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Nature Alberta

ALBERTA'S NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD, CROWSNEST PASS RAYMOND TOAL
PHOTOGRAPHED IN 2005 USING A CANON EOS 20D DIGITAL CAMERA WITH A 300 MM F4L LENS

feature article

The Western Painted Turtle

FEDERATION OF ALBERTA NATURALISTS

COYOTE, WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK RAYMOND TOAL
PHOTOGRAPHED IN 2005 USING A CANON EOS 20D DIGITAL CAMERA AND 300 MM F4L LENS

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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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PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Taking Action:

Putting Environmental Leadership back on the Political Agenda

BY SANDRA FOSS

As you may be aware, the federal Minister of the Environment, Rona Lee Ambrose, recently announced a full Panel Review of EnCana's proposal to drill 1275 more shallow gas wells in the "protected" National Wildlife Area at CFB Suffield (SNWA).

Reviewing the documents about EnCana's proposal, I am left wondering when our common sense abandoned us. I don't understand why this proposal even needs to be reviewed. It seems to me that more extraction in benchmark areas like SNWA (some extraction was taking place when it was declared a NWA), or in any Wildland (like Rumsey), National or Provincial Park, Heritage Rangeland or other sensitive ecosystem area that has been formally set aside, simply should not happen.

We live in a province lacking sound environmental leadership and policy, and industry (much of it foreign-owned) is taking full advantage of this void. Combined with the lack of environmental leadership, our governments, through royalty relaxations and tax relief, pay financial inducements to industry as well. Politicians need to put on the brakes and think about what they are doing – consider the whole picture and the whole price Albertans and Canadians are being asked to pay. Destroying our natural capital has a staggering cost. See Henry Binder's article in Nature Alberta, Winter 2006, p.15, or Wild Land Advocate February 2006, p.14 about the economics of proposed drilling, in particular reference to SNWA, but the same arguments apply all over Alberta. The lack of government leadership and sound policy is devastating our province to satiate the desires of foreign governments to access and control Alberta's resources.

We are industrializing this spectacularly beautiful province with its varied terrain and wild creatures at an unsustainable rate, and in the process, we are losing much of its natural beauty, and most of our natural resources. Of those resources, water increasingly is becoming an issue as industrial expansion hurtles ahead. Petroleum resource extraction is a huge consumer of water in Alberta. Extracting coal bed methane (predicted to increase 10 fold over the next decade), bitumen from oil sands (also increasing dramatically), and even gas from shallow wells requires vast quantities of water. Toxic wastewater can be generated in the process, which then creates a hazardous waste disposal problem. Although a few companies in the oil sands area have improved their water management practices (by recycling water or by using steam), our governments still reward companies using poor practices with financial bonuses. Recently, the federal government lowered the corporate tax rate by 2%. This could have been a great incentive to the fossil fuel industry, if made conditional on improvements in efficiency and environmental sustainability, but instead it was a gift.

Alberta doesn't have a comprehensive ground water inventory, or really any idea how much water is available. We know the amount issuing from melting glaciers is decreasing at an alarming rate, and soon will be gone. We cannot live without water, but we can live (perhaps not quite so comfortably) with fewer petroleum products. Before any more development is approved, Alberta needs to conduct a comprehensive ground

water inventory, and develop a much better understanding of the future of our water resources 5, 10, even 50 years down the road. If we have no water to drink, there is no point in having inexpensive fuel for vehicles or heating, or for any manufacturing processes.

Our governments must start taking leadership NOW. Giving advice and setting guidelines is not enough. Government MUST enact and enforce legislation and requirements. Where protection of the environment is key, the implementation of best practices and best available technology should be mandatory. Where there is a difference in federal and provincial rules, those that provide the higher level of protection should take precedence. Allowing self-monitoring by industry is not a solution, although it is cheaper - for government. However, the environment suffers, the wildlife suffers, and in the end, taxpayers bear the costs.

We need to let our governments (federal, provincial, municipal) know that we are paying attention and have serious concerns that need to be addressed. Do you have children and grandchildren? Will they be able to live, or want to live in Alberta in the future? Write letters, get involved. If you don't like what is happening …. *Exercise your political muscle. It's just like any other muscle; without use it withers and atrophies. Ultimately, I believe we get the kind of government we deserve. Right now, I think we deserve better than what we are getting. So, it must be our collective responsibility as citizens to demand better government, to raise issues, and hold our public servants accountable. And when our servants fail us, we must be prepared to fie them through our ballots."* Elizabeth May, from "Budworm Battles", 1982.

We soon may have that chance, in both provincial and federal elections. Use that opportunity wisely.

For more information on what we have lost through policies like the proportional energy sharing agreement of NAFTA, and what we stand to lose through more "harmonization" with US policies, find a copy of "Too Close for Comfort" by Maude Barlow, published by McClelland & Stewart Ltd. in 2005 (ISBN# 0-7710-1088-5) and inform yourself before another election is called.

