

Nature Alberta

ALBERTA'S NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW



BADLANDS ALONG THE SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER SEAN AND DON GORDON

feature article

South Saskatchewan River Trip 2007! **PART 1**



BIGHORN SHEEP RAMS
JOHN WARDEN



**WOLF FEEDING ON ELK,
MALIGNE RIVER, JASPER
NATIONAL PARK** RICK PRICE

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WANT TO SUBMIT ARTICLES OR PHOTOS?

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NATURE ALBERTA DEADLINES ARE:

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The Federation of Alberta Naturalists is composed of natural history clubs from across the province. The aims of the Federation are:

- To encourage among all Albertans, by all means possible, an increase in their knowledge of natural history and understanding of ecological processes;
- To promote an increase in the exchange of information and views among natural history clubs and societies in Alberta;
- To foster and assist in the formation of additional natural history clubs and societies in Alberta;
- To promote the establishment of natural areas and nature reserves, to conserve and protect species, communities or other features of interest;
- To organize, or coordinate symposia, conferences, field meetings, nature camps, research and other activities whether of a similar or dissimilar nature;
- To provide the naturalists of Alberta with a forum in which questions relating to the conservation of the natural environment may be discussed, so that united positions can be developed on them, and to provide the means of translating these positions into appropriate actions.

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Foothills Land Trust	
Fort Saskatchewan Naturalists Society	
Friends of Blackfoot Society	

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The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists. The editor reserves the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles submitted. While due care will be taken of all manuscripts, photos or artwork submitted, FAN cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to such articles.

P R E S I D E N T ' S P A G E

Education & More

BY SANDRA FOSS

I had an interesting experience when I went to Golden (BC) to look after my grandchildren for a week. I ended up going birding with 2 school classes.

The “guide” was a member of Wildsight, the East Kootenay Environmental Society (the local natural history group). She leads many school field trips, and the Society provides bird books as well as high quality binoculars for each child and parent volunteer. Wildsight has spent a couple of thousand dollars on equipment, and one keen

volunteer leads many school class trips each spring. They also have a “contest” for the school children, and my grandson was delighted to show me the bird book he had received, because of the number of birds he had seen, and written up on his list. (Looking them up in the bird book, and writing out the names was challenging for a nine year old boy!)

We had gone around the neighbourhood and out into the Columbia wetlands, but in Golden, there are many birds to be seen and heard locally. I wonder whether any of our local Alberta groups do this with local schools? I know we have clubs like the Red Deer River

Naturalists and the Grasslands Naturalists that operate (in) a Nature Centre that do programs. Do any other Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) clubs go into schools?

Take a child with you on your next walk or field trip, and show them something that they haven't seen before - a bird or plant or frog or insect, or a track in the snow. This year, the spiders in the mountains seem to be exceptionally large!! Or count the spots on a ladybug!

Questions that I am often asked are: “What is FAN?” and “What does FAN do?” The main objective of FAN is to encourage Albertans to increase their knowledge of the natural history of the province. Local clubs came together in 1970 to form a provincial organization that would provide a unified voice for naturalists on conservation issues. Over time this has evolved into a major role in working with governments at all levels to ensure that legislation,



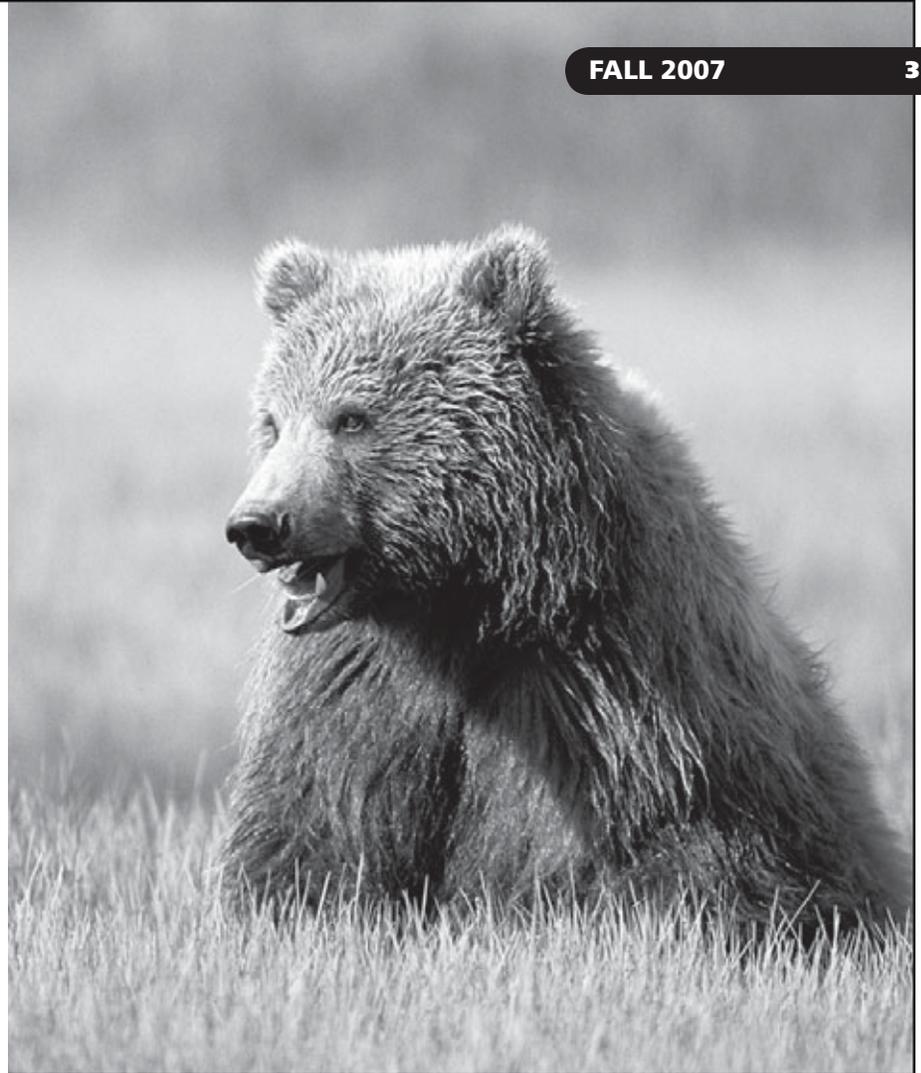
CHILDREN LEARNING ABOUT NATURE IS NATURE'S FUTURE; PHOTO FROM BIG LAKE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT SOCIETY. DAVE BURKHART

regulation and policy reflect the value of Alberta's natural history.

FAN's educational mandate is accomplished in many ways. FAN publishes a variety of natural history books. Our educational projects include Living by Water (rural and urban programs), Citizen Science projects, bird and plant counts (coordination, data collection and data storage), maintaining and supporting various databases, and providing support and encouragement to natural history and other environmental groups. Mapping and various computer based projects support this goal too.

FAN is in the process of establishing the Nature Alberta Foundation, to provide a more secure source of funding than we currently enjoy (applying for various grants, on a project by project basis). A Young Naturalists program has been started in Red Deer and possibly soon will be offered across the province.

Our influence on policy is accomplished by sitting on many government committees, like the Species at Risk Conservation Committee, various Recovery teams (Mountain Caribou, Grizzly Bear, Trumpeter Swan etc), and groups like the Prairie Conservation Forum, the Alberta Conservation Association, and



GRIZZLY PHOTOS.COM

others. FAN also occasionally raises certain issues directly with policy makers. FAN is highly regarded by industry with whom we work in partnership on conservation projects and policy review committees.

This magazine, *Nature Alberta*, is the voice of FAN, and we would like to hear more from you, from our member groups and anyone with interesting stories to tell, or pictures to share.

The FAN Board is recruiting, as well. We currently have no Vice President; my (3rd) term as President is finished in April, and

I cannot be re-elected. If you are interested in helping FAN by volunteering for any of our jobs, check out the recently revamped website (www.fanweb.ca) and give the office a call, or send an email. (I think Dennis may have a note about this somewhere too!!)

I hope you all had a wonderful summer, and didn't melt. It was too hot for me to hike until mid August when the snow appeared up high, and temperatures moderated somewhat.

EDITOR'S PAGE

Grand Ol' Nature

BY DENNIS BARESCO

Nature is truly grand. There are dozens of other words that one could use to try to define that which naturalists feel represents the natural world – words that can conjure up images, thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories.

That's part of *Nature Alberta's* vision: "celebrating our natural heritage," providing you - the reader - with a glimpse into the heart and soul of natural Alberta.

Nature Alberta also gives you – the naturalist – an opportunity to share your nature experiences or to become immersed in the experiences of other naturalists. Last issue, Theodore Manno shared his knowledge about Columbian Ground Squirrels.

In this issue's feature story, the nature tour includes a canoe trip, with Don and Sean Gordon, down the South Saskatchewan River (pg 18). Photographers John Warden and Rick Price let you look through their viewfinder (pg 25 and pg 31). John McFaul again takes you to the heavens (pg 29). Bill Brown and Teresa Dolman walk you through Lethbridge's Helen Schuler Coulee Centre (pg 10). As usual, your Editor guides you along a couple of nature's paths (pgs 16 and 25).

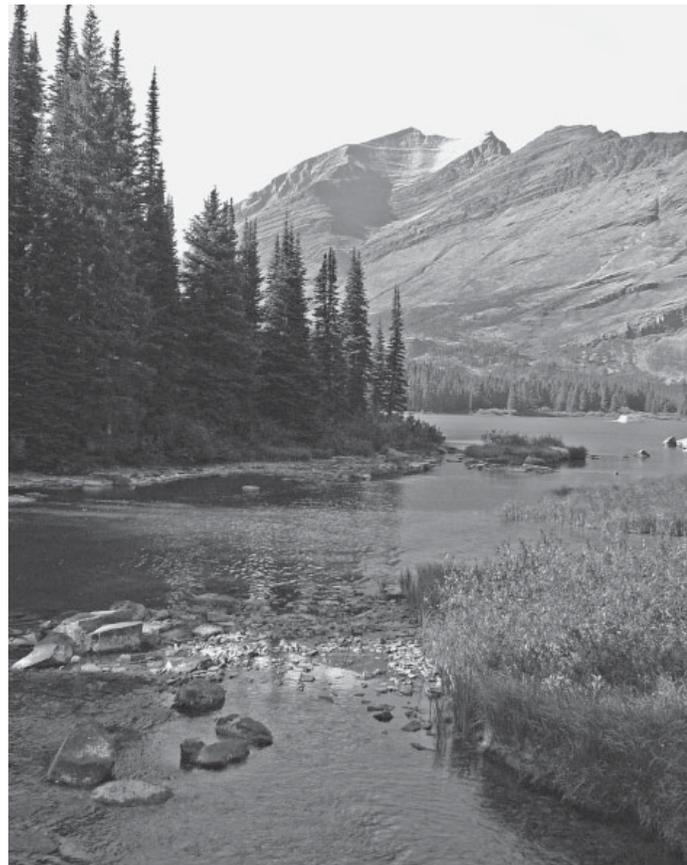
The idea is to entertain, inform and/or stir naturalists' memories. Perhaps a subtler message is to

instill hope and passion – hope that all this natural grandness will remain for generations and a passionate urge to assist in ensuring that hope is fulfilled. Because, though there are problems and issues and damage, the solutions are not all that difficult.

