

VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 3 | FALL 2006

Nature Alberta

ALBERTA'S NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW



OLDMAN RIVER, NEAR MAYCROFT IAN GARDINER
PHOTOGRAPHED IN OCTOBER 1999 USING AN OLYMPUS OM2 CAMERA, A 100 MM ZUIKO LENS AND KODACHROME 64 FILM.

feature article

Wolf Wars



SPRUCE GROUSE CHICK UPPER LIVINGSTONE VALLEY IAN GARDINER
PHOTOGRAPHED IN JULY 2002 USING A NIKON F3HP CAMERA, 200 MM NIKKOR LENS AND FUJI VELVIA 50 FILM.



About 7:30am on Monday, May 22, my husband Reg and I were travelling south of Medicine Hat, on Eagle Butte Road, to monitor our bluebird trail. Near the Cypress Hills, we spotted several Turkey Vultures sitting on the barbed wire fence by the road. On slowing down we realized there were more on the ground. Several of these flew to the fence. When I got out of the car to take better pictures, they played leap frog along the fence as I approached, the closest one moving to the post on the far end of the group. We were so awed by the sight of these magnificent though unlovely birds that we never thought at the time to check the area to see if they had a source of food there. Eventually, they flew off. We did not see them on our return a few hours later.

TURKEY VULTURES CAROL PORTER
PHOTOGRAPHED ON MAY 22, 2006 USING A CANON
POWERSHOT G5 DIGITAL CAMERA

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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:

- (a) To encourage among all Albertans, by all means possible, an increase in their knowledge of natural history and understanding of ecological processes;
- (b) To promote an increase in the exchange of information and views among natural history clubs and societies in Alberta;
- (c) To foster and assist in the formation of additional natural history clubs and societies in Alberta;
- (d) To promote the establishment of natural areas and nature reserves, to conserve and protect species, communities or other features of interest;
- (e) To organize, or coordinate symposia, conferences, field meetings, nature camps, research and other activities whether of a similar or dissimilar nature;
- (f) 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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P R E S I D E N T ' S P A G E

Senses of the Season...

BY SANDRA FOSS

As I wondered what I should write about, the seasons fade from one into another.

I notice the olfactory seasons....in Spring, the heavy perfume of the Wolf Willows and other emerging vegetation, which progresses to the scents of wild Bergamot, various clovers, sages and even ragweed. When it rains, the scent of the rain hitting parched ground, and damp river smells fill the senses. Summer brings the scent of ripe raspberries and other delicious things. Blistering hot days are always the days one needs to have the stove going full blast, making pickles or jams, with their tart and tangy odours, to enjoy the taste of summer in mid-winter. Then comes snow, along with evergreen and pine scents, and the corpse-like odour of bruised or dying Valerian hanging heavy in the woods. If there has been much rain, fungi appear, each with their own unique scent.

This summer, I went to "Dinosaur Camp", a Science Camp run by the Royal Tyrrell Museum, with my 6 and 8 year old grandchildren. What fun! Hiking about the badlands, sleeping in tepees, learning to find, excavate and cast fossils, and enjoying many museum

gallery tours. The camps have skilled and knowledgeable staff that were challenged by our Alberta weather. They made emergency repairs to tepees blown down in strong winds and program changes when slippery rain-wetted bentonite clays made hiking difficult. Interestingly, there was a family from England, one from Alberta and the rest came from the west coast. Albertans don't realize what gems we have in our own backyard. Driving back, I saw many new well sites - likely coal bed methane wells, in almost every field. Gone are the days of field after field of crops.....pipelines and well sites now haunt the landscape.

After "Dinosaur Camp", I drove up the Icefields Parkway, north of Lake Louise, for some hiking. Again, interesting weather, with at least 10 cm of snow on the ground on the first Saturday in August. I travelled through Wilcox Pass to Tangle Creek Falls, where in 1896, when Walter Wilcox travelled north from Lake Louise, the toe of the Athabasca Glacier blocked the valley bottom where the highway to Jasper

is now located. Then just past the glacier was the rocky jumble of the Mt. Kitchener slide. Wilcox took to the pass that bears his name to avoid the glacier and rockslide, which were too difficult for his horses to navigate. There is much spectacular scenery in this part of Alberta, with the receding glaciers and mountain peaks, and it was particularly breathtaking with snow highlighting the crags and peaks.

A couple of days later, we hiked towards Bow Glacier falls, and the source of much of southern Alberta's drinking water, the Wapta Icefield. An interesting note is that studies done by University of Alberta researchers in 1993, and later in 2000, show the Lake Trout in Bow Lake have higher levels of organochlorine contamination than any other trout in western Canadian lakes. They determined that glacial runoff was the main source of contaminants to Bow Lake: as the glaciers melt they release contaminants deposited on the ice pack over the past several decades.

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

AT BOW LAKE, WITH WAPTA ICEFIELD IN THE BACKGROUND

SANDRA FOSS



The Bow River, just west of Calgary, where I live, is running at exceptionally low levels right now. The Bow is a hydro peaking river, but also is over-allocated, as are many southern Alberta rivers. Low water levels mean higher water temperatures, which can kill the trout if temperatures are high enough. Hopefully, politicians will wake up before the trout in the river are gone. The Bow is one of several world-class trout fisheries in Alberta, which bring many millions of dollars to the Alberta economy, and many tourists to the province.

Those tourists better hurry, as the province is being devastated at an alarming rate. A large portion of northern Alberta with shallow bitumen deposits is about to be strip-mined, and an even larger area, with deeper bitumen deposits is likely to

be developed, with extensive surface disturbance, in the future (more than 1/5 of the province is underlain by bitumen deposits). This horrific prospect is what Albertans have to look forward to, if we don't do something soon.

Locally, I have seen few robins and snakes in my neighbourhood this year. There seemed to be many more before last year's heavy rains. I see lots of American Goldfinches just before it rains; some nested and raised families nearby. Rufous Hummingbirds also made a home in my yard, as well as Black Capped Chickadees. Along the Bow River, there was a family of Eastern Kingbirds this year, and I noted a Merganser yesterday, with her brood on the river. The Kildeer have already left, and warblers are starting

to move through. We have Ospreys living near and fishing on the Bow River too, and many swallows, which cause great excitement when there is a mayfly hatch. Of course, the Rainbow Trout and the Rocky Mountain Whitefish enjoy the hatches. I also see lots of California Stone Flies, or their shucks, on the rocks.