EDITOR'S PAGE

On Changing Climate

BY BRIAN PARKER

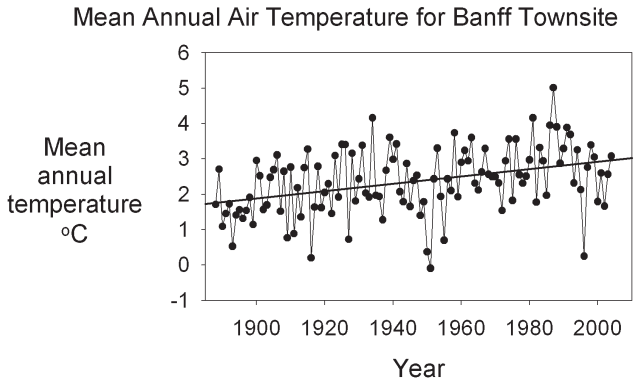
This winter's warm and dry weather had many people in Alberta talking about climate change. Indeed, warmer winters are one of the expected outcomes of anthropogenic global warming in northern climes.

And many of us, I think, would welcome the change. Who would argue against less snow to shovel, lower winter heating bills, and for those of us who hunt, less winterkill of White-tailed and Mule Deer.

But is there good evidence for climate warming (whatever the cause) in Alberta over the past 5-10 decades? In fact there is. Many long-term temperature records, such as those for the Environment Canada weather-station at Banff Townsite (shown below), show that mean annual temperatures have increased. And the increases at some weather stations have been substantial, upwards of 2°C over the period of record. The temperature increases tend to be larger in northern Alberta, in agreement with expectations that northern areas should warm more than southern regions.

Although some might welcome warmer weather in the future, for many Canadians, and particularly those who live in the north, warming climate is likely to bring massive changes to the environment, culture and lifestyle in the next few decades. Consider the continuing losses of summer sea ice in the Arctic (estimated at ~1,000,000 km^2 in the last 20-25 years). If ice loss continues at the current rate, some researchers expect the Arctic archipelago to become ice-free during the summer months within the next five decades. Animals that depend on, or occur in close association with sea ice, such as the Polar Bear and Narwhal, may be threatened with extinction (perhaps in the lifetime of some of our subscribers) and important cultural icons lost (for example, the Polar Bear is the face image on our two dollar coin). More southerly species will continue to invade northern habitats. The Arctic will also become more accessible to commercial shipping and international challenges to Canadian sovereignty over northern waterways will gain renewed strength. I could go on to discuss the effects that climate change will have on southerly regions, but I think, by now, that most of us realize that we are also likely to face a barrage of problems.

If the atmospheric researchers and climate modellers are correct, we and our children and grandchildren are likely to witness a wholesale change in the character and culture of our country. We may enjoy a few more winter barbeques with climate warming, but those BBQs will be accompanied by a host of new challenges. It's time for us to start thinking about the challenges climate change will deliver in the near future, and take some strong preventive medicine.



Northern Alberta Illness Clusters

Rare cancers and other serious illnesses, which are suspected are linked to upstream oilsands and pulp/paper operations, are appearing in northern populations in higher proportions than would normally be expected. In the town of Fort Chipewyan (pop. 1200), the local doctor has seen five patients recently die of a disease that occurs at low frequency (1 in 100,000) elsewhere, and he has more ill patients in the community. The medical examiner for the remote northern community, about 300 km north of Fort McMurray, confirmed the high number of illnesses, including leukemias, lymphomas, lupus, and autoimmune diseases, in the town. A monitoring system was established, but the causes of the disease cluster need to be established and the problems rectified. Relevant documents can be viewed on the Alberta Health and Alberta Environment websites.

Spray Lake Sawmills Forest Management Plan

Spray Lake Sawmills (1980) Ltd. has completed its first Detailed Forest Management Plan (DFMP) for their new Forest Management Area (FMA) in and around Kananaskis Country. Comments from the public are being reviewed, and will be included in the final submission to the Alberta Forest Service, due in September 2006. The DFMP is available for viewing at the mill in Cochrane, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development offices in Sundre and Calgary and in public libraries adjacent to the FMA, as well as on the SLS website, www.spraylakesawmills.com. For more info: Spray Lake Sawmills (1980) Ltd. (403) 932-2234.

CFB Suffield National Wildlife Area (SNWA)

The Federal Environment Minister, Rona Ambrose, has announced a full panel review will be held on EnCana's proposal to drill 1275 more shallow gas wells to speed gas extraction in the SNWA. This is a result of the large number of responses they received requesting a full review. Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Nature Canada, Grasslands Naturalists, Alberta Wilderness Association and the Southern Alberta Environmental Group are working together to ensure the highest level of protection for the SNWA. The SNWA is home to endangered species such as the Burrowing Owl, Tiny Cryptanthe, Sand Verbena and Swift Fox, three threatened species (Sprague's Pipit, Loggerhead Shrike, Slender Mouse Ear Cress) and seven species of special concern (Yellow Rail, Ord's Kangaroo Rat, Long-billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk, Short-eared Owl, Great Plains Toad and Northern Leopard Frog).