Nature needn't be the whipping boy at the hands of greed, corruption, lust, brutality and the vacuous plodding so prevalent in politicians, bureaucrats, industrialists and businessmen. All nature needs is a determined hope and passion – from naturalists. The result? To quote Sam Cooke: "♪ What a wonderful world this would be ♪"

Then again, perhaps you would prefer Louis Armstrong's more applicable "♪ What a Wonderful World ♪"

Take a few minutes on the internet: type in "What a Wonderful World" and go to YouTube to watch and listen to Louis (the seriusandco segment is good) – it's so very much better than the provincial government theme song and video, "It's an Exploitable World."



Your letters commenting on any aspect of Nature Alberta or its articles are welcome! Email them to na@fanweb.ca or mail/fax to addresses on pg 1, under "Contents".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Visit to Backcountry

Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoy *Nature Alberta* – lots of interesting info and great photos.

My husband and I just returned from a little tour of the North Prairie Creek – Ram River area. The last day we spent in the Hummingbird Creek area, and I must say I am somewhat concerned about the heavy use of that area: random camping, horses, quads, horses tied to trees despite signs requesting not to. I realize people like to get out and enjoy the back country, but when I observed a young fellow hopping on his quad to ride to the outhouse – I wonder what he really thinks about the NATURE aspect. I only hope all the horses and quads we saw are using designated trails!! It's beautiful country – I enjoyed the unique plants and birds in the area. I just hope it doesn't get spoiled by over-use.

Keep up your good work!

LORNA E MCDONELL, SHERWOOD PARK AB

Enthusiastic

I would like to say how absolutely thrilled I was to stumble across this rare beauty, *Nature Alberta*. I quite literally stumbled across it. Earlier this year I was browsing through the Internet, querying about nature, for the environmental school programs that I do with the Multicultural Heritage Centre in Stony Plain. I was specifically looking for content on Alberta and its geography.

My love of Alberta first began in grade four, where I had to write a letter to Alberta Tourism. We had to ask for specific information on the parks in Alberta. In the mail, addressed just to me, was information on Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone; those pamphlets I treasured for many years and if I dig through my archives I probably would find them. My other enjoyment of Alberta was our summer camping trips revolving around "Stamp Around Alberta". My mom's idea was to explore Alberta and get to know its wonders. That year we took the Forestry Trunk Trail in all its graveled

glory. My continuing jaunt through Alberta was in university; I took as many courses related to the geography of Alberta that I could.

With all those memories stored I had so wanted to capture Alberta, somehow. After exploring the site, I researched *Nature Alberta* magazine and I subscribed to the magazine. I then received your back issues and read them cover-to-cover; and my wish to have Alberta captured, somehow was fulfilled. That it's a magazine means I have new information almost every month. I am grateful that we have people producing a magazine and contributors writing, recording and preserving its history. I look forward to every issue. I just wish they were every month.

SHARON C. MCGONIGAL (ALBERTA ENTHUSIAST!), STONY PLAIN AB

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Congrats

Congratulations on Nature Alberta, which finally arrived today [July 17/07]. It's interesting, attractive and you're already getting bouquets!

DAWN DICKINSON, MEDICINE HAT AB

Good Issue!

WOW.....New magazine is wonderful....fabulous covers..... interesting articles...haven't had time to read them all but will be taking the issue to the lake for surehope it is received well in all quarters.....think

you could use more Letters to Editor space unless you don't get 'more'....paper quality is wonderful.....your pronghorn stories interesting.....good issue!

JEAN VANWERT, MEDICINE HAT AB

Pronghorn and Coyotes

I read with interest "Winter Pronghorn on their Northernmost Range" by Bob Gainer, Forest Gainer, Rhonda Munns and Franc Mes [Vol 34, # 4, Winter 2005], not only to be informed about the difficulties of the pronghorn in the Hanna area but because of the history of the two principal species discussed. The pronghorn and the coyote are two of the few significant-sized mammals to have come through to us from the great extinction that occurred at the end of the last ice age. Some 10,000 years ago and earlier an impressive megafauna was present in North America. Great herds of elephants, giant bison, camels, horses and an array of smaller ungulates including the pronghorn roamed the western plains. Along

with them were the predators, the great elephant-eating bears, the dire-wolves, the American lions and cheetahs and earlier the great sabre-toothed cats.

The cause of the great extinction is not clear but the pronghorn and coyote survived. They survived presumably because they were adaptable and smart. The pronghorn is incredibly hardy. It is also fast, far faster than it needs to be to outrun anything current but it had to outrun the cheetahs and it had to know when to run. It was also adept at hiding its young from the eagles that were possibly their greatest predator. The coyote too lived in a very dangerous environment having to eke out a living amongst the big predators.

It continues to do so but the big predator now is man who has used dogs, poison, traps and gunfire in an effort to wipe it out. The wise coyote was recognized by the American Indians of the southwest who referred to it, the little brother of the wolf, as "the trickster".

It is ironic that these two mammals having survived so much are now in conflict in the Hanna area. The pronghorn suffers from a serious reduction in available habitat. The coyote too is making its way in the modern world within a rapidly changing environment. It is hoped that we can accommodate them both in the years ahead. I tip my hat to them whenever our paths cross. I know what they have been through.

IAN HALLADAY, CALGARY AB

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Just in case you think that Ian Halladay is VERY far behind in his reading, I have to tell you that this "Letter to the Editor" somehow got lost for two-plus years, but the topic is timeless, thus my decision to print it at this late date.

Note that contact numbers for all MLAs, MPs and political parties are easily available on their websites, should you wish to send a message.
In Alberta: www.gov.ab.ca.

*For information on Oil sands: consultations:
www.alberta.ca//acn/200707/21552.html#backgrounder*

ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

Issues, Nature Alberta, and the New Fan Website

“Nature Alberta: celebrating our natural heritage” is this magazine’s vision. Part of that – and certainly an important part of FAN’s mandate - is letting naturalists know about issues that impact nature. However, many of those issues are difficult

to properly discuss in a space as limited as “Alberta Issues in Brief.” To the rescue comes www.fanweb.ca!

The “Issues” section of www.fanweb.ca is growing and will be an excellent resource for anyone wishing to become better

informed about issues in which FAN is involved. It will also be a place where you can discuss issues and be part of the solution. The Issues section is one of the many changes to the “new” www.fanweb.ca (see pg 33: “What’s the Plone?”) Watch for it – check it out!

HOPE: One step closer!

On June 20, the Government of Canada extended interim protection for a vast area of boreal wilderness called Edézhíe (the Horn Plateau), in Canada’s Northwest Territories.

Edézhíe is rich in wildlife, including boreal songbirds, migratory birds, Woodland Caribou and Moose. It is also an important source of water, and an area of great cultural importance to local First Nations people.

Temporary protection has been extended to October 31, 2008, allowing more time to complete the studies needed to establish a National Wildlife Area to protect the site. Nature Canada’s goal is to secure permanent protection of the Edézhíe.

More on CFB Suffield:

Just three years after Canada established a National Wildlife Area (NWA) at CFB Suffield, energy giant EnCana Corp’s proposal to drill up to 1,275 shallow gas wells and construct 220 km of new pipeline threatens one of the last remaining large intact pieces of mixed prairie in Canada.

EnCana’s 2,000 page Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is very

lightweight; little of substance is discussed or considered. A “no start” option for the project is summarily dismissed, and only the vertical drill option is presented.

Nature Canada feels the EIS is seriously inadequate in all policy and legislation areas, such as the Migratory Bird Convention, Species at Risk Act, and Wildlife Area regulations. Grasslands Naturalists (GN) is of the



ACTIVE DUNES ARE JUST ONE OF THE DRAMATIC FEATURES OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA.

ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

view that information that is provided does not meet the requirements of the Guidelines, in terms of not providing supporting information and/or substantiating conclusions. These deficiencies are so prevalent that GN only points out the obvious ones.

The Alberta Wilderness Association, federal and provincial governments, local ranchers and the Siksika Nation have submitted long lists of questions that the document does not address - like, why use non-native Crested Wheatgrass for reclamation?

Little consideration is given to the water issues that this project will cause. EnCana says all wetland buffers will be respected - unless it impedes resource extraction. Later they tell us that up to 100 wetland areas may be drilled or impinged on in some manner.

FAN is continuing to work with Nature Canada, Grasslands Naturalists, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, Alberta Wilderness Association, and World Wildlife Fund Canada on this issue. After reviewing the comments received and EnCana's response, the Panel will determine whether the EIS is sufficient or if the proponent

must provide any additional information before it schedules public hearings.

To read the questions and comments submitted, check the Canadian Environmental Assessment (CEAR) website. Project #05-07-15620. If you are concerned about this project, and are a shareholder of EnCana, please make them aware of your concerns: EnCana Corporation, 421-7th Ave SW, PO Box 2850 Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2S5

You could also express your concerns to local and federal politicians and leaders. Check out the wonderful pictures and descriptions of the area:

http://www.army.gc.ca/Suffield/English/backgroundnder_dnd.asp
Department of National Defence
- National Wildlife Area CFB Suffield

www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/
Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry

www.pnr-rpn.ec.gc.ca/nature/whp/nwa/suffield/dd02s00.en.html
Environment Canada - Canadian Forces Base Suffield National Wildlife Area

FAN's website, www.fanweb.ca, will update the latest press releases and news on the topic.

On the Covers:

**FRONT COVER**

By Sean Gordon. The South Saskatchewan River is a wonderful mix of hoodoos,

badlands, floodplains, and high cliffs, with a plethora of grand vistas for artists, photographers and adventurers. Sean and Don Gordon (son and father) recount the story of their canoe trip in this issue's Feature Article (see pg 18).

**INSIDE FRONT COVER**

By Rick Price. A radio-collared white Wolf, feeding on an Elk kill in the Maligne

River, resulted in a picture-perfect setup for Rick and Lucy Price. Jasper National Park is where the Prices have taken a number of Wolf pictures. See pg 31 for more photos by Rick.