I hope you had a good summer season, and are thinking hard about all the assaults on our beautiful province. The next election, and perhaps our best chance to change environmental policy in this province, is not far away.

EDITOR'S PAGE

Bear tales

BY BRIAN PARKER

The recent (early August) announcement from staff in Jasper National Park that visitors should watch out for bears feeding on a heavy crop of berries at lower elevations brought back memories of my and my staff's many encounters with Grizzly Bears.

For about a decade we operated a seasonal research camp near the Scotch Camp warden cabin, about 30 km to the west of the campground at Ya-Ha-Tinda Ranch, and about 10 km inside the eastern boundary of Banff National Park. Over that decade we encountered grizzlies on many occasions, sometimes watching them amble across an alpine meadow from afar, on other occasions coming uncomfortably close in the confining quarters of willow thickets.

For the most part, we and the bear(s) went our separate ways with little more than a sideways glance at each other. For example, one summer in the mid-1990s a sow grizzly and her cubs made a summer home in the valley leading into Pipit Lake, where we were conducting an experiment to test the effects of UV radiation on algae and invertebrates living in the lake shallows. Hiking into the lake along an elk trail about halfway between the valley bottom and ridge top around 9:30 am, as was our usual practice, we would often see the family digging for roots along Pipit Creek, several hundred feet below us. The sow

usually would give us a good long look, but she never made a threatening gesture towards us on the 20 or so days we saw her that summer. Although the bears fed close to the lake at times, they avoided the meadows in front of the lake while we were present. We each had our routines, of which we were both aware. We chose to respect those routines and we shared a quiet co-existence in that small valley for the whole summer.

Yet another grizzly, a young, dark brown male, used to appear in the corral behind Scotch Camp cabin about two hours after every visit by a backcountry warden. He would walk in following a small seep, slip between the fence poles and search for spilled oats left behind after the warden horses had been fed. He would slide across the ground on his belly, licking up everything he could find, clearly enjoying himself and paying little attention to those of us watching him. He was so reliable we could have set a stopwatch by him. It's interesting though, although he was obviously living in the vicinity, we never saw him except for that half

hour or so when he came to graze in the corral. After the district wardens switched to using nose bags to feed their horses, on learning this bear's habits from us, we only saw him on one or two more occasions.

We had some remarkable encounters. Like the day we sat on a small rise on Snow Pass watching three sows with cubs (9 bears in total) graze around us. We had hiked into the area, unaware of the bears until we topped a small rise in front of Snowflake Lake, at which point one of the families became visible. Looking to avoid the family, which was not familiar to us, we chose to detour behind them, but encountered the second sow and her cubs. Having two females with cubs ahead of us at this point, we backed off in the direction from which we came and then saw the third sow and cubs walking across the trail on which we had just walked. Being surrounded, we headed to the top of another rise, where we had a better view of the goings on and would not be surprised, and waited until the bears moved past. At one point we could see all three families at once. We never again saw so many grizzlies in one place at the same time.

EDITOR'S PAGE

But I would be remiss if I didn't mention the some of the more stressful encounters, rare though those may have been. On one occasion, four of us were hiking the old Cascade Fire Road towards Scotch Camp when we surprised a huge male grizzly beside a small creek. The big bear jumped back a few feet on seeing us, as surprised as we were, but he quickly decided that we needed firmer handling. He walked calmly towards us, ears laid slightly back, and we started to slowly back away, trying to increase the distance between us and tone down the intensity of the situation. We kept on backing up, but he followed us back, step for step, for more than a kilometer. He didn't seem to be stalking us, he just escorted us out of the area. Eventually, he just stopped, then turned around and walked back the way he had come, leaving us to continue our journey a little more humbly than we began.

On another occasion, four of us were mountain biking out of the park, two by two, when we came around a sharp corner and encountered a sow with two cubs standing about 50 m ahead of us. Seeing only the first two of us round the corner, the sow immediately charged, leaving us scrambling to stop on the loose gravel, get off our bikes and pull out our bear spray. The sudden appearance of the last two of us coming around the corner a few seconds probably saved us. The sow immediately turned back on her tracks and fled with her cubs. Four people were, apparently, more than she was willing to deal with. There's clearly a benefit to

traveling in larger groups in bear country. The most interesting part of the story though, was the reaction of one of my summer staff, in the second group to come round the corner. On seeing the bear in full charge and at very close range, the student yelled out "Oh no! Get them, not me!"

Perhaps the worst encounter though, occurred at our campsite near Scotch Camp Cabin. Each year we erected a large canvas tent, some sleeping tents, and surrounded the entire complex with a powerful solar-powered electric fence. On this particular day, we were walking along the fence checking to make sure no grass was in contact with the lowest fence wire (which would short out the fence). Suddenly, passing by a shrubby willow, we came face to face with a grizzly watching us from the other side of the fence. Close enough to reach out and touch, and as surprised as we were, the grizzly turned and ran away. Then came her cubs. And things went downhill, fast.

The cubs, rather than following mum along the fence, came through the fence wires, *into our compound, with us!* A couple of seconds later, realizing that the cubs hadn't followed her, mom stopped, turned around and came running back! The situation was spiraling out of control. But we were lucky. Our momentum took us a few steps towards the cubs, which sent them

running back through the fence and straight for their mother, who, thankfully, turned around and ran off after getting her cubs back. As my first ever encounter with Grizzly Bears this incident burned an indelible mark on my memory. I still remember, in exquisite detail, the change in that sow's face and posture when she realized her cubs had not followed her and she might need to fight to get them back.

As interesting as these three latter encounters were, such incidents comprised only a small proportion of our encounters over the years, only 2-3% by my count. And they all involved an element of surprise, something we learned to work hard to avoid. For the most part, watching a wild bear in a spectacular mountain setting makes for an interesting and memorable day and there is relatively little risk if we keep a safe distance and work to eliminate surprise encounters. But, as parks staff advise, we do have to be careful and watchful when working and recreating in the presence of bears.



