

BURDOCK ENTRAPMENT OF A RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET IN THE CRESTON VALLEY

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Common burdock (*Arctium minus*) and great burdock (*A. lappa*), members of the sunflower family, are introduced weeds which are widespread in disturbed land in the southern interior of British Columbia (Parish et al. 1996). The invasive plant is well known to farmers and ranchers who consider it a serious agricultural pest. Seed heads (e.g., burs) may cause pain and irritation for domestic grazing animals, as well as wild mammals, when it becomes lodged in a mouth, stomach, or on fur and ears. Since the early 1900s burdock has been recognized as a “death trap” for small birds (Humphreys 1975).

This note describes a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) found entrapped on great burdock in the Creston Valley, British Columbia. On 5 April 2004, while clearing a weedy patch on her rural property north of Wynndel, Judy Winterbottom discovered a Ruby-crowned Kinglet entangled on a clump of mature dried burdock (Figure 1). The bird was ensnared by barbed hooklets on the breast, belly, head, left wing, right leg, and right foot. The bird was freshly dead suggesting this fatal accident occurred during spring migration.

It has been suggested that many small insectivorous birds become entrapped on burdocks while foraging for insect larvae on the seed heads (Needham 1909). As well, gusty winds may cause birds foraging in burdock to lose their balance and become snared (Herzberg and Juhola 1986).

Burdock entrapment of birds in British Columbia is a rare event but it is probably under reported. Dawe (1974) reported the death of a Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*) found by Val McLeod at the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Delta on 4 February 1974. A dead, ensnared Ruby-crowned Kinglet was discovered by Bert Brink in the Bull River valley in 1992 (Brink 2004).



Figure 1. Ruby-crowned Kinglet entrapped on the seed head of a great burdock plant near Wynndel, BC. 5 April 2004. (Linda M. Van Damme). BC Photo 3206.

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is not the only animal to perish from burdock entrapment. Other species from published literature in North America include: Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*), Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapilla*), Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliptila caerulea*), Northern Parula (*Parula americana*), Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*), Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*), American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), and red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*). (McNicholl 1988,1994; Brewer 1994; Nealen and Nealen 2000; Iron 2002; Brink 2004; and Hinam et al. 2004).

Weights for the 15 species listed above range from about 3.5 g (Ruby-throated Hummingbird) to 15.2 g (Cassin's Vireo). It appears that animals weighing within this range, and whose habits include foraging near the ground in plants and low bushes, are most susceptible to entanglement by burdock.

Other than burning or herbicide spraying, most types of mitigation or control is nearly impossible for many weed species. However, early mowing of burdock, before seed heads develop, can make a difference at a local level.

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