By John Warden. "This photo was taken in Jasper National Park on the 03 Jan 2006, again with a Canon 20D ... I think [it was a]

17 - 85 mm. These two young rams had been butting heads playfully, then stopped to nuzzle each other." Turn to pg 23 to read John's photo essay on Mountain Goats

**BACK COVER**

By John Warden. While Mountain Goats are not all that difficult to find, getting excellent pictures

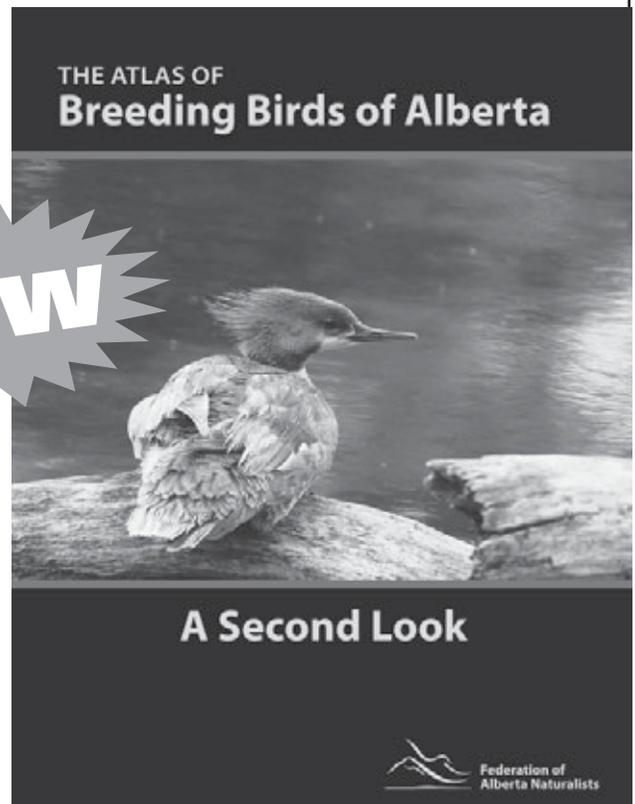
is another thing. John took this shot along the Icefield Parkway. Check out his Mountain Goat story, and more photos, on page 23.

BOOK REVIEW

New book from FAN!

The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta: A Second Look

new



Available from FAN Books:

\$64.95. online (www.fanweb.ca) or traditional methods.

The Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) published the original version (also referred to as Atlas 1) of The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta in 1992. The new 2007 update, The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta, A Second Look (Atlas 2), is now available – and it's a superb volume!

The data collected for both Atlases cover five-year periods. Information in Atlas 2 includes: general distribution map, distribution change, habitat preference charts, relative occurrence and population changes from Atlas 1 and 2, and provincial status. Some species

were newly confirmed as breeders in Alberta. Over 80,000 bird observations were collected during Bird Atlas which amounts to 470,000+ bird records.

A number of rare bird species were seen during the Atlas project. Among those documented were Little Blue Heron, Common Eider,

Long-tailed Jaeger, Barn Owl, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Wood Thrush, Hooded Warbler, and Siberian Accentor.

The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta: A Second Look is filled with fascinating data on provincial avian populations. It would be safe to say that the book is a must for those calling themselves birders or for those with an interest in birds.

trivia

Where is the square with highest number of breeding species?

ANSWER: Lac La Biche (Square VR37) - 135

Where is the square with the highest number of species?

ANSWER: Calgary (Square QG05) - 254

What species breeds in the most number of squares?

ANSWER: American Robin - 922

Lethbridge's Helen Schuler Coulee Centre

Celebrates its 25th Anniversary

BY BILL BROWN AND TERESA DOLMAN

From June 6th to 9th, 2007, the Helen Schuler Coulee Centre, located in the 196-acre Lethbridge Nature Reserve, was the location of a celebration to mark twenty-five years of operation.

Officially opened on June 6, 1982, the Centre was the result of years of work by a group of dedicated citizens of Lethbridge and area determined to have a focal point from which to run nature interpretive programs.

This citizen group had worked since the late seventies to get a nature reserve in place and volunteers were already taking people on nature interpretive walks along river valley trails. The area they used was part of the Oldman River flood plain and adjacent coulee lands bordered by the river, the CPR High Level Bridge and the old Highway 3 western access to the city. Along with native plants, animals and land forms, this area had evidence of human activity and settlement. In one corner was the site of the first Galt Coal Mine with its associated tailings pile and it was apparent that miners' homes were once located there as well. The shifting course of the river and

some gravel work had created a somewhat uneven floodplain and the whole area was dominated visually by the 100 meter (300 foot) high railway bridge.

The river valley was the site of the original European settlement in the late 19th century (at that time the community was known as Coalbanks). The majority of homes were on the east bank of the valley, but some were down in the valley itself. However, several large flood events between 1902 and 1953 persuaded the citizens to remove all the homes from the flood plain. A subsequent decision to extend the city to the west across the river brought forth the urgent question of what to do with the river and coulee area - develop or preserve? After some study City Council asked the Provincial Government in 1976 to declare the area a Restricted Development Area. The City also

initiated a major facilities plan which considered, amongst other things, a nature centre.

In spring 1977, a committee was established to assist the City's Community Services Department in developing proposals for the nature centre. The committee was composed of representatives from the Lethbridge Naturalists Society, Lethbridge Community College, University of Lethbridge, School District No. 51, School District No. 9 and a resource person from the Community Services Department. This committee grappled with such issues as the purpose of the centre, initial staffing requirements, possible locations and cost estimates for construction and operation. The firm of Richard White Architects was given the job of designing the building but, while designs were ready in a short time, getting funding proved difficult. In the end it was decided to fund the building through various grants and provincial monies made available to the City and the two School Boards, and all three allocated



HELEN SCHULER COULEE CENTRE IN LETHBRIDGE AB. DOUGLAS DOLMAN

funds to the project, which was finally completed in 1981 and formally opened in June, 1982. It is located on the old mine tailing pile partly to keep it above the 100-year flood level. (The site, by the way, was not high enough to prevent it from being inundated by the great 1995 flood.)

The Lethbridge Naturalists Society (LNS) maintained an active interest in the Centre throughout its development stage. In 1976, the LNS was urging its members to write to City Council to preserve the river valley so that "everyone can have a space to walk and breathe and enjoy a natural prairie area" (LNS newsletter, September, 1976), and in 1977 it set up a River Valley Committee to promote the cause. When it became clear that a nature centre was to be built, the LNS raised close to \$50,000 by means of grants and donations (primarily from the Province of Alberta, from the **Federation of Alberta Naturalists** and from private donations). The money

was used to purchase furnishings and reference books, assemble program materials, construct self-guided nature trails and hire a naturalist for one year to get the Centre up and running. On top of this were countless hours of volunteer time that LNS members gave to serving on committees and advising on programs. The Society also suggested that the Centre be named for one of their founding members, the late Helen Schuler, an active naturalist and conservationist who had been a prime mover in getting the Centre project under way and inspired others to get involved.

The Anniversary Celebration got underway the evening of Wednesday, June 6th, with guest speakers. Sheila Buelow, Leisure Services Coordinator for the City of Lethbridge, detailed the City's role in working with community members to develop the long term planning framework and vision that would allow this Nature Centre to stand the test of time. Coreen Putman, Nature

Interpretation Coordinator of the Centre, shared highlights and achievements from the last 25 years. Martin Howg, an elementary school teacher, discussed how the Centre's hands-on, interpretive approach supports and motivates outdoor learning in his students. Bill Brown gave a history of how the LNS helped get the Centre established.

Thursday evening recognized the lasting contributions of Helen Schuler - wife, mother, nurse, educator and environmentalist. It brought members of her family back to meet old friends and talk about those earlier times and living with Helen. The audience included older folk who had known the Schuler family 25 years ago, as well as younger people who learned about the woman who did so much to get the idea of a nature centre building accepted and who was instrumental in founding the Lethbridge Naturalists Society.

Helen Schuler's legacy lives on in the many volunteers and staff who continue her work at the Centre. Friday evening was dedicated to

Lethbridge's Helen Schuler Coulee Centre Celebrates its 25th Anniversary...continued



COREEN PUTMAN WITH CHILDREN AT 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION.

PHOTO COURTESY HSCC

these individuals who, over the years, have worked on programs, operations, the advisory board and committees. In the years since the Centre opened, approximately 650 local residents have volunteered more than 50,000 hours to the Centre. The success of the Centre may well be attributed to these people. The mutual trust and respect established between volunteers and the professional staff was particularly noted during the ceremonies.

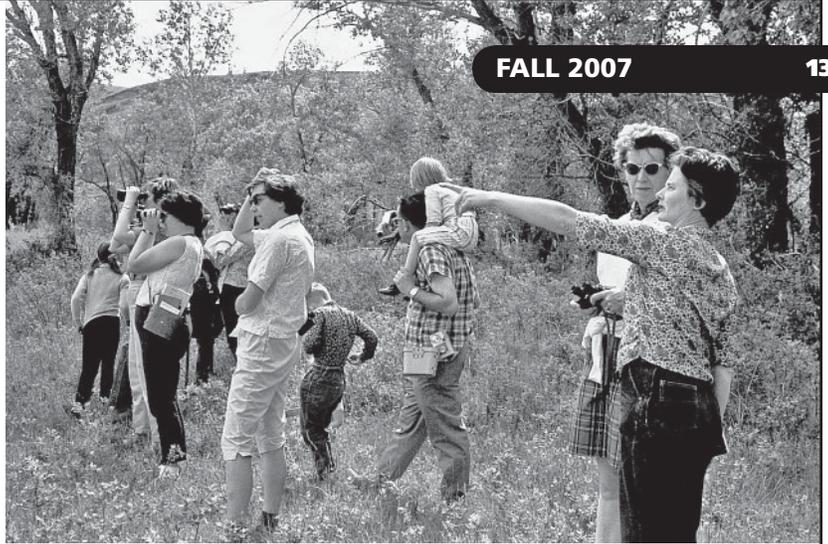
The celebration wound up on Saturday afternoon, when outdoor activities for the public were a demonstration of the Centre's role in educating the community about nature. Local organizations displayed their areas of interest and provided hands-on activities for youngsters. The most telling feature was the keen involvement of both children and adults in the many special events and displays that afternoon.

Over the years an impressive number and range of programs

have been developed by the staff and volunteers. School Programs are in place to complement the elementary science curriculum, and Badge Programs allow guides and scouts to work toward nature-related badges. There are three drop-in programs devoted to children, of various age ranges. Sunday Nature Walks welcome people of all ages throughout the year and in the summer there are special walks on various park trails in the river valley, as well as a weekly nature theatre in a downtown amphitheatre. Adults are attracted to courses such as nature photography and bird or plant identification. Throughout the year there are special events such as the Family Day Track Trek, Christmas Crafts and an annual Coulee Clean-Up. The list of programs and events is limited only by the knowledge and imagination of staff members, but there is a decided emphasis on youth programs, an emphasis Helen Schuler would surely have approved.

The Helen Schuler Coulee Centre is the focus for nature interpretation in the City of Lethbridge. It began with a band of nature lovers who wished to share their love and knowledge of nature with others. It evolved into today's building with its many programs and it will continue into the future. Plans are in hand to further develop the interpretive potential of the Centre to meet the ever-evolving needs of today's society, and the Lethbridge Naturalists Society remains ready to offer help and guidance.

Lethbridge's Helen Schuler
Coulee Centre Celebrates its 25th
Anniversary...continued



HELEN SCHULER (RIGHT) LEADING A LETHBRIDGE NATURALISTS SOCIETY FIELD TRIP, SUMMER 1970. ARVID SCHULTZ

Acknowledgments: We wish to thank Coreen Putman and Jessica Deacon-Rogers at the Helen Schuler Coulee Centre for reviewing the manuscript and for providing photographs of the Anniversary Celebration. We also thank Arvid Schultz for the photograph of Helen Schuler and Douglas Dolman for the photograph of the Coulee Centre building.