ALBERTA ISSUES

Species at Risk

The Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Alberta Wilderness Association, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Sierra Club of Canada and Nature Canada, represented by Sierra Legal Defence Fund, served Federal Environment Minister Rona Ambrose with a petition giving her 60 days to step in to protect two endangered plants in Alberta or face a lawsuit.

To test the government's commitment to protecting of Canada's endangered species, the groups are asking Minister Ambrose to recommend protection for the Tiny Cryptanthe and Small-flowered Sand Verbena. These plants, at immediate risk of extinction, have small populations and small footprints, making them an easy choice for protection. The decline of these species is

in part due to degradation of the natural prairie region of Alberta, of which most has been lost due to agriculture, industry and urbanization.

The Species at Risk Act, while a national law, does not apply in the provinces unless the federal cabinet orders it to, which it will do only on the recommendation of the Federal Environment Minister, if she considers provincial laws inadequate. Minister Ambrose has failed to make such a recommendation for Alberta despite the fact that the province has no endangered species legislation and does not protect national endangered species.

For further information, contact: Glen Semenchuk, Executive Director, Federation of Alberta Naturalists: (780) 427-8124.

Woodland Caribou/Wolves

During the winter of 2005-06, biologists under contract to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, shot 89 wolves from aircraft in the Little Smoky foothills area, northwest of Hinton. The stated objective was to reduce predation pressure on the region's dwindling Woodland Caribou. Under the same program, ten pregnant caribou cows were taken into captivity, provided with food and shelter, and allowed to give birth to their calves in a fenced enclosure. On July 19, 2006, the animals were returned to the

wild. Their release was effected by simply removing the fence around the enclosure. The idea was to protect the newborns from predators during this most vulnerable time of their life. For more information on the initial stages of the program --such as capture techniques, immobilization, and transport from the capture sites to the holding pens-- see the government's websites www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/wild/caribou/LSCCP/index.html www.srd.gov.ab.ca/caribou.html

Suffield National Wildlife Area

EnCana Corporation proposes to install, over a three-year period, up to 1275 new shallow gas wells within the Canadian Forces Base Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA). The project is in addition to the existing natural gas development activities within the NWA and includes the physical works and activities associated with the preparation, construction, operation, decommissioning and abandonment of the shallow gas wells, pipelines, and supporting infrastructure. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has developed a draft Agreement with the EUB for the conduct of the environmental assessment. The Agreement will establish the mandate and authorities of the joint panel, its composition and project review procedures. The public was invited to submit written comments on the draft Agreement and after taking public comments into consideration, the Agreement will be finalized and made public. The draft Agreement along with more information on this project can be found on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry at: www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca.

ALBERTA ISSUES

McClelland Lake Wetlands

The McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC) north of Fort McMurray, is one step closer to destruction. The Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear an appeal of the Federal Court of Appeal's ruling in *Prairie Acid Rain Coalition et al v. Canada (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans)*. At issue in the case was the interpretation by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) of what aspects of the Fort Hills project required a federal environmental assessment. The Fort Hills open pit mine and bitumen-processing facility will sprawl across roughly 180 km² and will disrupt and destroy fish habitat, valuable migratory bird habitat and the traditional lands of the area's aboriginal peoples. Rather than subject the whole project to an environmental assessment DFO officials used their discretion under the Act to confine their attention to the destruction of fish habitat in Fort Creek - a small part of the project. The MLWC, located 90 kilometres north of Fort McMurray, is composed of a large shallow lake, ancient patterned fens, and a series of twelve sinkhole lakes, all of which are provincially significant. It offers a combination of aesthetic beauty and ecological complexity that makes this area a rare find in Alberta and in Canada.

Wind Power Projects

At a meeting on July 31 in Medicine Hat (by invitation only) WestWindeau announced its proposed schedule for developing up to 75 150-metre tall turbines in sensitive native prairie on the north slope of the Cypress Hills. This schedule includes a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for agency/public review; submission of a final EIS to NRCan for Federal Environmental Assessment coordinated agency and public review and NRCan's Screening Report and decision, all to be completed in 2006. In 2007, WestWindeau proposes to apply to EUB for a facility licence as well as for a licence for a transmission line. The corporation will also apply to

Cypress County for approval and will develop, with ASRD and CWS, a mitigation and post-construction monitoring plan. Construction will be completed in 2008.

In the meantime ASRD has withdrawn its "Wildlife Guidelines for Wind Energy Projects" finalised in April 2006, and is developing policy that will address the critical question of whether the department should allow development of wind energy facilities on public lands. FAN, Grasslands Naturalists and Alberta Wilderness Association are requesting a meeting with the Minister, the Hon. David Coumts, to discuss these issues.

Energy Innovation Fund

The Alberta government is providing \$200 million over the next 3 years towards research, advanced technologies, market development and innovative projects focusing on energy supply and protection of the environment. To receive funding, projects must increase the efficiency and effectiveness of energy exploration, extraction or development in Alberta. They must also focus on energy and/or environmental research; technology; innovation and

efficiency; and they can involve renewable or non-renewable energy resources. The fund will be administered by an advisory group from five sponsoring ministries: Energy; Agriculture, Food and Rural

Development, Environment, Innovation and Science, and Sustainable Resource Development. The advisory group will consult with industry and government stakeholders prior to finalizing its recommendations.

ALBERTA ISSUES

Oil Sands

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers predicts that by 2020 the oilsands will be producing 80% of Alberta's oil. Oilsands production is expected to at least triple in the next 10 years, with most of the increase expected to be exported to the USA. The oilsands are the single largest contributor to the growth of greenhouse-gas emissions in Canada. Greenhouse-gas intensity in the tar sands is almost triple that of conventional oil because of the large amount of energy, much in the form of clean-burning natural gas, needed to extract the oil. As Jim Dinning, Alberta's former treasurer and Conservative leadership hopeful, recently noted, "Injecting natural gas into the oil sands to produce oil is like turning gold into lead."

Oilsands mining also requires large amounts of water, more than five times that consumed per year by the city of Edmonton and surrounding area. Alberta needs to start charging the real cost for these extraction permits, instead of granting royalty reductions.

