was in existence and then moved to right field in year three. Lowell Kulak played left field and Art Walker was the backup pitcher. Garry Burnett played center field; he could throw the ball farther than anyone else. I remember one time him throwing the ball to home base from center field it went right over the catcher and hit the back stop. I buckled over laughing. I was amazed at how far he could throw ball. Coach Lawrence Schroeder's kept us all in line.

Calvin Petrie was a natural leader for our team and was often very animated during games. He started playing softball with us years earlier in Good Hope. We would all meet at the neighbouring Bergasson farm and play for fun. When he was young, Calvin owned a dog who would retrieve when Calvin batted a ball out, so he got lots of extra practice that way.

My brother Reg had a real good spin on the ball for the first six innings of the game, and the opposition would hardly get a hit, or if they did, it wouldn't go very far. Reg would get tired during the sixth inning, and then they would get hits. Art Walker, the backup pitcher, would subsequently take over for the remainder of the game. Softball is pitched underhand, and Reg would sometimes bring his arm back too high and they would call it an illegal pitch. He would get a mean spin on the ball using a windmill motion.

In the second year of our team's life, we acquired jerseys, and we wore them proudly for a photo for the Fort Record when we won the Country League Ball Tournament in 1958. We won a lot of our games and practiced regularly after work when we all stayed in the work camp in the Park. Our practice field was in the flat area next to the campground. There used to be a set of bleachers there for the spectators. Nearly every weekend, we would play a game against another team, and all take our own cars to the games.

Our biggest fan was undoubtedly my father, Ernie Johnston. He played baseball in his youth in Good Hope and was a back catcher when Lloyd Seymour pitched. They didn't get to play in leagues, but they got together once in a while to play a game. Even though he was generally a mild-mannered soul and rarely got mad at anyone, softball brought out another side of him. He never missed a game and sometimes got to hollering at various calls. He would walk out to the baseline and frequently had to be told to get back by the umpire. He would, but then ten minutes later, he would be back to voice his opinion about another call. Once when an umpire declared that the pitcher had an "illegal" pitch and called everything thrown a "ball", Ernie said "Come here Reg, we'll go talk to the ump", and then proceeded to give the umpire a good bawling out. My dad even got to fill in a few times as a catcher when we needed him. Baseball was good for him, and he looked forward to the games in his later years.

The team broke up after three years when a team from Edmonton, called the Beverly Drakes, stole our back catcher Mike Sweedish. These were, indeed, very special years of my life.

Dennis Johnston, his brother Reg, and father Ernie all worked for the Elk Island National Park. Dennis played for the ball team from 1957 to 1959. The Elk Island Ball team uniform displayed in the 2022 photo of Dennis above was worn by the late Garry Burnett. The Friends of Elk Island Society would like to thank Garry's wife Lynn Burnett for allowing us to display the uniform on Canada Day 2022 at Astotin Lake in Elk Island National Park.



Snowshoe Trek - Tawayik Lake



After two years of Covid-19 restrictions, FEIS were able to host a public event, a Snowshoe Trek held at Tawayik Lake Trailhead. On December 3, 2022, the group of 17 ventured off under the supervision of FEIS Board Member Larry Roy. After an hour of snowshoeing on this sunny cold day, the group went on a short hike while Larry pointed out animal tracks and provided facts about the parks wildlife and vegetation.



Photo by Michelle Jean