If you are visiting Lethbridge, make one of your stops the Helen Schuler Coulee Centre. Turn west into the river valley at the intersection of Scenic Drive and 3rd Avenue South. At the bottom of the hill, turn right and follow the road to its end. The Centre is open September to May from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (closed Mondays) and June to August every day from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Walk the trails, drop into the building to look at the many exhibits and the feature display (it changes every four months), and add your name to the more than 30,000 visitors who come each year. As a bonus, admission is free! You can also learn about the Centre from its website, www.lethbridge.ca/hsc/.

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BOOK REVIEW

Ladybugs of Alberta

Finding the Spots and Connecting the Dots

REVIEW BY: SARAH MCPIKE

Not only does John Acorn's most recent book, Ladybugs of Alberta, showcase some of Alberta's most charismatic beetles, but it also draws attention (and question) to some of the issues at the forefront of conservation today. Whichever of these reasons makes you pick up the book, you won't be disappointed.

The field guide aspects are appealing. If you spend any time outside looking at insect-life, you'll want to have *Ladybugs of Alberta*. Seventy five species of ladybugs are documented with illustrations, drawn by the author himself. The drawings are found in both a gallery style, for side-by-side comparison, and on the description pages for each species.

For many of the ladybugs, more than one "form" is shown, as there can be a fair amount of variability in a species. The provided range maps should help eliminate some possibilities when identifying ladybugs (however one error was noticed regarding the polished ladybug which is described as not found in the southeast of Alberta despite multiple records in and around Medicine Hat). Also found throughout are amazingly close-up photographs of these

relatively tiny but lovely beetles. The photographs will show you details you couldn't imagine.

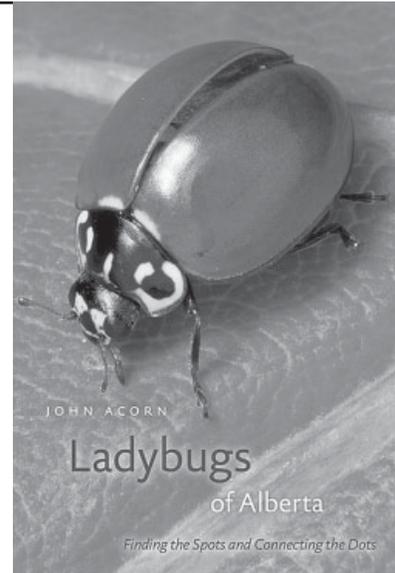
Through the conversational style of writing, found in this book and his previous efforts in this series (*Tiger Beetles of Alberta*, *Damselflies of Alberta*), John reveals his talent for making learning about nature fun. Particularly enjoyable are the rhyming couplets that accompany each species: "A wee tiny ladybug feeding on mould, Loves life in Alberta no matter how cold", he writes of a small mildew-feeding beetle, the Wee-tiny Ladybug. Some of the couplets even have political commentary: "Oregon ladybugs, in the national park/ Protected by wardens, keeping us in the dark".

The aspect of *Ladybugs of Alberta* that will possibly surprise readers is John's addressing of the issue of introduced wildlife. The most commonly found ladybug is in

fact an "alien"—the Seven-spot! Enemy to all native ladybugs! Or so I thought... John explores the idea that perhaps the alarmist, battle-stations approach to introduced species is not the only choice. Encouraging people to not immediately consider change in the ecosystem as damage to the ecosystem is part of the argument. Anyone with an interest in conservation will appreciate John's "trying very hard to follow my conscience and remain as scientifically self-honest as I can", as he states in the preface.

Beautiful beetles and provocative philosophy—What more could you want from a field guide?!

(Sarah McPike, formerly a park interpreter at Police Point Park, has a passion for insects – including butterflies and ladybugs, which has led her to continue her studies this fall at U of A.)



by John Acorn. University of Alberta Press 2007.

*Take note: Ladybugs of Alberta, along with Tiger Beetles of Alberta and Damselflies of Alberta, are available at the FAN book store: www.fanweb.ca. You can buy all 3 for \$69.95.

In Memoriam



Word of the passing of Colleen McCrory, has shocked and saddened Canada's – and the world's – environmental activist community.

Colleen McCrory

Ms McCrory was the founder of the Valhalla Wilderness Society and dedicated herself totally to environmental protection in British Columbia and around the globe.

She was, without question, one of Canada's greatest environmentalists. "She was extremely courageous," said her friend, Anne Sherrod. "Colleen understood that as an environmentalist her role was not to be comfortable or to be liked. Her allegiance was to the environment and she would defend her principles no matter what the cost was to herself, and she did pay a huge cost."

Colleen died in New Denver BC (in the West Kootenays), Sunday July 1, at age 57. For more information on Colleen McCrory and the Valhalla Wilderness Society, go to: www.vws.org

"What was it that connected the two sides of Colleen? What but that the fierceness of her battles had love as its secret source? — love for the undefended, for the people, animals and trees trampled in the name of resource exploitation; and for the principles of service to the public interest that made her a fierce enemy of those who betrayed them?"

Anne Sherrod, from the Valhalla Wilderness Society website.



A life-long rancher, Peter Butala did more than just talk about preserving native ranchland; he actually did it through his ranching methods and by donating both deed and lease land, to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC).

Peter Butala

The result is the 5,300 hectare (13,100 acres) Old Man on his Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area, which is surrounded by a huge swath of native prairie crown land (80,000 plus hectares).

Mr Butala, named by Time Magazine in 1994 as a "Canadian Hero," had a passionate belief in protecting grassland. Fearful of what might happen to his ranch after retirement, he and his wife,

author Sharon Butala, began to search out ways to keep it natural, culminating – after much difficulty – in his 1996 deal with NCC.

The result is a stunning example of grassland – which, since 2003, has had a herd of Plains Bison once again roaming freely. Old Man on his Back, in SW Saskatchewan near Eastend, is well worth a visit – and a tribute to a man of true vision. Mr Butala passed away on August 9, 2007

Wildlife! Starring...

Tiger Salamander

BY DENNIS BARESCO

The Tiger Salamander (Ambystoma tigrinum) is not particularly secretive; however, since it's mostly nocturnal, somewhat sluggish, spends most of its time under something (logs, debris, ground) or in sloughy waters, does not vocalize, and is reasonably camouflaged, it tends to escape notice. But, if you have ever watched or held one, the experience tends to stay with you.

One thing is certain: you will not confuse this amphibian with any other animal. A half-moon head, small eyes, squat body, large size (between 14 and 20 cm long, half of which is tail), chubby little "lizard legs", and unusual blotchy striping, Tiger Salamanders are the classic "so ugly, they're cute" creatures.

Tiger Salamanders can be found, usually close to water,

throughout the central and southern half of Alberta, except where the elevation is above 2,800m. There's also an isolated population near Grande Prairie. Best time to observe: early Spring in ponds, marshes or lakes, which is when they emerge from their burrows to breed.

The eggs hatch in 3-4 weeks; over the next 3-4 months, the gilled larvae develop and then metamorphose into adult salamanders. At least, most of them do. In a process called neotony, some may simply stay in the larvae stage and

remain in the water, though they still grow and reach maturity. This strategy may be a response to harsh conditions (eg., drought) on land – though how they know those conditions, considering that they're not "out there" is best left to scientific speculation or a response from a reader.

Tiger Salamanders are not fussy eaters. They will eat insects,

"It looks like a lizard and feels like a frog."

Perhaps no other definition sums up a salamander quite so well. In fact, the word salamander comes from a Greek word meaning lizard-like animal."

AB Sustainable Resource Development website

TIGER SALAMANDERS APPEAR TO HAVE A PERMANENT "SMILE"! SAN FRANCISCO ZOO
WWW.SFZOO.ORG



Wildlife! Starring...
Tiger Salamander...
continued



TIGER SALAMANDER PHOTOS.COM

worms, invertebrates of any kind, fish, small vertebrates and even other salamanders.

Though Tiger Salamanders are endangered in B.C. and extirpated from Ontario, the Alberta population, according

to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), is thought to be "healthy and widespread". They are harmless, gentle creatures, which may help explain why they can live to be over fifteen years old. It

appears that the only use humans have for them is as live bait (one of the more repulsive habits of fishermen!); this has led to salamanders being introduced in areas where they are not normally found.

Info from: SRD website; The Amphibians and Reptiles of Alberta (Russell and Bauer, 1993)

PARKS FOR TOMORROW 2008: CALL FOR PAPERS

The Departments for Geography, History, and the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary are pleased to invite paper proposals for "Canadian Parks for Tomorrow 2008". Submissions are strongly encouraged from interdisciplinary backgrounds that address conservation and management issues from different angles, including -but not limited to- geography, environmental sciences, political science, biology, sociology, history, economics and law. **Submissions are due December 17, 2007.**

For details:

www.parks4tomorrow.ucalgary.ca;
or email: parks08@ucalgary.ca.

The conference on Parks and Protected Areas will be held May 8 – 13 2008 in Calgary.

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE #2 (IN THE SUMMER NATURE ALBERTA)

ACROSS

1. FORSTER
4. MENSA
7. INCA
8. CLASSIFY
10. RED BIRCHES
12. NEVADA

13. ADDERS
15. CRETACEOUS
18. TARSIIERS
19. KIWI
20. KITES
21. ACCENTS

DOWN

1. FLIER
2. ROCK DOVE
3. RELICT
4. MASKED DUCK
5. NAIL
6. AGYNOUS

9. BIRDBRAINS
11. DEVONIAN
12. NUNATAK
14. STERNA
16. SOILS
17. GRIT

FEATURE ARTICLE

South Saskatchewan River Trip 2007

PART 1

BY SEAN GORDON AND DON GORDON

We had an early start on day 1 (June 24, 2007), having stayed in Taber the night before. That made for an easy first day, as we only planned for 18 km, or to the end of Reach One.

The maps we used for planning this trip and on the water were from a book called *Prairie River*, by Dawn Dickinson and Dennis Baresco (illustrated by Garry Newton)¹. This book is an invaluable reference for the South Saskatchewan River,

and I would say vital if you are planning a canoe trip on it. It is available through the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (www.fanweb.ca).

We expanded the maps in the book and laminated them for ease of reference on the

water, roughly following each of the Reaches set out there. We also took a copy along with us, and it enhanced our experience greatly.

The weather on the first day was perfect for river canoeing, partly overcast with a little wind. The start of a river trip is always something special, and I was really happy when we got on the water.

Almost immediately, we started seeing wildlife. We spotted a healthy-looking Coyote paralleling our course, running along the top of the bluffs. He went a couple hundred meters before heading up top. I can't believe how green the hills all are. I've done a lot of camping in Southern Alberta and I've never seen it so green. Clearly, there's been a lot of precipitation.

SHOWY MILKWEED (*ASCLEPIAS SPECIOSA*): ONE OF OUR MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS.
SEAN AND DON GORDON



¹ Prairie River divides stretches of the river into "Reaches"; Reach 1 starts where the South Saskatchewan River is formed (by the merging of the Bow and Oldman Rivers) at "The Grand Forks," north of Grassy Lake., and runs for 18km to Cherry Coulee.