Further, with labour shortages and little infrastructure to support the current high rate of development, it would be better for Alberta to slow the pace of development to a more sustainable level.

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

A new 3,246 acre provincial park will be established along the north shore of the Bow River between Cochrane and Calgary. The area will be preserved through a land agreement between the government and the Harvie family of Cochrane. Access to the park will not be allowed for about a year while the transition from ranch to parkland takes place. For details on the future park, as well as on a new conservancy fund created to benefit Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, please visit the following links:

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park website

http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/featured/glenbow/index.asp

Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park website

http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/featured/loishole/index.asp



Dad's Rubber Boots

BY LAURIE L. LYWAK

It was mid-October and many animals were busy preparing for the winter.

Geese and ducks were gathering in large flocks before flying further south. The family cat abandoned the barn to curl up behind our old woodstove in the kitchen.

Leaves on the trees had started turning colour. The air was crisp and cool.

At the wheel of our old pickup, Dad drove down the gravel road raising clouds of dust behind him while I stared out the window, daydreaming. We arrived at the general store where 50 lb sacks of potatoes, cabbages, pumpkins, carrots, and corn were piled high in the corner. Among the sacks of local produce were several bags of imported shelled peanuts. Quickly, Dad knelt down and snapped up the biggest bag he could find. Satisfied with what he had found, he turned to me, raised his head and winked. I smiled back knowing he had succumbed to his passion. No one I knew enjoyed feeding peanuts to the squirrels as much as my Dad.

On arriving home, Dad took out the wooden feeder, hung it on a branch of a huge white spruce that grew close to our kitchen window and filled it with peanuts. We patiently waited to see if the squirrels would come. The next morning I spied two Red Squirrels scampering from limb to limb

down towards the feeder. One particular squirrel, who we soon nicknamed Willy, had a real taste for peanuts. Eagerly, he poked around the peanuts, picking the largest ones he could find. After stuffing them into his mouth Willy would leave, climbing back up the spruce tree and out of sight. Minutes later he would return to pick more. Willy spent the rest of the day and much of the next two weeks taking peanuts from the feeder, taking so many that my Dad visited the general store two weeks later just to pick up another bag of peanuts.

Just before the Remembrance Day weekend, the snow started falling: the fluffy kind that often comes with the start of winter. Hearing on the radio that the snow was to continue for several days, Dad decided that he needed to find his rubber boots. He went to the shed and began rummaging through the clutter. He found long johns, knitted caps, mittens, and coveralls, and finally, in the corner, his old rubber boots. He reached for his boots and was



RED SQUIRREL BERTHA FORD

stunned to see they were both filled to overflowing with shelled peanuts! Willy had been taking peanuts from the feeder only to store them in Dad's boots. Not wanting to deprive Willy of his winter food supply, Dad found an empty cardboard box, poured the peanuts into it and set it on the floor where the boots had been. Then he tucked his rubber boots under his arm and headed towards the house.

Now, many years later, after time has quieted my father's voice, I still remember my father laughing as the back door slammed shut, and while explaining that Willy was using his rubber boots as a midden, to store peanuts for the winter. That squirrel and his antics built a memory I will cherish forever. And now, each October, I buy a bag of peanuts, to pass on my father's tradition to the next generation.

Wolf Wars

BY DICK DEKKER

Shooting wildlife from aircraft is illegal in this country, but provincial biologists justify last winter's aerial wolf kill with the claim that it is intended to halt the decline of Woodland Caribou.

The idea is to protect the remaining herd northwest of Hinton from its natural predator, the wolf. Ironically, the real enemy of our Woodland Caribou is the Alberta government itself, which has pulled the rug from under the beleaguered ungulate by allowing resource industries to destroy its old-growth forest habitat.

Alberta's current war on wolves is a matter of déjà-vu with a difference. During the past three decades, government agents have unleashed similar wolf killing sprees in Alaska, Yukon, and British Columbia, but Alberta hesitated. The reason was passionate opposition from the people. This time around, though, the animal-loving public has been silent. Perhaps it was caught off guard. Alberta government biologists began shotgunning wolves from the air before the media and the environmental watchdogs were aware of the scheme.

The fuse for the current war on wolves was lit twenty years ago, when *The Calgary Herald* (November 4, 1986) ran a news item under the headline: "Report outlines plan for major wolf

kill." It was based on a leaked and confidential government document titled: "Restoration Plan for Woodland Caribou in Alberta." The report's author, biologist Janet Edmonds of the Edson Fish and Wildlife Division, wrote that a herd of migratory caribou that summered in the alpine regions of Jasper and Willmore Wilderness Parks had dwindled from an estimated 1600-1800 in 1968 to less than 300 in 1986 (Edmonds 1986).

The report outlined a number of causes for the decline in the following order of importance: predation, hunting, and disturbance on the wintering grounds. In my opinion, however, the author failed to place the population fluctuation in a realistic cause-and-effect perspective. Edmonds did not explain that the high caribou numbers of 1968 followed more than five years of blanket wolf poisoning that began in 1952 and persisted on a lesser scale through the mid 1960s (Dekker 1997). The absence of predators in combination with a decade of mild winters led to a cyclic high in the abundance of ungulate prey species including caribou and elk (Dekker et al. 1995). Further, the down cycle

in the 1980s was natural and to be expected given a series of extremely cold winters with deep snow combined with the resurgence of the once decimated wolves. They and other predators came back with a vengeance, so to speak, because of the exceptionally high food base. Eventually, both prey and predator made a numerical adjustment between them, resulting in less caribou and fewer wolves. The ecologies of these species are intertwined in a dynamic equilibrium, driven by a combination of factors, including habitat, weather conditions, and disease.

AN AVALANCHE OF PUBLIC PROTESTS

In 1986, soon after the Caribou Management Plan had been broadcast by the media, the Honourable Don Sparrow - then Alberta Minister of Forestry, Lands & Wildlife - began receiving a avalanche of letters condemning the proposed wolf cull.