West Fraser Timber Company

Recently, West Fraser held its AGM in Edmonton, giving the Alberta Foothills Network an opportunity to directly express its concerns about the company's policy of putting profits ahead of environmental responsibility. The Network was represented at the meeting by FAN Executive Director Glen Semenchuk, who called upon West Fraser shareholders to demand that the company make a commitment to applying Forest Stewardship Council certification criteria to their operations. This would include setting aside from logging Endangered Forests like Alberta's Bighorn Country and Little Smoky, and conserving critical habitat for threatened species such as Woodland Caribou and Grizzly Bear. For more info: Glen Semenchuk, FAN: (780) 427-8124, Alberta Foothills Network http://www.albertafoothillsnetwork.org, and CPAWS http://www.cpaws-edmonton.org/CPAWS-ResourceR.html

Wind Power

The Grasslands Naturalists (GN) are concerned about a proposed 70 turbine wind farm adjacent to the north boundary of Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park. The primary concern is the impact on native grasslands adjoining the Park, as they contain unique ecological resources of national significance. The wind farm will also destroy what is arguably the most inspiring viewscape in SE Alberta, from an elevated unglaciated plateau over the great expanse of rolling prairie below.

The open house for the proposal was to receive public input on the scoping document for the project, but instead the public was provided with a "greenwashing" document, which was essentially a sales pitch for the project.

Further, the illustrations provided were misleading in their portrayal of turbine scale and impacts. The towers/turbines will reach 150 m into the air, almost the height of the Calgary Tower observation deck. Since wind farms are often perceived as providing green energy the public is not encouraged to appreciate that they are simply large industrial developments.

GN's position is that wind farms should follow siting guidelines directing them away from native grasslands to already disturbed lands, including large areas of ploughed fields. Because wind farms can change the climate of the area where they are located, are noisy, and have a significant impact on the ground, the choice of location is of utmost importance.

Federal Budget Puts Solar Industry at Risk

The May 2006 federal budget was not good news for solar energy in Canada, or low-income homeowners wanting to add solar power. Currently there are no federal programs for solar electricity and the Renewable Energy Deployment Initiative (REDI), the only federal program for solar thermal technologies is at risk of being cancelled. Funds for REDI have been frozen since March 31. No federal support during the spring/summer season is having an impact on the annual sales of the solar thermal industry. Uncertainty about the continuation of REDI is resulting in many potential purchasers putting off decisions to proceed with solar projects. Previously, the 2006 budget for REDI was set at $5 million. REDI has been crucial in stimulating the sale of solar thermal products and has helped expand the use of solar energy in Canada. In 2004, annual sales of solar heating grew by > 50%, reaching over 250 MW in that year. These sales were for Canadian manufactured products, installed by Canadians. Globally, the solar industry is growing rapidly - it is estimated that the solar industry in Germany employs over 50,000 people. International sales in 2005 were estimated to be in excess of C$8 billion. Canada lags well behind its major trading partners both in terms of government support and deployment, with only 23% of the average per capita installed capacity of IEA reporting nations. The benefits of solar energy include local job creation, stability of energy pricing, increased security of energy supplies, and a cleaner environment.

FAN, Off Highway Vehicles and Recreation Access Management:

Over a year ago, FAN and the Off Highway Vehicle community convened a workshop with a variety of stakeholders to discuss concerns about Recreation Access Management. At the workshop, all groups made and agreed on a number of recommendations to government, including which government department should take the lead, and where the funds should come from. Those recommendations were presented to the Energy/ Environment /Sustainable Resource Development Standing Policy Committee (SPC) on Oct. 31, 2005. On a request from that SPC, the Group presented to the Health/ Education/ Community Living SPC in April 2006. The government is using the recommendations as reference material for the Recreation Corridors Committee, which was set up to deal with some of the issues raised at the workshop. The workshop did not deal with site-specific issues, such as use of Off Highway Vehicles in Provincial and National Parks, Wildlands, and Heritage Rangelands. FAN opposes OHV use in those locations and would like to see more Parks declared.

Canadian Nature Network Reviews SARA

The Canadian Nature Network reports that the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA), proclaimed in 2003, is failing to meet its objectives. Weaknesses in the Act have been exacerbated by shallow federal implementation, reducing the Act's effectiveness in the following ways:

- The legal species at risk list grows more political and less scientific each year. The federal government has delayed listing decisions, imposed cost-benefit analyses on what should be science-based judgments, and refused to list several endangered species due to potential socio-economic consequences.
- Protection of critical habitat under SARA is limited (lands under federal jurisdiction only) and too late (not required until recovery). Further, the federal government has refused to issue emergency orders to protect critical habitat that would save species under imminent threat of extinction.
- The federal government has failed to implement SARA in a timely manner or to meet the Act's requirements to maintain a comprehensive public registry. Ten of 16 recovery strategies due January 2006 were overdue. SARA's public registry is outdated, confusing, and lacking documents required by law.
- Stewardship has been left the greatest burden for saving species, but without a corresponding increase in funding. Given that federal implementation of SARA is all carrot and no stick, Canada's species at risk require a bigger carrot.

While SARA has helped direct resources towards recovery planning, it has not realized its full potential in protecting Canada's species at risk. To achieve this, federal implementation of the Act must be strengthened to address the issues above.

Ghost –Waiparous Access Management Plan (GAMP) Approved

The long awaited Ghost-Waiparous Management Plan has been approved by Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, David Coutts, according to a Senior Manager. The plan has not yet been made public. The plan has been a long time coming, with not as much public input as stakeholders would have liked, but the government preferred to keep user groups apart. Trails will likely be designated for various modes of travel (hikers, horses, single track motorized, quads, snowmobiles etc), and random camping won't be quite so random. It is hoped that the occasional outhouse will be provided near random camping nodes, for the protection of the watershed. Some enforcement staff have been hired for the summer months.