SEAN AND DON GORDON

I think that Dad and I both thought the same thing: this is going to be a good trip.

We set up camp 1 about half a kilometer upstream of the hwy 879 bridge. There were a couple of absolutely gigantic Plains Cottonwoods, underneath which we set up; they had to be 200+ years if they were a day. One in particular had a trunk that was easily 2 m across at the base! Also lots of driftwood, likely brought downstream during the '95 flood. That gave us wood to cook up the steaks. We always start a trip with steak and a nice bottle of wine. Not only is it nice to have such luxuries out in the bush, it's important to get some calories, as we burn so many during the day, and our appetites always drop away to nothing over the course of things. We start with a big steak

dinner and by the end of the trip, supper usually consists of a couple of handfuls of trail mix and a few sips of water.

Not being entirely sure of the weather, we used our standard set up: tarp pegged to the ground on one side of the tent, and fully deployed out with poles, giving us a substantial covered area to work under. However, we quickly discovered that the eyelets in a \$75 tarp are no better than a \$20 one, as we managed to punch out a couple over the course of the first night.

On the wildlife front, aside from the Coyote, we saw both Mule and White-tailed Deer. The deer population is clearly very high along the river at this time, as we saw deer every day of the trip.

On day 2, we broke camp, hauled gear, and packed the

canoe (it always packs better on the second day after we have the gear sorted out a little better). It was still partly overcast, only the wind had picked up significantly.

Our first break was on an island, with fresh water clam shells scattered all around. Fresh water clams?! This is the first time either of us had seen them on a river canoe trip. Quite interesting². It never fails to amaze me how each river has its own quirks and personality. I've canoed the southern reaches of the Red Deer down to Dinosaur Provincial Park, which is close to the same area as the South Saskatchewan, but this is still a new experience. While on the island I managed to get a good shot with my Nikon looking back upstream with the canoe in the foreground.

At km 24, we saw a White-tailed Deer on an island right across from

² There are about 43 species of Molluscs in southeastern Alberta, including 19 clams. Except for two large species, they are small, "fingernail" clams, 2.5 cm or smaller. The species referred to is the Fat Mucket Clam – the river's only pearly mussel - which can grow to 15 cm, and is hugely abundant.

South Saskatchewan River Trip 2007...continued

a gravel operation. At km 30, just upstream of a big ranch/farm, we spotted our first Bald Eagle (first of many). Then, approximately a kilometre downstream of that same ranch, we spotted a Red-tailed Hawk that was being harassed by some psychotically aggressive Eastern Kingbirds. Presumably the hawk was threatening their nests for them to be going after it with that kind of zeal³. It was quite entertaining.

The nice partially cloudy weather lasted for the day; however the wind definitely picked up as the day went on. Fortunately, it was behind us, so we made better time than expected. We found another great campsite under some big cottonwoods, and after hauling

the gear and the obligatory post-haul beer, we set up the tent. By this time the wind was really up and we had to peg the tent prior to putting the fly on. Once that was done, the wind was still increasing, to the point that there were whitecaps on the river. It was readily apparent that something was on the way, so we brought the gear close to the tent, spread out the tarp, and pegged it right to the ground, covering the tent as well (I called it a "tarp igloo").

After that we relaxed some more under the cottonwoods, while watching the birds. We spotted a Baltimore Oriole (camp 2, km 52) flying by. However, our reverie did not last long, as the

huge storm we were half expecting, came up, and we took refuge in the tent. That was easily the worst storm I have ever weathered while camping. The winds were absolutely howling, easily gusting past 50 km/h, and the rain lashed down like crazy. However, secure in our tent under the tarp, it was kind of cozy.

Cozy that is, until the storm abated a little, and Dad got out of the tent for a smoke. We discovered that what had been a dry streambed near our camp, was no longer dry. The main flow of water was going away from us, but there was a small stream that was diverting in our direction. Fortunately, out of sheer luck, we happened to set up camp on a slight rise; however, the water was coming up at an alarming rate, to the point where we could see it creeping closer and closer from inside the tent. We were making contingency plans in the event we were going to have to do a middle of the night take-down with water flowing through the tent, when the storm finally passed. Our campsite was now a small island, surrounded by standing water, but everything stayed nice and dry.

Day 3 dawned clear and sunny. I remember the smell of sage and earth on the breeze blowing off the terrace after the storm the night before. We

A BONAPARTE GULL SKIMS ALONG THE SURFACE OF THE RIVER. SEAN AND DON GORDON



³ Eastern Kingbirds have earned their Latin name, *Tyrannus tyrannus*! Like their cousins, Western Kingbirds (whose name, *Tyrannus verticalis*, is even more appropriate), they seem to think that their territory extends considerable distance skyward, and will attack any raptor that even unsuspectingly wanders over.



HOODOOS STAND TALL, LIKE MAGNIFICENT STATUES. SEAN AND DON GORDON

got on the river nice and early, to take advantage of cooler morning temperatures. This day saw us pass through more of those beautiful rolling hills that I like so much in Southern Alberta. We spotted lots of wildlife this day, seeing a Merlin at km 62 and a pair of Long-billed Curlews at km 69, who were clearly annoyed with us for being too close to their nest. We also spotted another Bald Eagle at km 71, near an old farm house.

We made camp 3 at km 74 in an area that was virtually identical to camp 2 (complete with dry stream bed). However, not wanting to tempt fate, we made our camp higher up, on the top of some gravel that someone had pushed

out with a caterpillar. It made for a level, and most importantly dry, campsite. After hauling gear and setting up, we spotted another Baltimore Oriole. There was a nice prairie terrace up behind our campsite, so I went for a short hike and took some pictures. I spotted a White-tailed Deer straight off, or more appropriately, we spotted each other simultaneously. We both froze, but I managed to do a fast lens switch on my Nikon and got a couple of nice shots with my 300 mm lens. There were some nice flowering cacti around. Later on that evening, I went back up there and managed to get some shots of a Nighthawk out getting insects. Also in camp, we saw a Beaver come floating by, but it

tail slapped and submerged when it saw us.

Day 4. We were planning on camping upstream of Medicine Hat this day, prior to meeting Dennis Baresco the next morning for resupply. At km 79 we spotted a burning coal seam about halfway up the cliff face. That's another first for us. I've seen the rusty-red remains of coal seam fires on river banks many times, but have never seen one burning before⁴.

It was another hot sunny day, and soon became frustrating, as we reached the end of our planned mileage for the day, and couldn't find a good campsite/take out point. One thing we noticed very quickly on the South Saskatchewan was the quantity of silt on the banks. It made for very

⁴ Coal seam fires are almost impossible to put out, and some of them have been burning for decades.

South Saskatchewan River Trip 2007...continued

muddy business getting in and out of the boat, and made it virtually impossible to haul gear at times. Therefore, we got in the habit of taking out on gravel when we could find it. It was harder on the canoe, but much easier on us.

As the day drew on, we saw the Trans Canada Highway and knew that we were close to Medicine Hat, but a campsite was not materializing, so we made the

decision to pull double distance and go through the city a day early. This meant taking a bit of a risk of not being able to easily re-supply, as Dennis wasn't expecting us until the next morning. But under the circumstances, we didn't have much choice. I managed to make contact with Dennis with my cell phone and fortunately he was able to accommodate

us. We arranged to meet at Strathcona Island Park.

Medicine Hat is a nice place as far as that goes, but I have to say that I hate canoeing through urban areas. When we did the Athabasca River last summer, we went 5 days without seeing another human being, and that suited me just fine. I couldn't wait to get out of the city.

NEXT ISSUE:

The Gordons head into the wildest, most dramatic parts of the South Saskatchewan River!

SEAN AND DON GORDON



Close to Home:

Nature Photography in Alberta

BY JOHN WARDEN



John Warden has been involved in film and digital photography for over 30 years. He is a resident of Sherwood Park AB; his photographs have appeared in publications with the Alberta Heritage Tree Project, and the Big Lake Environmental Support Society. Says John: "I love the zen-like experience of using photography as a tool to become part of a moment in time and place."

Mountain Goats of the Icefield Parkway

Mountain Goats have the oldest eyes in nature. Their eyes are big and brown, like those of many other animals, but the eyes of an adult mountain goat seem to speak of ageless experience. It is as if from their haunts in the craggy spires of the Rocky Mountains they have seen all things come and go, yet they remain, shaggy white sages.

I like to drive the loop from Sherwood Park, going south to Red Deer and then pick up the David Thompson Highway at Rocky Mountain House. I saw two wolves cross the highway this year, just west of Rocky Mountain House, but they were too quick for photos. Along that route, Windy Point and Whirlpool Point are favourite stops to photograph and walk amongst ancient pine

trees. The highway continues west to Saskatchewan River Crossing and the intersection with the spectacular Icefield Parkway. This backbone ridge of road is the home of mountain goats, and the parkway has two reliable locations for photographing them.

Just a few minutes north of the Icefields Centre on Highway 93, the road climbs up to a gorgeous viewpoint on Tangle Ridge. Below the viewpoint is Sunwapta Canyon, Tangle Falls and on the day I was there, mountain goats.

There are opportunities for close up 'portrait' shots and the spectacular scenery provides a contextual background for mountain goats in their natural



JOHN WARDEN



JOHN WARDEN

habitat. I spent three hours there with a group of about 8 mountain goats including one 'kid'.

About 60 km further north is the second reliable location, the viewpoint at the Kerkeslin Goat Lick near the signpost for Mount Kerkeslin. I found Mountain Goats on both sides of the highway leading up to the viewpoint, but the best shots I got were up from the road on the ridge above the Athabasca River. I spent a couple of hours with a mother goat and her baby who were resting in the shade of mid-day in tree-dappled sunlight. Looking into the ancient eyes of a Mountain Goat and experiencing

that serene, accepting 'connection', as they look back is a check mark on my life list. The experience was a 'zen' thing. The photography was almost an intrusion on the moment.

There are additional opportunities for nature photography all along the parkway, including Sunwapta Falls and Athabasca Falls. There were reports of Grizzly Bears along the parkway this year and of course there are always Elk and Bighorn Sheep when you leave the parkway at Jasper.

People come from all over the globe to drive the world-renowned Icefield Parkway, but for us here in Alberta, it's 'close to home'.

Close to Home: Nature Photography in Alberta... continued

Lessons Learned:

I leave at 1:30 in the morning from Edmonton in order to be in the mountains along the David Thompson Highway for dawn light. I like to bring a bag lunch and supper with me so I can sit on a rock somewhere and breathe in the mountain air as I eat. If you are traveling the David Thompson Highway, be sure to get gas at every opportunity as the David Thompson Resort and Saskatchewan River Crossing are usually closed off-season and it's a long way to Jasper.

Ponderables

"Politicians are like diapers: They should be changed often... and for the same reasons".

TOM DOBBS (ROBIN WILLIAMS) IN THE MOVIE "MAN OF THE YEAR"

First Hand:

Alert! Animals at Play

BY DENNIS BARESCO

Of the many thrilling observations in nature, watching wild animals play has to be in the top ten.