On December 4, 1986, the Sierra Club of Canada organized a protest meeting at the Calgary Auditorium. The star attraction



GREY WOLF HANK WONG

was famous author Farley Mowat. After his hard-hitting presentation, the supportive audience of over one thousand was shown the entertaining and humorous film "Never Cry Wolf." The meeting received wide coverage on provincial and national television, which contributed to the government's early capitulation. The controversy ended as abruptly as it had begun. On January 9, 1987, the minister announced that the wolf kill was not going ahead and had only been a last resort. In a newspaper interview, Don Sparrow expressed his personal dislike for the plan: "Shooting wolves from a helicopter is too much like shooting fish in a barrel." A departmental spokesman was quick to point out that the minister's remarks were only "hypothetical."

Nevertheless, the wolf controversy did not die. In March 1988, the

University of Alberta invited the notorious activist Paul Watson to speak at a public meeting in Edmonton. Formerly with the crew of the Greenpeace Rainbow Warrior, Watson was now captain of the Sea Shepherd, and his current topic was fighting for whales, dolphins, and baby seals. However, a year or two earlier, he had played a pivotal role in halting the infamous government wolf kills in British Columbia.

Following his address, a senior Alberta biologist, who had personally poisoned wolves in the 1950s and 1960s, bluntly told Paul that he was not welcome in this province. Throughout the mostly hostile, two-hour question period, captain Watson remained courteous, and his replies often earned him the applause of the public. Later that evening, at an informal get-together with local members of

the Canadian Wolf Defenders, this environmental guerrilla, as the press labelled him, proved to be a very gentle soul.

THE WOLF AS A COMPETITOR FOR HUNTERS

Behind the scenes, demands for wolf control remained strong in hunting circles. At their 1988 annual convention, the 17,000 member Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) passed a resolution urging the government to cull wolves in the Rocky Mountain foothills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing elk populations. In response, LeRoy Fjordbotten --the new minister of Forestry, Lands & Wildlife-- hinted that wolf control might be given over to private interests. A government biologist had informed the minister that the province's estimated 5,000 wolves were taking down 50,000 hoofed animals annually.

Wolf Wars...continued

The following year, frustrated by continued government inaction on the wolf issue, AFGA came up with an idea of its own. Based on the most recent data, Alberta's total wolf population was said to be between 3,500 and 5,500, and the average yearly take by registered trappers was 500 wolves. AFGA wanted to boost that kill to 1,200. To that end, they would pay trappers a bonus of \$150 per wolf. AFGA's executive director, Lyle Fullerton, said that only a fringe element of society would oppose such a plan. As it so happened, when interviewed by the press,

one of the first persons to turn down AFGA's offer was LeRoy Fjordbotten himself. The scheme raised a chorus of protest among the general public and reverberated across Canada and beyond.

"Stop the Wolf Bounty" became the slogan of a new Alberta group calling itself "Friends of the Wolf." On February 3, 1989, they organized a protest rally and march to the Alberta Legislature, which received a lot of press coverage.

Members of the Canadian Wolf Defenders, low key and well

informed, collected a petition with over 3,000 signatures, which they presented in person to LeRoy Fjordbotten. The minister shrugged off the wolf worries with an indulgent smile. At the time, his department had more important business at hand. Alberta was signing away the cutting rights to thousands of square miles of its boreal forests, with ominous but unmentioned implications for all of its wild denizens, including caribou and wolves.

As it turned out, the AFGA scheme fizzled. Due to a shortage of donations for the

WOODLAND CARIBOU DAVID FAIRLESS



Wolf Wars...continued

bounty proposal, the bonus was reduced from \$150 to \$100 per wolf and the target lowered to a maximum of 50 payments.

THE BIGGEST PUBLIC MEETING EVER AT THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM

The flames of public indignation over the never-ending wolf complaints were fanned on January 18, 1990, when The Edmonton Journal ran the following headline: "Alberta ponders killing up to 1,200 wolves to free up game for hunters." Journalist Don Thomas had based his information on a leaked government document titled "Draft Management Plan for Wolves." The plan mentioned the intended use of aerial gunning to eliminate wolves near Grande Cache and along the boundaries of Banff and Jasper National Park.

To expose the long festering issue to public scrutiny, the Canadian Wolf Defenders invited representatives from all parties to an open forum and panel discussion at the Alberta Provincial Museum on February 8, 1990. The meeting was promoted across the city and drew the largest crowd ever to gather at the museum. The 400-seat auditorium was filled to capacity and an estimated 150 people were following the proceedings in the foyer via

closed-circuit television. Many others were turned back at the door or unable to enter the parking lot

The six panel members included two senior zoologists from the University of Alberta, the FAN president, a spokesman for Canadian Wolf Defenders, the executive director of the Alberta Fish and Game Association, and Les Cooke, the Deputy Minister of Alberta Wildlife. The moderator was Garnet Anthony, a well-known CBC radio personality.

After brief opening statements from the panel members, the floor was open to the public, lining up at the microphones. Their comments and questions were lively, informative and often humorous, generating lots of laughter. Ranging from computer programmers to crusty old trappers, from articulate politicians to brightly-voiced schoolchildren, the audience included a wide spectrum of Albertans. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most passionate voice protesting government wolf kills and pleading for more protection of our wildlands came from a young member of the Alberta Fish and Game Association. The meeting ended with a showing of the film "Following the tundra wolf," narrated by Robert Redford.

WHY IS THERE NO PUBLIC OPPOSITION TODAY?

This past winter, twenty years after the start of the caribou controversy, the Alberta government unexpectedly went into action, ordering their biologists and technicians to shoot wolves from the air in the hill country northwest of Hinton.

In a March 5 feature story "Alberta's War on Wolves," The Edmonton Journal's Ed Struzik interviewed half a dozen independent experts, including FAN's Glen Semenchuk. All condemned the wolf cull as futile, a waste of time, money, and animal lives. Like similar campaigns in other jurisdictions, once the killing stops, the wolves were predicted to bounce back to larger numbers than before.

The perplexing thing is that the general public has been silent on the issue. Why? Have we become immune to the wanton killing of animals on wilderness lands, like we have become inured to the killing of innocent citizens on foreign soil, as long as we have been told that the war is just?

To get public opinion on side, in politics and advertising, the advice given by propaganda chiefs everywhere is to repeat a lie often enough and eventually it will be taken for the truth. The oft-stated rationale behind the current wolf kill is that the

Wolf Wars...continued

Woodland Caribou is on the road to extinction unless we protect it from its arch enemy, the wolf. Therefore, so says the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, the predators need to be controlled.