See the SRD website for more information.

DENNIS BARESCO RECEIVES AWARD FROM FAN PRESIDENT SANDRA FOSS

Dennis Baresco

2005 Recipient of The Loren Goulden Award

Dennis Baresco has been a member of Grasslands Naturalists (GN) since 1986: its president from 1992 - 1994; a long-time editor of the Sagebrush Chronicle (1991 – 1997); and GN representative to and then president of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN, 2001 - 2004).

During these years he has chaired or been a member of several committees focused on environmental issues and has submitted numerous letters and briefs on behalf of both GN and FAN. Grasslands Naturalists' membership peaked at 175 during his term as president.

In his professional work as chief interpreter of the Medicine Hat Nature Centre (1996 to the present) he created the interpretive program as it is today with outreach and partnerships, extension of programs into schools both within the City and in Cypress County, with a doubling of attendance and on a shoestring budget. In this, he contributed hundreds of volunteer hours. Under his direction, the Centre was awarded the Sunshine of the Year award by Tourism Medicine Hat in 2005. As chair of the 2003 Canadian Nature Federation (CNF) Conference Committee, he worked tirelessly with CNF and Grasslands Naturalists to put on an outstanding conference in Medicine Hat in June 2003. A few years earlier he had been co-chair of the Interpretation Canada National Conference that was held in the Cypress Hills in 1999.

Dennis also contributed many volunteer hours during Alberta's Special Places Initiative to nominate areas in southeastern Alberta for protection. He served on the Prairie Coulee Natural Area Planning Team, and he provided unwavering support during the CFB Suffield Feral Horse Review in the face of personal abuse and attempts to publicly discredit him.

Of the more rewarding activities, he has been active in bird atlasing, breeding bird surveys and has put considerable energy into compiling bird records and motivating others to get their reports submitted. He co-authored the book "Prairie river: a canoe and wildlife viewing guide to the South Saskatchewan River", and is currently on the Board of the Heritage Tree Foundation. He was one of the early recipients of the Medicine Hat Civic Recognition Award for his environmental work in the community. As FAN president, he has worked hard to bring FAN and other provincial ENGOs together.

For more than twenty years Dennis has worked with amazing persistence in the face of many difficulties to further conservation goals - in particular promoting wider understanding of the lands, waters and wildlife of southeastern Alberta. His unquenchable sense of humour, and his easy-going, down-to-earth style, together with his writing skills, and the intelligence and thoughtfulness he brings to the table, enabled him to reach and form partnerships with many groups and individuals of diverse perspectives, both rural and urban. His contribution to the conservation of the land that he knows and loves has been outstanding and an inspiration to others.

Basking in the Sun

BY LAURIE L. LYWAK

Several hours had passed since leaving Grande Prairie, as we traveled southwest past Big Mountain Creek, Cutbank River and Kakwa River (tributaries to the Wapiti and Smoky rivers).

GARTER SNAKE LAURIE LYWAK

The gravel road wound through mixed-wood boreal forest consisting mostly of stands of Trembling Aspen and White Spruce. Occasionally, we passed Black Spruce and Larch on wetter sites and Jack/Lodgepole Pine on drier and sandy sites.

Because we were expecting to wait several hours for our co-workers to arrive at the pre-arranged meeting site, we decided to explore a small creek not far from where we had parked the truck. I took my two most important items: a full water bottle and a camera. I was hoping to take a few pictures of flowering plants and, perhaps, collect a few fragments of fossilized wood and bone or an interesting rock specimen from the riverbank. The warmth of the morning sun on my face was welcoming in the cool morning air and I applied sunscreen to my face and hands, put on a pair of sunglasses, and started following the riverbed upstream.

An hour of searching the riverbank turned up little of interest and frustration had begun to set in. I wondered if there was anything to find. Turning to other things, I noticed there were freshly overturned rocks scattered along the riverbank: a bear must have visited earlier in the day. In response to my observation, I started turning over several larger rocks that had caught my attention. I found ants under one and a centipede under another, probably the reasons the bear was turning rocks.

Suddenly, the boredom disappeared. I could feel something warm, and with a texture like a linoleum floor, against my fingers and the palm of my hand when I reached to turn over yet another rock! It was a welcoming sensation, like an instant hand warmer on a cool day. Not daring to breathe, I moved closer for a better look: I had brushed against a snake that had been lying against the sunny side of the rock. The prominent cream-coloured stripe along the back, and yellow stripe along each side identified it as a garter snake. It was a good-sized adult, almost two feet long. Startled by my intrusion, it made a "mad dash" for safety under a nearby piece of driftwood. I was excited since this was the farthest north I had ever observed a garter snake.

Snakes are cold-blooded (ectothermic) reptiles that can't maintain their body temperatures internally. They seek warm places in cool weather, in this case the sunny side of a large rock, in order to raise their body temperature. They move faster when they are warm and thus likely are more successful hunting, and escaping predators, after basking. I remember from my experience in southern Manitoba that many garter snakes, sometimes dozens at a time, would sunbathe on the black cinders along abandoned railway lines when the weather was cool.

My persistence had paid off with an interesting experience, although I admit luck was a factor. Now, every time I turn over a larger rock on a riverbank I think back to that memorable encounter. What will I find this time?