Pronghorn, of course, are well known for playing with cars (see Nature Alberta, Summer 2007, “Pronghorn: Start your Engines”). Anyone who has spent any time outdoors has probably been fortunate enough to behold animals at play.

A woman once phoned the Police Point Park Nature Centre and said she had a hummingbird in her back yard behaving oddly; would I come and see it? Since naturalists are always eager to escape routine and witness what nature has to offer, I didn't hesitate and was knocking on her door within the half-hour.

At the edge of the patio was a stand of sorts with a thin plastic tube – about 2ft (60cm) long - bent on the diagonal. There it was: a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, having a whirling good time! She would land at the top of the tube, then loosen her grip slightly and – Wheeeee!- slide sideways down the tube. Just before reaching the bottom, she'd fly back to the starting

line and - Wheeeee! – do it again...and again...and again. Occasionally, she'd rest for a minute or so, then – Wheeeee! – she would go again. We both agreed that she gave a great big grin with every slide.

Another time, I was attracted by some odd movement on the paved trail about 100 ft (30m) from the Nature Centre. Out I went to investigate. In the

center of the walk was a Nuttall's Cottontail and a Long-tailed Weasel. The highly efficient predator going after fairly large prey? Apparently not.

As I watched amazed, the weasel would chase the rabbit in tight little circles, never going off the walk. Then, the rabbit would chase the weasel. Then, weasel-rabbit – then rabbit-weasel. Back and forth they went.

FOX KITS ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR PLAYFUL ANTICS! RICK PRICE



First Hand: Alert! Animals at Play...continued

They did a lot of leaping and leap-frogging, too. Suddenly, a mouse ran across the walk right behind them, and into the thick chokecherry shrubbery! The weasel bolted after it, disappearing. With the game interrupted, the rabbit sat waiting in the center of the walk. Less than sixty seconds went by, then out popped the weasel and on went the chase. However, the interruption must have caused some of the excitement to go out of the game for them, because after only a minute or so, they stopped and each casually went their respective ways.

Then there was the cat and the fox. Again, my attention was attracted by odd movement, though this time on a hillside about 500ft (150m) away. The site was Spring Valley Guest Ranch near Ravenscrag. The farm tomcat – big and mean-looking – was face to face with a Red Fox. Abruptly, the fox chased the cat, which twisted and turned in an attempt to escape. But, just as abruptly, they both stopped – and then the cat chased the fox, which twisted and turned to escape. Neither touched the other – sort of a non-contact Formula One

competition! They took turns doing this for the longest time. Eventually, perhaps worn out from the fun, they sat looking at each other for a bit, then turned and went their separate ways: the cat walking slowly back toward the barn, the fox jogging lightly along the hillside.

Apparently, this was a fairly common occurrence – just two friends getting together for a game of...whatever they might call it.

Those are three fascinating experiences I've been fortunate enough to behold first hand. Stay alert, naturalists; there are many, many more animals at play out there!

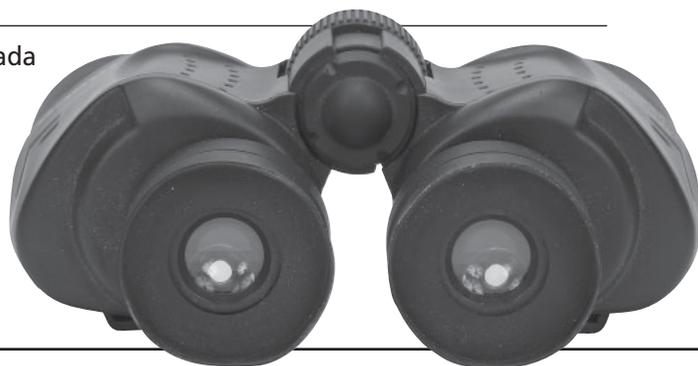
For another story of play, see "Strange and supremely fascinating": President's Page, Alberta Naturalist, Vol 32, #2. If you have a first-hand experience with nature, send it in and share it with other naturalists. After all – there are 8 million stories in the nature city. Yours...could be one of them.

SPECIES WATCHDOGS: Calling all naturalists!

Implementation of the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) is reaching a critical moment: Over the next few weeks, the government will be releasing recovery strategies for nearly 200 endangered species. We need your help to review these strategies!

We need to make sure that the government's recovery strategies include the identification of each species' critical habitat – and we cannot review them all alone! We need volunteers to become a Species Watchdog for each of the listed species for which federal recovery strategies are due. You can review the list of species in need of a watchdog at: http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/plans/timelines_e.cfm

Contact Nature Canada to volunteer your care and knowledge for monitoring legal protection of a listed species! Contact Carla Sbert or call 1-800-267-4088 ext. 222.



nuggets

Send *your* Nuggets to na@fanweb.ca.

URBAN BADGER

BY DENNIS BARESCO

Your Editor has seen animals in unusual places, but a Badger in my yard – only a few blocks from downtown Medicine Hat – on August 12 was one of the strangest. On the small side, it was likely a female. When she saw me, she crouched down, but was not all that spooked. After a minute or so, she did a detour around me, left my yard, crossed the avenue, and headed down the sidewalk. I later learned that she'd been sitting for a spell on the front step of a house down the street – watching the world go by.

BARK-LOVING SQUIRREL?

BY SANDRA FOSS

"I am watching a squirrel up a poplar tree in my neighbour's yard. It seems to be peeling the bark off a dead branch, and throwing the pieces of bark on the ground. Does anyone know anything about squirrel behaviour, or what or why it might be doing that.....It looks like it is going up and down this big dead branch, so the branch has significant bald spots now!! I have seen them throw bunches of cones down, then they go and gather the bunches up, for winter food but this is dead bark.

"My thought is that it was gathering material for a nest, but the pile of bark is still sitting on the ground! The squirrel was very systematic about peeling the bark.. Anyone have any answers?"

DESPERATE SWALLOWS

BY CAROL PORTER

"Well, we have a first on our [Eagle Butte Mountain Bluebird] trail! The doubled boxes at E6a and E6b are about 25 feet apart and each box has Tree Swallows in it. As we drove up today, swallow heads peeked out of both boxes. At E6b, the female flew from the box and we found 6 warm Tree Swallow eggs. On opening E6a, we found a female Tree Swallow and 5 good sized young. We know that there have been more Tree Swallows this year and they have been very aggressive. It looks like they must be desperate as well.

YELLOW LADY'S-SLIPPER ORCHID

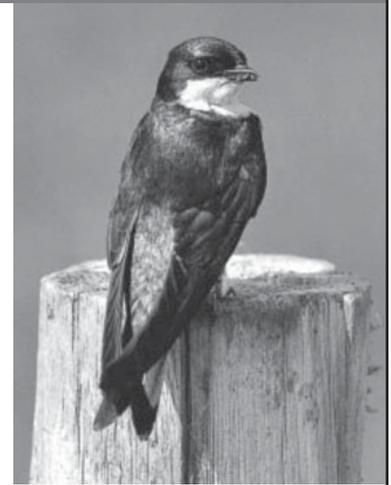
BY SHARON C. MCGONIGAL

On the inside cover of the Spring 2007 issue of Nature Alberta is the Yellow Lady's-Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium parviflorum*). Even though sixteen species of orchid are found in the Wagner Natural Area (located west of Edmonton on Highway 16), this was chosen as the emblem of the Natural Area, because of its "beauty and relative abundance." (pg. 20 Marl Pond Trail Guide, Post 26).

Orchids are considered as one of the most evolved flowering plants, but need specialized and ideal growing requirements. Once they are pollinated by flying insects or birds, it can take some species of orchids up to 450 days to produce seed pods; and then when ready the tiny, almost invisible seeds

burst and scatter on the wind. These seeds carry no food reserves and are dependent on an external source for nutrition. If any survive the landing, they form a bond with mycorrhizal fungi below the ground. Some can grow from seed to flower in two years; others take up to 7 -10 years.

SOURCES: Orchid Society of Royal Botanical Gardens; Orchid Species Preservation Foundation; The Wagner Natural Area Website and Marl Pond Guide.



DESPERATE SWALLOWS.
PHOTO FROM NATURESCAPE



DAWN HALL



“Autumn is a season followed immediately by looking forward to spring.”

DOUG LARSON



It's Autumn!

BY DENNIS BARESCO

According to Wikipedia, the word “Autumn” - from the French *automne* - became common only in the 16th Century. Before that, the season was called “harvest,” as might be expected in the mostly agrarian culture of the times. Fall (which means exactly the same thing) is mostly a North American term.

Fall is more than just the time of migration. There may be nothing in any season that matches the splendid smell of burning leaves! Fall is a time when we wait for Indian summer, the mosquitoes are gone, but the wasps are hyped and angry with too much sugar. The stifling heat is gone and the numbing cold has yet to come.

Ah yes, as P. D. James wrote:

“Those perfect English autumnal days which occur more frequently in memory than in life.”

TUNDRA SWANS MIGRATE OVER ALBERTA EACH FALL, MOST OF THEM ON THEIR WAY TO THE WASHINGTON-CALIFORNIA COAST. RICK PRICE



The 2007 Fall Equinox officially starts Sept 23, at 3:51 am MDT and lasts until the Winter Solstice, Dec 21 at 9:08 pm MST.



“Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.”

ALBERT CAMUS



Gathering Leaves

Spades take up leaves
No better than spoons,
And bags full of leaves
Are light as balloons.

ROBERT FROST

October's Party

October gave a party;
The leaves by hundreds came -
The Chestnuts, Oaks, and Maples,
And leaves of every name.
The Sunshine spread a carpet,
And everything was grand,
Miss Weather led the dancing,
Professor Wind the band.

GEORGE COOPER



“For man, autumn is a time of harvest, of gathering together. For nature, it is a time of sowing, of scattering abroad.”

EDWIN WAY TEALE



CELESTIAL HAPPENINGS

Starry Nights

Fall/Winter (November to January)

BY JOHN MCFAUL

FEATURED CONSTELLATIONS – CASSIOPEIA, ANDROMEDA, AND PERSEUS

Perhaps the most prominent of this group is the constellation Cassiopeia. It is the w or m grouping of stars found above and to the right of Polaris at this time of year. Cassiopeia was the queen of ancient Ethiopia. She bragged one day that she and her daughter, Andromeda, were more beautiful than the sea nymphs. This enraged the sea nymphs who asked Poseidon, the god of the sea, to avenge this boasting. He sent Cetus, the sea monster, to ravage the coast.

King Cepheus was told by an oracle that the only way that he could save his land and people was to sacrifice his daughter, Andromeda, to Cetus. Thus he chained poor Andromeda to the rocks by the sea to await her fate. However, just in the nick of time, the hero Perseus, who happened to be flying by on the winged horse Pegasus, saw the helpless Andromeda and was immediately smitten by her beauty. He confronted Cetus and turned the monster to stone by showing it the head of the Medusa. He thus saved the kingdom and gained the hand of Andromeda.