But wait a minute! The fact is that Alberta's wolves have never been out of control. Hunters bag them at every opportunity, and trappers "harvest" them for their valuable pelt. In our foothill forests, some wolf packs are hit hard by secretive capture methods. A common practice is to dump the carcasses of traffic-killed deer and moose at bait stations hidden in the bush. After the wolves have become habituated to a free meal at these sites, the local trapper closes off all narrow access trails with metal snares. It can result, in rare cases, in the capture of the entire family pack, milling about in confusion until all members are choking to their death. These hidden tragedies take place each winter near the boundaries of Jasper National Park, unbeknownst to the general public and sanctioned by the government departments that supply the carcasses. Rumour has it that some trappers have even had the gall to ask national park staff for their road kills.

IN THE AUTHOR'S OPINION

In its wisdom, the Alberta government already closed the hunting season on Woodland

Caribou in 1980. Unfortunately, these restrictions do not apply to aboriginal and metis hunters. Other potential causes of death, besides wolf predation, are poaching, road accidents, and hunter mistakes in animal identification.

However, the most important and largely indirect peril confronting the caribou is the fragmentation of its winter habitat by timber companies, coupled with increasing human access on roads and trails built by the oil industry. It is in this critical realm that governments can do much to mitigate negative impacts on caribou and other wildlife. Unfortunately, in the past thirty years, the deforestation of our foothills and boreal north has intensified. Will the problem get worse, or is there some hope for improvement in the future?

The Woodland Caribou's official designation as an endangered or threatened species requires that government agencies take measures to limit further losses. One immediate consequence has been that research has been stepped up to the tune of millions of dollars, with most of the money ending up in the pockets of aircraft companies. In a recent interview, Stan Boutin, one of Alberta's foremost zoologists, is quoted as wondering: "I don't know if there is any point in spending

millions of dollars....trying to save the Little Smoky caribou herd when the chances of success are minimal." (The Journal, April 15).

As part of this ongoing research, caribou are captured by gun-netting them from helicopters. In my opinion, this represents an extreme form of harassment and comes at a risk. Several net-gunned caribou have died. At this critical time, each animal lost is one too many.

A sobering thought is that there are still millions of caribou in Canada's north, of both the woodland and barren-ground varieties. And, despite frequent claims to the contrary, they are close cousins. Their differences lie largely in behaviour. While the barrenground variety aggregates in large herds and makes extensive migrations, the Woodland Caribou tends to isolate itself in the deepest northwoods and muskegs or on remote alpine slopes. It is an anti-predator strategy that is most effective if caribou numbers are small and widely scattered. By contrast, a large population would draw and concentrate the wolves (Dekker 1997).

To field researchers, the Woodland Caribou has been affectionately known as the "grey ghost of the woods." A compulsive recluse, well adapted to its boreal environment, it has

Wolf Wars...continued

been around far longer than mankind. But despite its wary ways, it too is subject to one of nature's primary edicts that life is ever evolving. Animals that are unable to adapt to changing habitat, whether as a result of mankind's activities or natural climatic cycles, will be replaced by others that can. Since the last ice age, long before humans entered the equation in any significant way, the southern limit of caribou range has shifted farther north as climate warmed and glaciers receded. This trend may well speed up if global climate warming continues, leading to the loss of the southernmost herds.

But perhaps not all is lost yet for wildlife in Alberta's foothills and boreal forests. With proper care, the clearcut and scarified

ground left behind in the wake of the man's machines might well become a future paradise for deer, elk, and moose, and their predators, including wolves. However, as to caribou, unless we are willing to prevent ongoing habitat fragmentation and further climate warming --both of which will push our remaining herds closer to extirpation—what purpose does it serve to start a mass kill of wolves? Particularly when such crude and temporary measures have been proven to be ineffective in the past.

Information for the above article was gleaned from *WolfNews*, a quarterly newsletter published by the Canadian Wolf Defenders and sponsored by World Wildlife Fund Canada from 1982 to 1992. Editor Dick Dekker.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

There are alternate viewpoints with respect to killing wolves to prevent further short-term declines in caribou abundance. While industrial activity or global warming may be the ultimate and long-term causes of the caribou decline, reducing current mortality rates is the only way to prevent the herd from decreasing further in the short term. Scientific data strongly show that predation is the #1 source of caribou mortality. Whether the wolf cull can reduce mortality rates enough to prevent further decline is subject to question, as is the validity of killing members of one species to 'save' those of another.

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BOOK REVIEW

Earth Alive

Essays on Ecology

REVIEW BY LAURIE L. LYWAK

Earth Alive: Essays on Ecology, is a collection of essays by the late Stan Rowe, compiled and edited by Don Kerr.

The essays, as a group, encourage us to create a new worldview of thinking about life on our home planet, Earth. Through the eyes of Stan Rowe, we see the beauty of life here but he conveys an urgent message: we need to change our ways. The essays educate and stimulate interest in how we can choose to live more responsibly. And Rowe offers inspiration to present and future generations to make those changes. His essays combine superb literary skills and extensive ecological and philosophical knowledge to give us a sense of hope for the future.