PLASTRON PATTERN OF WESTERN PAINTED TURTLE
JAYMES GOING

The Western Painted Turtle

BY JAYMES GOING

INTRODUCTION

Of the 49 semi-aquatic and terrestrial turtle species inhabiting North America, the Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) is the most widely distributed. Its range stretches from British Columbia to Nova Scotia, and south to New Mexico, Louisiana, and Georgia (MacCulloch and Secoy 1983, Blood and Macartney 1998). There are four morphologically distinct subspecies of Painted Turtle, the Eastern (*C. p. picta*), Midland (*C. p. marginata*), Southern (*C. p. dorsalis*), and Western (*C. p. bellii*) (Ultsch et al. 2001). The most northernly occurring of these is the Western Painted Turtle, which will be the focus of this article. In Alberta, the Western Painted Turtle is found only in specific locations in the Cypress Hills and the Milk River and Oldman River basins. However, accidental or intentional release of turtles into the Elizabeth Hall Wetland in Lethbridge appears to have resulted in a breeding population at this site.

The Western Painted Turtle is ranked "sensitive" as evaluated by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development: *General Status of Alberta Wild Species* and is vulnerable to site-specific habitat loss and possible extirpation (Alberta Government 2003). As well, it is currently under assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

The objective of this study was to gather baseline information on the population of Western Painted Turtles inhabiting the Elizabeth Hall Wetlands.

BIOLOGY

The Western Painted Turtle is the largest subspecies (Gibbons 1968, MacCulloch and Secoy 1983). In northern populations, the mean body size for individuals of the same age class is greater than for their southern counterparts. In these northern populations, males reach sexual maturity at ~four years of age and females at seven years (Blood and Macartney 1998). Turtles may live 20 years or longer in the wild.

Males exhibit courtship behaviour in the spring and fall, although mating occurs only in the spring (Gibbons 1968, Blood and Macartney 1995). Clutch size increases with latitude, averaging 20 eggs in Saskatchewan compared to 6 eggs in Michigan (Gibbons 1968, MacCulloch and Secoy 1983). Nests are located on land, usually near water and often face south to south-east. Sex determination is temperature dependent and a nest temperature of 28.5˚C will produce a 1:1 sex ratio in offspring in a laboratory setting. Higher temperatures result in more females, with lower temperatures producing more males. Hatchlings can supercool their body tissues to prevent freezing and will often spend their first winter in the nest, withstanding temperatures as cold as -6˚C (MacCulloch and Secoy 1983, Blood and Macartney 1998, Weisrock and Janzen 1999).

Suitable habitat for Painted Turtles includes ponds, marshes, small lakes, sluggish streams, and oxbows with muddy bottoms that provide considerable growth of aquatic plants for cover and foraging. These locations must also have fallen logs or other sites suitable for basking in the sun. Upland areas must provide suitable substrates for nesting and be close to the waterbody. Their diet consists of vegetation and animal matter and is correlated to age and habitat use. Juveniles tend to be more carnivorous and become more herbivorous as they age. Conversely, adults in Saskatchewan were found to have a diet consisting primarily of crayfish (*Astacus fluviatilis*) (MacCulloch and Secoy 1983, Blood and Macartney 1995).

Optimal water temperature for Painted Turtles is 20-25˚C and cessation of

WESTERN PAINTED TURTLE JAYMES GOING

activity begins to occur when water temperatures cool to 9-10°C (MacCulloch and Secoy 1998, Blood and Macartney 1998). With the onset of ice, turtles may remain active until water conditions become low in oxygen and prohibit normal metabolism. At this time they will hibernate under the water and may bury themselves in the mud for extended periods until water conditions are once again favourable (Blood and Macartney 1998). At the northern extent of their range, during the winter when oxygen levels are low they may rely on anaerobic metabolism for 6-7 months. They have an unequalled ability to tolerate lactic acid, a by-product of anaerobic metabolism, although they can acquire a small amount of oxygen through specialized gill-like tissues to avoid lactic acid poisoning.

STUDY AREA

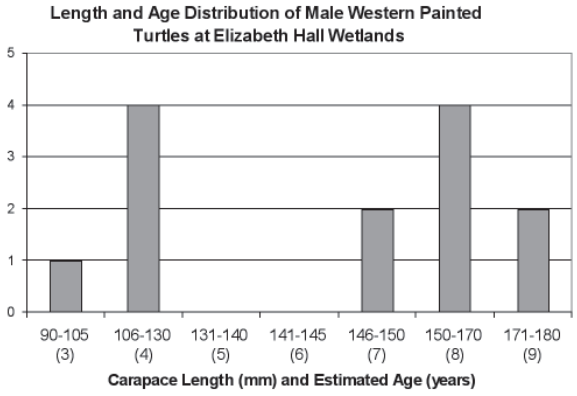
This study was completed at the Elizabeth Hall Wetlands, a 36-acre nature reserve within the City of Lethbridge, Alberta. This oxbow pond, adjacent to the Oldman River, is separated from the main river channel by the construction of an artificial embankment. The water is clear, and there are emergent logs available for basking. The littoral zone is soft mud and emergent vegetation consists of cattails (*Typha spp.*) and rushes (*Juncus spp.*). Submerged aquatic vegetation includes Richardson Pondweed (*Potamogeton richardsonii*) and Northern Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum exalbescens*).