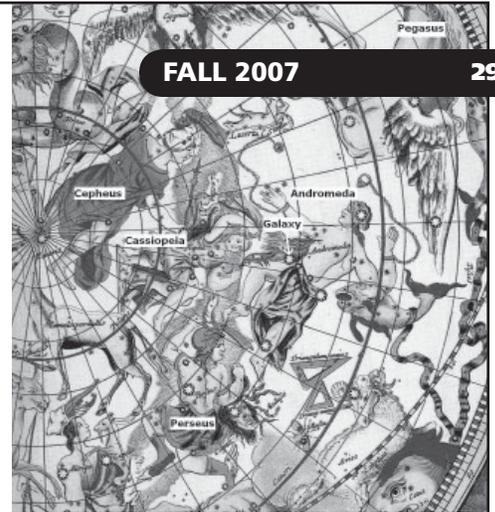
The constellation of Perseus consists of a line of stars below and to the north-east of Cassiopeia. Both of these constellations are found within the Milky Way. This is the band of light across the night sky made up of the combined light of millions of stars that lie along the plane of our galaxy.

Looking toward Perseus we are looking opposite to the centre of our galaxy out to an outer spiral arm. To appreciate what our galaxy looks like from a distance, we shall go to the constellation Andromeda to view the great Andromeda galaxy.

To find the Andromeda galaxy it is best to look for the Great Square of Pegasus which is found to the right of Perseus. It represents the body of the flying horse. It consists of four moderately bright stars, fairly far apart, that form a square or diamond shape in the eastern sky at this time of year. From the north-west corner of this

square are two parallel strings of stars extending back to Perseus. This is the constellation Andromeda. If you look a little above the second set of stars from the corner of Pegasus with a pair of binoculars you will see a small fuzzy patch of light which is the Andromeda Galaxy.

This galaxy is similar to our galaxy and is about 2.2 million light-years away. Thus the light you see has taken 2.2 million years to reach your eyes. Note: A light year is the distance that light, traveling at about 300,000 km per second travels in one year. This amounts to about 9 trillion km. The Andromeda galaxy is the furthest object that we can see with our naked eyes.



CELESTIAL HAPPENINGS

Sun: Rise - Nov. 1 (08:33 MDT), Dec. 1 (08:27 MST), Jan. 1 (08:50 MST)

Set - Nov. 1 (18:01 MDT), Dec. 1 (4:18 MST), Jan. 1 (16:24 MST)

Note: Times are for Edmonton.

Moon: Full - Nov. 24th, Dec. 23rd, Jan. 22nd

New - Nov. 9th, Dec. 9th, Jan. 8th

Planets: **Mercury** can be seen low in the south eastern sky in the pre-dawn hours of November 8th and above the western horizon after sunset during the third week of January.

Venus is located above the eastern horizon in the mornings of November to early January.

Mars will be a bright red light in the constellation Gemini, high above the horizon during the late evening hours in December.

Jupiter lies low above the western horizon in November. By mid December it will set before darkness falls.

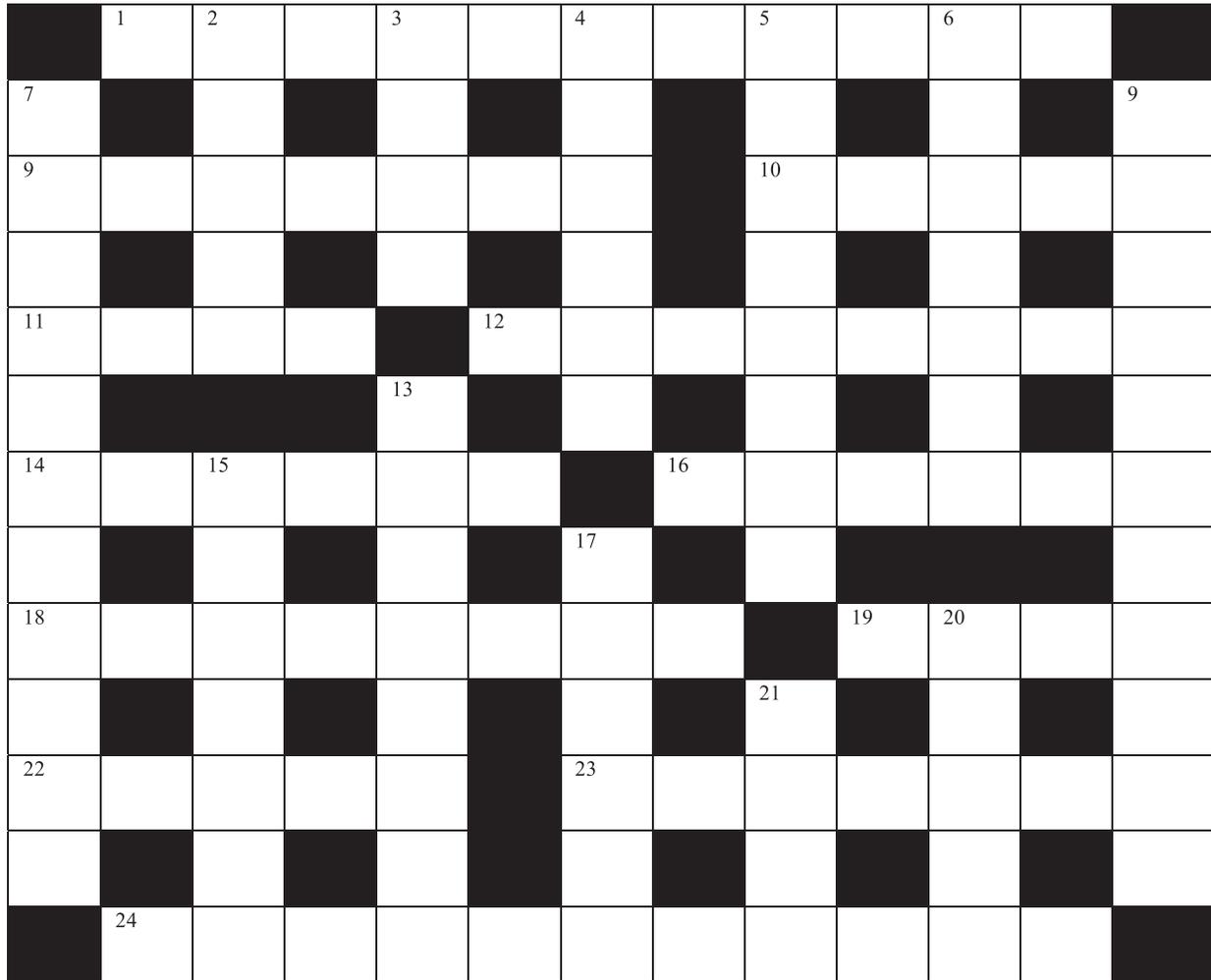
Saturn is to be found above Venus in the morning skies of November. It continues as a morning object in the Constellation Leo throughout December and January.

Meteor Shower: Watch for the Leonids on November 17th and the Geminids on December 14th.

The rate of meteors observed is for dark skies well away from city lights and with no Moon.

NEWTON'S OCCASIONALLY CRYPTIC CROSSWORD! #3

Time for the third crossword. Check the answers for #2 on page 17. Yet again, your nature knowledge is up against creator Garry Newton's sly wit and cryptic mind.



ACROSS

1. A shorebird rarely seen in SE Alberta, though not in winter (2 words: 5, 6 letters)
9. This gland may help when you are terrified (7)
10. It's good, and Christmas brings it (5)
11. Amphibian (4)
12. All kinds of muck from a smokestack (8)
14. Cut it out! (6)
16. Half-baked (6)
18. Looks like an owl (8)
19. Indonesian island (4)
22. Fit in securely (5)
23. Diagnostic feature of *Sphyrapicus nuchalis* (3, 4)
24. These birds enjoy the sun more than any other (6, 5)

DOWN

2. This girl is almost average (5)
3. No bird has one (4)
4. Spanish carrier pigeon? Delivering one more letter to the great observatory in California? (6)
5. Favourable juncture of circumstances (8)
6. Often a useful circular field-mark for the birder (3-4)
7. African invader of the Western Hemisphere (6, 5)
8. FeS₂, which a fool may over-value (4,7)
13. What the rock climber should do to the mountain (6, 2)
15. Used to enforce the prohibition against corvids? (7)
17. Hematite is this kind of oxide (6)
20. Once more (5)
21. Bounding line (4)

Answers will be in the Winter issue – lots of time to get them all!

BOOK REVIEW

Reptiles and Amphibians of Canada

REVIEW BY: CARLA FROYMAN

When you think of reptiles and amphibians, what comes to mind? For many it is fear and disgust. After reading or viewing the book Reptiles and Amphibians of Canada, your opinion may be swayed for the better.

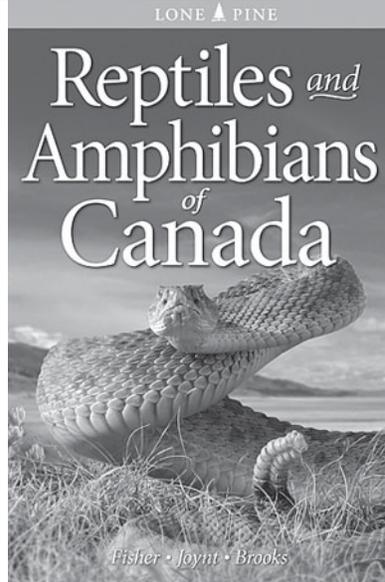
For the amateur nature enthusiast to the wildlife professional, Lone Pine Publishing has made a collection of field guides loved and used by all. The new addition to the collection, *Reptiles and Amphibians of Canada* is appreciated, as there was yet to be a simple, clear field guide written on the topic. The book features 93 species of “herpetids” (the collective name for reptiles and amphibians) including turtles, lizards, snakes, salamanders, frogs, toads, as well as a section designated for vagrant, introduced, and extirpated species. When purchasing a field guide, quality, value, and credibility are important components to consider. This field guide provides its readers with the knowledge and functionality required by nature lovers in their quest for discovering and understanding the world of herpetids.

For most people the purpose of a field guide is to provide them with a quick and clear visual and descriptive reference in order to easily identify a species when outdoors. From personal experience I have found Lone Pine books to be my favourite field guides. This new book has proven to be no exception. One of the most functional characteristics of the book is the visual index at the front

called “Species at a Glance.” A visual reference such as this is key for those with little experience in field identification and/or patience.

A unique component is the way each species is presented. The reader is provided with illustrations of each species, instead of actual photos. Even though the illustrations are artistically well done, I found the drawings somewhat misleading. By comparing photos of some amphibians and snakes to the illustrations shown in the book, I was surprised to find many of the drawings did not look as close to the photo as I expected they would. This could be a slight downfall to the book; I feel it is easier to strengthen identification skills from looking at real photos of species rather than trying to learn from illustrations.