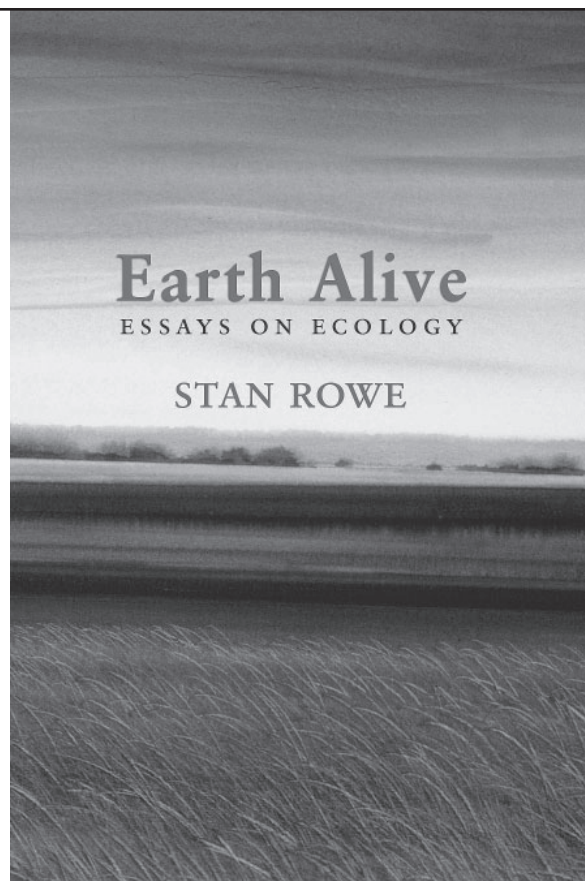
I enjoyed the chance early on to learn more about the late Stan Rowe. Rowe was an Albertan by birth, born in the hamlet of Hardisty. We discover, through his essays that he was the son of a Methodist Church minister, the impact the First World War had on his family, about his imprisonment in a Second World War camp in Canada, his role as a teacher in the interior of British Columbia, and his intense passion for nature. Stan ultimately became a professor of plant ecology, at the University of Saskatchewan and a well-known and respected Canadian

ecologist. To some, Rowe became a modern, updated version of Aldo Leopold.

Being both a scholar and a naturalist gave Stan a unique viewpoint on the world.

He explored a combination of philosophy, language, poetry, religion, art, history, and science in his essays as he considered the relationship we have with our home planet. Resources are finite here he confirms: we are aware of this and yet we continue on in our exploitive ways! We have become eco-terrorists he argues. Rowe signals the onset of our destruction of the Earth. He mentions several examples: the gradual destruction of the ozone layer, acid rain, and toxins in our water, air and food. A feeling of concern sets in as one continues reading his thought provoking essays. Stan responds to our concerns with insightful answers. His message is clear: we must change our attitudes and behaviours. We must abandon our "I conquer" attitude with respect to our planet and bond

With Christmas just several months down the road, this would be a great gift to put, or find, under the Christmas tree.



by Stan Rowe; Don Kerr, editor
6 x 9, 256 pages, paperback, \$24.95 CDN
NeWest Press, ISBN 1-897126-03-4

with earth as an equal partner. We need to acknowledge that change is required. We value and treat our home with respect, he argues, why not the same for our home world? Stan is a mentor to all of us. We need to put some of Stan's ideas into practice.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. I pulled it off my bookshelf again and again. It will capture the imagination of naturalists and environmentalists alike, and those with academic interests in ecosystems or ecosphere ethics. But it deserves to be much more widely read. Parents and grandparents will want to share the ideas in this book with their families and friends, to give our next generation a chance of inheriting a better future.

Calgary Naturalists Club

BY DON STILES

The Summer 2005 issue of Nature Alberta mentions some "Forerunners of the Calgary Field Naturalists Society", and describes in detail the Calgary Natural History Society 1910-1921.

The second of these forerunners, the Calgary Natural History Society (1949-1955), has been mentioned in single paragraphs in the Alberta Naturalist, Special Issue no. 1 (1981), and the Alberta Naturalist, Special Issue no. 3 (1986). This article describes that club and its activities in detail. The following information was taken from notes and correspondence files in the Glenbow Archives.

An organizational meeting to discuss plans for a Naturalists Club in Calgary was held at the home of Mary Barclay on May 19, 1949 with 18 people present. "As instigator of the idea, the group unanimously elected Miss Barclay as chairman." "Ideas and suggestions were discussed with Professor W. Ray Salt acting in an advisory capacity."

(Mary Barclay along with her sister Catherine, were founders of the Youth Hostel movement in the 1930s.) An interim committee was set up with a program committee, and leaders for various study groups such as Botany, Insects, Birds and Junior Naturalists. General meetings were to be held on the third Thursday of the month and

weekly field trips were to be arranged.

A Club publicity document shows the Aims and Activities of the Club as follows:

AIMS:

To enjoy and help young people to enjoy nature.

To establish in the vicinity of Calgary a *Natural History Park*.

ACTIVITIES:

Monthly general meetings except July and August.

Two flourishing Junior Groups.

Plant study, bird watching and star study groups.

Weekly evening trips in suitable weather.

Occasional all day outings.

Program evenings, usually from September to June had speakers on varied subjects such as plants, butterflies, geology, birds, meteorology, fisheries, and parks, with a business meeting preceded the main presentation. Members nights were held on a number of occasions, which allowed several areas to be explored in a single evening. Average attendance was about 25 people, in various

venues such as the Hillhurst Public Library, Central United Church and the Calgary Branch of the University of Alberta. At one special event on Apr. 7, 1955 at the main auditorium of the Calgary Branch of U of A, Edgar T. Jones, president of the Edmonton Bird Club, showed slides of Alberta wildlife to over 200 people.

Weekly field trips in the summer were usually to natural areas in or near Calgary. In 1953 the average attendance was 11. A few trips were to some places not known today such as the Caves, which were flooded by the Bearspaw Dam; and sloughs in the northeast part of Calgary, which have long since been removed for Calgary's expansion.

Efforts were made to involve Junior Naturalists, but attendance was small. For example, four field trips were held in the summer of 1953 to Nose Hill, Nose Creek, Ogden Hills, and Shouldice Park, with an average of 5 to 10 present.

A Christmas Bird Count was held on Dec. 27, 1952 from 2:00 to 4:00 PM within a four mile radius of Inglewood Bird Sanctuary

Calgary Naturalists Club...continued

along the Bow and Elbow Rivers. 14 observers saw 20 species, with 2370 Mallards being the most numerous. This began a tradition of Calgary Bird Counts in the Calgary area, which has continued to the present.

Some correspondence and articles indicated an interest in obtaining a Calgary Natural Park. For example, correspondence to V.A. Newhall, city commissioner on Feb. 6, 1950 suggested parks such as the along Irrigation Ditch or along the Bow between Shouldice and Bowness Parks. A reply dated Feb. 17, 1950 indicated existing parks of Sandy Beach and Shaganappi Woods, with Prince's Island to come.

A 1951 letter in a Calgary paper (the Calgary Herald?) suggested rezoning areas such as Lowery Gardens to Brickburn as parkland.