DATA COLLECTION

Fieldwork took place between 25 October and 8 November 2004. Long handled dip nets were used to capture turtles from shore. Captured turtles were weighed to the nearest gram and straight-line carapace length was recorded to the nearest mm. All individuals were assigned a sex based on secondary sexual characteristics: mature males have longer and thicker tails as well as longer foreclaws (Blood and Macartney 1998). Water and air temperatures were taken with a handheld thermometer.

RESULTS

Numerous turtles were observed basking on logs and swimming or sunning at the water's surface. All turtles observed were within 15m of shore and within 100m of emergent logs. A total of 16 turtles were caught, eight being the highest number observed at one time during the study. However, passersby mentioned seeing 30 or more turtles on occasion during the course of the previous summer. The average mass and carapace length of females (n=3) was 1177g and 193mm respectively. Males (n=13) averaged 528g and 160mm. No juveniles were captured during this study. Weather conditions varied considerably, with air



"The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks, which practically conceal its sex, I think it clever of the turtle, in such a fix to be so fertile."

OGDEN NASH

The Western Painted Turtle…continued

temperatures ranging from 5-27˚C, however water temperatures remained between 9-11˚C.

DISCUSSION

There are multiple age classes of turtles present in the Elizabeth Hall Wetland. Based on data from MacCulloch and Secoy (1983), I estimate the age of males varied from 3-9 years and females 6-9 years. Although the initial population size and age structure is unknown, based on these observations, I suggest that the Western Painted Turtle population in the Elizabeth Hall Wetlands is reproducing.

Turtles were observed when water temperatures were 9-11˚C and as ice was beginning to form, consistent with records of activity for other populations. A single individual was observed on March 6 2005, much earlier than MacCulloch and Secoy (1983), who during their study in Saskatchewan first observed Western Painted Turtles on April 22. Yearly changes in weather patterns and the influence of warm Chinook winds in Lethbridge may explain this early sighting.

Possibilities exist for further research on this extralimital population of Western Painted Turtles and other populations throughout the province. This past summer, Western Painted Turtles were observed outside Waterton Lakes National Park and on the Milk River Ridge. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will also commence a new status review during 2006/2007 (R. Quinlan, personal communication). Determination of population sizes and ranges will expand on the existing data and help us to better understand life history characteristics such as dispersal, habitat requirements, and reproduction. Genetic blueprinting could also be undertaken to determine the degree of relatedness amongst populations of the province and may confirm whether the populations are native or introduced

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BASKING TURTLE JAYMES GOING

BARRED OWL ALAN MACKEIGAN

Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey, the First Four Years 2002-2005

BY LISA PRIESTLEY

Little is known about the abundance and population trends of most species of nocturnal owls in Alberta.

Most owls are not adequately monitored by the existing continent-wide bird surveys in North America. The Breeding Bird Survey takes place outside of the breeding season for most owls, and at a time of day (early to mid-morning) when most owls are relatively silent. Christmas Bird Counts are conducted at a time of year when most owls are relatively quiet. Migration Monitoring may have the potential to monitor populations of the more common migratory species, such as the Northern Saw-whet Owl, but many species of owls do not migrate, or only migrate short distances.

Broadcast surveys are one of the most widely used techniques to locate and survey owls (Takats et al. 2001). Owls vocalize to communicate with their mates and delineate territory. Imitating or broadcasting recordings of owl vocalizations can invoke vocal responses from many species of owls. This survey technique has been used successfully to document the range and status of several owl species in North America, and can also be used to determine habitat associations.

Alberta's volunteer Nocturnal Owl Survey was initiated as a pilot project in 1997. It became a full time program in 2002. The Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1) Estimate trends in populations of nocturnal owls at regional to provincial scales.
2) Determine distribution of owls by habitat type across Alberta.
3) Estimate relative abundance of owls across Alberta.
4) Determine habitat associations of owls.
5) Contribute to the Canada-wide Nocturnal Owl Survey Program coordinated by Bird Studies Canada.
6) Contribute to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists Bird Atlas Update.

Following is a description of techniques used during nocturnal owl surveys and discuss some of the 2002-2005 results. Habitat associations are being investigated in the next year and are not reported in this manuscript.

METHODS

The volunteer survey was advertised through naturalist groups, public talks, and poster presentations at various events, and through the media. When volunteers expressed interest in participating, they were mailed a survey package which contained an instruction manual, a CD or tape, and a route map. Volunteers had random roadside routes assigned to them, but decided what area of the province they would like to work in. Roads must have limited traffic, should be wide enough to allow vehicles to pull over to the side, and be accessible in March and April. Each route has 10 equally spaced calling stations, with 1.6 km separations (total length was 14.4 km).

Volunteers started surveys no sooner than 30 minutes after sunset, and concluded around midnight. Routes were surveyed once or twice. The first surveys occurred between March 20 and April 10 and the second surveys between April 11 and May 5. Surveys were conducted when wind speeds were ≤20 km per hour, no precipitation was falling, and air temperatures were close to the average for the season.

At each station volunteers stopped their engines, exited the vehicle, and set up the CD/tape

OWL CALLING CHUCK PRIESTLY

Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey…continued

player on the hood of their vehicle. There was an initial 2-minute silent listening period. During this time volunteers recorded start time, air temperature, and wind speed. We asked that volunteers move a little way from the vehicle (about 25-50 m) since the vehicle can make noises that impede the ability to hear owls, or that may sound like owls. Also owls will sometimes dive towards the speaker, which may startle volunteers.