Professionals, semi-professionals and amateurs can all appreciate the content of this field guide. The book provides enough information for a person to understand the lifestyle of each species. The book includes an introductory and descriptive paragraph followed by short sections on ID, length, distribution, habitat, activity patterns, reproduction, food, similar species, the French name, as well as



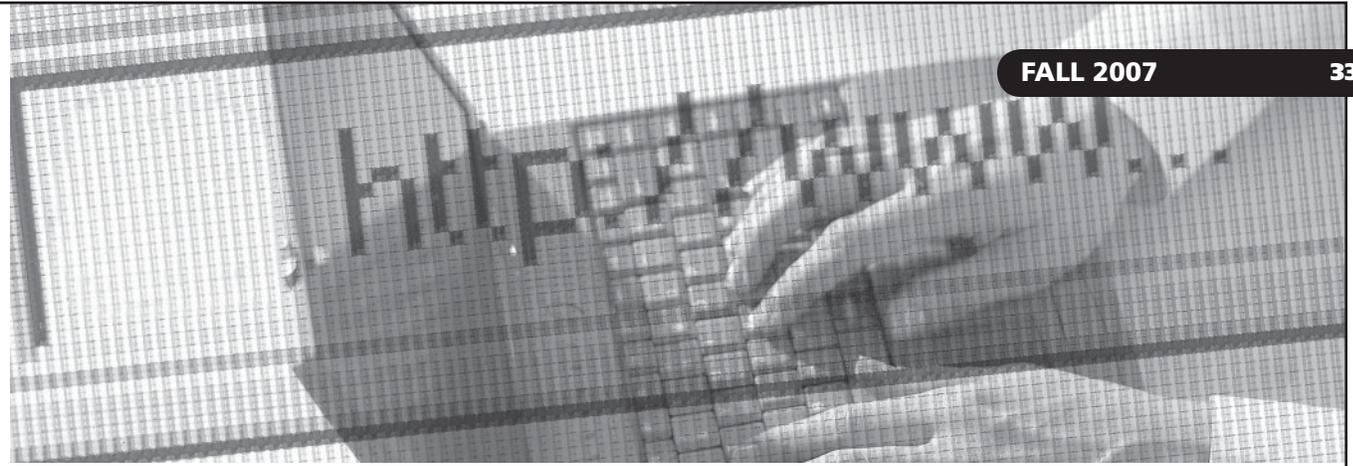
by Chris Fisher and
Ronald Brooks.
Lone Pine Press 2007

a ‘did you know’ tidbit. The section on Vagrant, Introduced and Extirpated Species is the only part of the book that does not provide sufficient information for each species. Considering that, overall, the information isn’t too extensive, the book may appeal more to amateurs than professionals. With more information, the reading may become too technical for the target audience.

Value is always an important aspect for people when choosing whether or not to purchase a book. The price, \$18.95, is reasonable, as this gives the reader a field guide for all of Canada, not just of species from one or two provinces. One field guide for this topic is all most people need, and for \$18.95 you can’t go wrong.

Herpetids are a group of species people are quick to judge and dislike with little to no knowledge of the species and their lifestyles. The field guide *Reptiles and Amphibians of Canada* provides credible and appealing knowledge one can use for study, research and/or fun. I encourage anyone who has even the slightest interest in herpetids to add this guide to their collection, as I have yet to find another enticing publication like it.

(Carla Froyman is a farm girl from Vanguard, Saskatchewan who was a Park Interpreter in Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (both AB and SK), and who ran the “Researching Amphibian Numbers in Alberta” program in Cypress Hills. This past summer, she worked at CFB Suffield as a Range Sustainability Field Technician. Presently, she is completing her Environmental Assessment and Restoration Diploma from Lethbridge Community College.)



What's the Plone?

VID BIJELIC (FAN I.T. MANAGER)

Wouldn't it be great to have a website where a board member, staff, or volunteer could go to, log in, and add news or events as they happen?

S/he would check the other pages on the website and correct any errors or outdated information just by using their favourite Web browser (Internet Explorer, Netscape, or Firefox). Wouldn't it also be great if the news or event related to a geographical location could magically appear on the interactive Google-Maps-powered map on the web site, once the latitude and longitude have been added by the reader? And at last, wouldn't it be great if those tasks didn't require any HTML knowledge and this web application came free of charge?

Would you believe me, if I told you that such web application exists and is called Plone (www.plone.org)? It's the website solution for non-profits.

What is Plone? Plone is an out-of-the-box Content Management System that is built on top of a web application server called

Zope (www.zope.org). It is easy to install and runs well on Linux (our preferred), Windows, and Mac operating systems. It is an Open Source product, which allows Plone to be downloaded and used free of charge.

What is Content Management System (CMS)? It is a web application designed to allow non-technical users to add, edit, and manage content of the website (eg., web pages, images, news, events, documents etc.). It also takes care of adding new content to a navigation system, making content searchable, removing outdated content, and keeping track of users, their permissions, and security settings.

Why Plone? FAN is constantly looking for new advanced technologies to help it achieve its vision. As a not-for-profit organization we are always

trying to find technologies with the affordable price tag and one that can fit in the not-for-profit framework where volunteers play a critical role. Plone comes free of charge, so is the perfect fit.

The most important component of Plone is probably a built-in content management editor. It is similar to Microsoft Word or Dreamweaver. It allows the text to be formatted as in Microsoft Word, where a paragraph can be aligned differently, and text can be converted to title or subtitle, made italic or bold. Similar to Dreamweaver or FrontPage, internal or external links could be inserted in the page, as well as images. Images also could be resized to fit the rest of the page content. This editor also allows for automatic insertion of tables, bullets, pull-out quotes, and much more. This

What's the Plone?...continued

is all done directly through web browsers like Internet Explorer, Firefox, or Netscape. There is no need for additional software or HTML knowledge.

Plone comes with the fully integrated administration system, where members and groups and their permissions can be easily managed. This administration system allows a number of people to be working on the same website, with each being responsible for their own section of the website.

The news and events system is supported out-of-the-box. It is also possible to specify activation and expiry dates for both. Expiry date allows for news and events to automatically disappear from the website.

There are hundreds of existing free plug-ins for Plone such as content management editor, events calendar, Google map implementation, form builders, image galleries, tools for translation to other languages, and more.

For more information, contact Vid from FAN at vidb@fanweb.ca or (780) 427-8124.

Highlights of the New Federation of Alberta Naturalists Website

- ▶ **Historical issues of *Nature Alberta Magazine*** from 1971- 2005 available for free download in high-res PDF from Our Magazine section
- ▶ **News is instantly posted** as it happens, by our volunteers, board directors, project coordinator, or staff
- ▶ **Natural History section** is now in place where individuals and groups can provide their information about nature in Alberta; see the example of the Columbian Ground Squirrel (contact FAN to find out how)
- ▶ **Issues section** is added to the FAN website; it will contain up to date information about Issues FAN is involved in. (contact FAN to create your own issue section)
- ▶ **Online Store section**, where you can browse and purchase our Publications and other products using a Shopping Cart

Nature Alberta on Web!

BY VID BIJELIC

FAN has now placed historical issues of *Alberta Naturalist* (1971-2005) on the web. They are in "Previous Issues" section under "Our Magazine". You have to sign in to see them (download them). People who don't have an account with the new FAN website can create one free. This way we can better keep track of who is using the website.



www.fanweb.ca

F A N C L U B P A G E



Peace Parkland

Naturalists Club

BY MARGOT HERVIEUX

The southern Peace region is a great place for a naturalists club. Four of Alberta's six natural regions lie within a 100 km radius of Grande Prairie and the Peace River Parkland exists nowhere else.

The Peace Parkland Naturalists Club (PPN) is actually the second incarnation of a nature group in the Grande Prairie region. In 1976, the Trumpeter Swan Naturalists Club was created to promote trumpeter swan conservation in the area and participate in bird and plant counts and other club activities. Despite reaching a membership of almost 50, dwindling volunteer participation brought the group to an end in 1981.

The arrival of new naturalists to Grande Prairie in the late 1980s led to the formation of the current naturalist club in 1989. Like naturalist groups everywhere, the PPN offers field trips, guest speakers and a newsletter and members actively participate in bird, plant and butterfly counts. Despite a high turnover, membership has remained steady at about 40.

Since its formation, the PPN has also been involved in various advocacy projects, particularly those associated with habitat conservation and protected areas. Members of the club serve as natural area stewards and

also participate on management committees. The group has also published guidebooks to two important local natural areas, Kleskun Hill and Saskatoon Mountain, and is currently coordinating efforts to purchase threatened native grassland adjacent to the Kleskun Hill site.

In smaller communities organizations tend to overlap and many PPN members also support the Friends of Saskatoon Island Provincial Park and the annual Swan Festival. The Grande Prairie region is the core nesting area for the threatened trumpeter swans and local naturalists have always been at the forefront of their conservation. During the late

1930s and early 1940s, local naturalist Bernard Hamm made the country aware of nesting swans in the region and worked tirelessly to protect the birds and their habitat. Those efforts continue today with public education programs like the Swan Festival and through conservation and land use plans developed with the help of PPN members.

Northern Alberta has far more wild places than the rest of the province but there are also far fewer residents who, like the Lorax, will "speak for the trees". PPN members should be proud of the fact that they are recognized not only as a source for answers to bird and bug questions but also as a credible voice for habitat conservation in the region.



yes

it will soon be

Christmas!



There are many exciting gifts that one can buy for family and friends that tie in with naturalist values and reward the gift receiver. Consider these:

- **With FAN books**, you're sure to find one that would be greatly appreciated; see the list below and then go to the website at www.fanweb.ca, or call the office: (780) 427-8124.
- **A gift membership** in the local naturalist group;
- **A donation to FAN or other naturalist organization** in the friend/family member's name;
- **The "must have" gift**: a subscription to Nature Alberta.
- **Stocking stuffer**: a package of bird friendly, shade-grown, organic, fair trade coffee – the gift that gives superior tasting coffee AND helps nature throughout the Americas! Available from Nature Stores and FAN (check our website or call the office).
- **Nature books** – like those reviewed in this issue.

Go ahead...

go for the unique gift this Christmas:

the gift of nature appreciation!



FAN BOOKS

16 great titles to treat yourself, friends and family!

Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta: A Second Look [\$64.95]

The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta (Atlas 1) [\$45.00]

Field Guide to Alberta Birds [\$24.95]

Alberta Butterflies [\$25.00]

People and Peaks [\$60.00]

Ladybugs of Alberta by John Acorn [\$29.95]

Tiger Beetles of Alberta by John Acorn [\$19.95]

Damselflies of Alberta by John Acorn [\$29.95]

White as a Ghost by Bill Samuel [\$24.95]

Prairie River by Dawn Dickinson, Dennis Baresco, Garry Newton [\$14.95]

Flight of Deer by Dawn Dickinson [\$9.95]

For the Love of Alberta by Leslie Curthoys [\$15.00]

Keepers of the Springs by Jean Burgess [\$18.00]

Naturescape Alberta by Myrna Pearman, Ted Pike [\$24.95]

On the Living Edge by Sarah Kipp, Clive Callaway [\$14.95]

Living Near Urban Lakes [\$19.95]

Fish, Fur and Feathers [\$39.95]

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Nature *gallery*



MOUNTAIN GOAT AND KID (SEE STORY PG 23) JOHN WARDEN