The Feb. 1953 meeting report indicated that the president, Julie Hrapko, had attended a meeting of the University Women's Club where the Town Planner brought up the meeting of a Natural History Park. He suggested that organizations keep plugging away at the idea. The Feb. 1953 meeting also had a mention that there is a danger that Inglewood Bird Sanctuary is in danger of being closed, and "that the support of larger interested groups is required to maintain its existence."

A letter dated Dec. 11, 1953 to Edgar T. Jones of the Edmonton

Bird Club endorsed their brief to the Alberta Government re extending protection to all wild birds.

A publicity event was held in June 1953 at the Corral called "Recreations Unlimited" where various clubs had booths to showcase their activities. This was later written up and published in Canadian Nature, the magazine of the Audubon Society of Canada. Similar events are held today at some Inglewood Bird Sanctuary and Calgary Horticultural society events.

By Nov. 7, 1955, interest seemed to be waning as a letter from the executive to the members proposed a meeting on Nov. 18 regarding the future of the Club. One of the suggestions was that the Club concentrate on one branch of nature egs. "birds or plants or insects". The organizational date of the Calgary Bird Club was Dec. 10, 1955 so this new club must have followed that suggestion.

There must have been some overlap in the two clubs as a newspaper article indicated that the two clubs did a joint Christmas Bird Count on Boxing Day in 1955. Other correspondence in the file indicated that the Calgary Naturalist Club was discontinued in June 1956, and that the Club would not be holding its usual

meetings the coming winter at the Calgary Branch of the University of Alberta due to insufficient interest and support.

Presidents of the Club were (terms started in Sept. of the year noted):

Mary Barclay (1949), Jean MacAskill (1950, 51), Julie Hrapko (1952, 53), Glen Steen (1954), and Jean MacAskill (1955). Secretary of the Club for all of those years was Margaret Cope, who also became the first secretary of the Calgary Bird Club.

Mary Lore, first noted on a mailing list in 1952, is only current Calgary Field Naturalists' Society member who has been active in the Calgary Naturalists Club, the Calgary Bird Club, and the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society. Mary was treasurer and president of the latter club, and later president of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

Some prominent members were: Tom Baines, first curator (in 1929) of the Calgary Zoo, two professors at the Calgary Branch of the University of Alberta (located at present day SAIT): Cy Hampson, professor of Zoology and Botany, who later went to the U of A at Edmonton, W.C. McCalla, professor of Botany, and Julie Hrapko, who moved to Edmonton to become curator of Botany at the Provincial Museum.

FAN CLUB PAGE



The Chevalier's Gift

BY PATSY J COTTERILL

Most of us in the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS) still can't believe our luck: in five years Wagner Natural Area has grown by 240 acres, and has almost doubled in size since the original 320 acres (130 ha) was set aside in 1975!

Of course we know that virtually nothing happens by luck alone: the Alberta government's decision to purchase 160 acres in 2001 was at least in part due to their new policy of accreting more land around existing natural areas. And chance favours those who are prepared. WNAS has put in a lot of hard work and dedication in the 23 years of its existence, not to mention recent heroic efforts in the "Project Land" campaign spearheaded by Irl Miller, Pat Clayton and Alice Hendry. But still, to be on the receiving end of the generous donations and grants that have enabled us to gain a further 80 acres of the Kichton property has us pinching ourselves.

Only recently did we hear some details about two of our donors – Laurence and Cec Chevalier – whose bequest provided the greatest share of the purchase price. The Chevalier's thought of themselves as an ordinary couple, says Shannon Campbell, executrix of their estate. Ordinary, perhaps, in the sense that many good Canadians believe in sharing their accumulated wealth and doing their

best to make the world a better place. Laurence was a qualified motor mechanic and Cec had a talent for sewing and crafts, which she often used for the benefit of others. Both were extraordinarily neighbourly and community-spirited. Most important for us, however, the couple loved nature and understood the concept that without habitat there will be no nature. They were keen nature watchers and as farmers in the Oneway area they did their best to ensure their farming practices were compatible with the welfare of wildlife. They also believed in the importance of education. They endowed a scholarship in Biological Sciences at the University of Alberta with the idea of encouraging young people to follow careers that could help protect the environment. And they did not confine their vision to the local scene. They made a bequest to Foster Parents Plan to support the education of girls in East

Africa. After the death of his wife, Laurence specified that their final gift should be directed towards protection of habitat, especially where that protection could be combined with an educational component.

The Chevaliers' gift was made initially to the Canadian Wildlife Federation, who partnered with the Nature Conservancy and consulted on the estate on how to disburse the money in the most appropriate way. Ms. Campbell said several options were considered, but Wagner was chosen because of the security of its protected status and its accessibility to the public and opportunities for nature education.

It is sad to think Cec and Laurence Chevalier will never see the land they have been instrumental in protecting. But I have no doubt that WNAS, along with our partners and well-wishers, will do our best to honour their vision and intent. Of course, the Society is profoundly grateful to all its donors, and will continue to work hard to justify their belief in it. That belief, like the Chevaliers,' is that ordinary people, working together and through others, can create a better world, a world in which nature still has a place.

Laurence Chevalier JULY 8, 1913 – JULY 19, 2002
Cec Chevalier DECEMBER 14, 1915 – AUGUST 29, 1998

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HANS H. MUELLER

To keep my eyes open to all wonders of nature on my daily hike has over the years become a habit. In late March 2006, a Canada Goose came to my attention as she inspected several trees for possible nesting sites. It became evident that this goose had a very special location in mind. Several trees were tested and rejected, by what standards only a goose would know. Eventually she found the place, far enough above ground to be safe from predators and close enough to the earth so as not to injure her young when they were either kicked or coaxed from the nest. During the time of the incubation I checked on my, by now, friend, daily and she seemed content with her choice. The hatching and departure from the nest took place unseen. All that was left for me to do was to wish the goslings godspeed and safety from the ills of this world.

Nature *gallery*



HARLEQUIN DUCK, BAUERMAN CREEK, WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK ROBERT FREW
PHOTOGRAPHED ON 16 MAY 2006 USING A SONY CYBERSHOT DSC-H1 DIGITAL CAMERA



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