Following the initial silent listening period, there was a broadcast of 20 seconds (Boreal or Northern Saw-whet Owl), followed by 1 minute of silent listening, then a 20 second broadcast (Great Gray or Long-eared Owl) followed by one minute of silent listening, then a final 20 second broadcast (Barred or Great Horned Owl), followed by a final 3 minutes of silent listening. Northern Saw-whet, Long-eared, and Great Horned Owl calls were used on routes located in prairie and parkland ecoregions, while Boreal, Great Gray, and Barred Owl calls were used in boreal, foothill, and mountain ecoregions. The total time spent at each stop was 8 minutes.

When an owl was heard calling or was seen, volunteers recorded in which call interval it was observed, the estimated direction, and the estimated distance to the owl (800 m is the furthest distance that a person can hear a small owl; larger owls can be heard for over 1 km). Volunteers also recorded how many vehicles passed by and whether there was some background noise that might have impeded their ability to hear owls calling (dogs, generators, pumps, water flowing, etc.).

When a survey station was completed, volunteers returned to their vehicles and moved to the next station (1.6 km) where they repeated the above procedure. Additionally, any other wildlife seen or heard could be reported.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 2002, 17 routes (170 stops) were surveyed by 42 volunteers. One hundred and twenty owls of seven species were detected (7.1 owls/10 stops). In 2003, Alberta's owl survey had a 360% increase in the number of routes surveyed and a 290% increase in the number of volunteers participating (Table 1). The program continued to expand in 2004 and 2005, with further increases in the number of routes and volunteers.

In 2004, eighty-six routes (843 stations) were surveyed with 43 of these routes being surveyed twice. There were 7 species of owls found (plus five unknown owls). In 2005 there were 90 routes visited (57 were visited once, 29 twice, 1 three times), and 13 stations on 3 routes were missed due to poor weather (887 stations). A total of 402 owls of eight species (plus six unknown owls) were heard or seen. Only two routes had no owls detected on them, while 10 routes had more than 20 individual owls detected on them. Elk Island, Black Diamond, Ministik, and Brown-Lowrey had 15 or more owls detected.

The number of Northern Saw-whet Owls and Great Horned Owls detected in 2004 was very high, most probably due to high prey densities (voles, mice, snowshoe hares). The numbers of all owls (except Short-eared Owl) reported were much lower in 2005 (4.6 owls/10 stations) compared to 2004 (7.9 owls/10 stations), most probably due to a drop in prey densities (Table 1). In Manitoba detection rates for Great Horned Owls and Boreal Owls dropped, while Barred Owl increased (Duncan 2005). The Great Horned Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl were the most abundant species detected on surveys in all years, Great Horned Owls were detected on 50 routes (2.0 owls/10 stations) and Northern Saw-whet Owls were detected on 51 routes (1.6 owls/10 stations). Duncan (2005) reports that these species were also the most abundant in Manitoba.

The Short-eared Owl and Northern Pygmy Owl were the least abundant owls based on our calling survey, being detected on only two routes each. However, these owls are considered more diurnal in their habits, therefore other survey techniques may need to be used to monitor these species.

Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey…continued

Many volunteers commented on their experiences, and if there weren't owls calling there were countless other night sounds to keep people excited. Thirty-two other species of wild animals were observed during owl surveys. Surveys that were conducted earlier in the season, listed Ruffed Grouse, Red Fox, deer, and countless Coyotes. Later surveys had frogs, gulls, swans, ducks, cranes, swans, Common Snipe, Killdeer, and even the first songbirds of the spring season. There were some unusual encounters also. We have reports of a Beaver slapping its tail in a pond that had a Moose crossing it in an earlier survey. Small mammals included Northern Flying Squirrels gliding from the trees, a mouse crossing the road, and a bat swooping through the air. And a favorite record was from the Elk Island route, where Bison were munching on some grass near owl surveyors, making it difficult to listen for owls.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This program would not be possible without the dedication of all the volunteer Owl Surveyors, I would thank them for their continued commitment. I would also like to thank all the individuals who have been supporting owl monitoring initiatives in Alberta, including: Michael Bradstreet (Bird Studies Canada), Steve Brechtel and Gordon Court (Alberta Sustainable Resource Development), Loney Dickson and Geoff Holroyd (Canadian Wildlife Service), and Jim Duncan (Manitoba Conservation). Jim and Barb Beck provided the owl calling CD. This project is a collaborative effort between Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, and Canadian Wildlife Service (Environment Canada). Funding and in-kind support from Alberta Ecotrust, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Boreal Forest Research Center, Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service), Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Manning Diversified Research Fund, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Shell Canada, and TD Friends of the Environment was greatly appreciated. For more information about this program, or to receive a copy of the North American guidelines, contact: Lisa Takats Priestley, Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Box 1418, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5. Phone: (780) 918-4804 Fax: (780) 422-9685. E-mail: lisa@beaverhillbirds.com

TABLE 1. DATA (SUBMITTED TO DATE) FROM ALBERTA VOLUNTEER NOCTURNAL OWL SURVEY IN 2003, 2004, AND 2005.

	2003		2004		2005	
Species	Number	Owls/ 10 stops	Number	Owls/ 10 stops	Number	Owls/ 10 stops
Barred Owl	22	0.359	27	0.320	18	0.203
Boreal Owl	36	0.588	45	0.534	40	0.441
Great Gray Owl	8	0.131	19	0.225	9	0.101
Great Horned Owl	137	2.239	273	3.238	177	1.995
Long-eared Owl	9	0.147	28	0.332	14	0.158
Northern Pygmy Owl	2	0.033	4	0.047	4	0.045
Northern Saw-whet Owl	111	1.814	269	3.191	138	1.556
Short-eared Owl	2	0.033	0	0.000	2	0.023
Unknown Owl sp.	2	0.033	5	0.059	6	0.068
TOTAL	**329**	**5.376**	**670**	**7.948**	**408**	**4.600**
Number of Routes	**62**		**86**		**90**	
Number of Volunteers	**116**		**163**		**178**	

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Request for Information

The ABRC is currently compiling records of *Chaetura* swifts for the province, particularly southwestern Alberta, to build a case that *Vaux's* Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) is in all probability involved and should be added to the Official List of the Birds of Alberta. Please submit your observations of *Chaetura* swifts, even passing notes, to the ABRC.

VAUX'S SWIFT EDGAR T. JONES

Sixth Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee

BY JOCELYN HUDON, RICHARD KLAUKE, RICHARD KNAPTON, M. ROSS LEIN, JOHN RIDDELL, BRIAN RITCHIE AND RAY WERSHLER

The Alberta Bird Record Committee (ABRC; hereafter the Committee) continues to adjudicate provincial records of rare birds and update the "Official List of the Birds of Alberta".

With this report, the sixth since creation of the Committee in 1995, and the first since publication of the "Official List" (posted at http://www.royalalbertamuseum.ca/natural/birds/birdlist/intro.htm), the provincial list reaches 404 species, with the addition of one contemporary species (the Yellow-throated Vireo), and extinct one (Passenger Pigeon) previously omitted on invalid grounds. Since publication of the Fifth Report of the Committee (Slater and Hudon 2004), the Committee has reviewed, and reached a decision on 54 records, and has evaluated evidence for the occurrence of the Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) and Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) in the province.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Cackling Goose *(Branta hutchinsii)*, created as a result of a recent split of the Canada Goose *(Branta canadensis)* by the AOU's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature (Banks et al. 2004), this species is added to the List on the basis of two specimens housed at The Royal Alberta Museum (accessions Z79.136.1 and Z00.20.1) and band recoveries in Alberta from hunter-killed "Canada Geese" banded on the breeding grounds on Victoria Island (Hines et al. 2000). The Cackling Goose would appear to be a not-uncommon migrant in the fall and, to a lesser degree, spring in Alberta.

Common Eider *(Somateria mollissima)*, Cold Lake; late November to mid-December 2001; brief note with 5 images captured from video (Richard Klauke; 8 December 2001). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Cold Lake; 4 December 2002; written description with sketch (Terry Thormin). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Little Blue Heron *(Egretta caerulea)*, Kininvie Marsh, E of Tilley; 22 - 24 May 2004; 4 images captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Green Heron *(Butorides virescens)*, Vista Lake, Banff National Park; 5 June 1975; written description (M. Scott O'Keeffe). This becomes the earliest documented occurrence in the province. **CODE 3 RECORD.** Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 19 September - 6 October 2004; written description (Brian Ritchie), written description with 5 photographs (Royce Howland), web page with 16 images (Royce Howland), 3 photographs (Steve Oliphant). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Little Gull *(Larus minutus)*, NW end of Frank Lake; 22 May 2004; written description (Greg Wagner). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Slaty-backed Gull *(Larus schistisagus)*, Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; from 13 April 2004, for about a week; 2 written descriptions (Robert W. Storms, Andrew Slater), photograph (Bill Walker). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Black-legged Kittiwake *(Rissa tridactyla)*, Mildred Lake, Jasper National Park; 19 July 1984; written description and photograph in Connelly (1986). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Eurasian Collared-Dove *(Streptopelia decaocto)*, Red Deer (Onslow Square); several individuals; 2003; 3 images captured from video (Richard Klauke; 17 February 2003); written description (Andrew Slater; 1 March 2003), 3 photographs posted on the Albertabird Yahoo! web site (Dwight Arthur; 22 March 2003), 2 photographs (Ross Lein; 7 September 2003). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Medicine Hat; from 18 May 2003 to at least mid-July; 5 images captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Nanton; from 19 February 2004; written description (Greg Wagner); photograph (Jack Shier), 3 photographs (Ken Havard). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

RECORDS ACCEPTED...continued

White-winged Dove *(Zenaida asiatica)*, N of Lacombe (34 Wildrose Street, Rosedale Valley); 1 September - 9 October 2003; written description (Mike Mulligan), photograph (Richard Klauke), 3 photographs (Alan Fishkin), written description with 2 photographs (Ross Lein). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Passenger Pigeon *(Ectopistes migratorius)*, added to the list on the basis of the following published reports: Cooke (1912), Smith and Kidd (1971) and Houston (1972).

Barn Owl *(Tyto alba)*, 5 km E, 1 km S of Picture Butte (SW1/4-31-10-20W4); 3 June 2003; written description (Dr. Gail R. Michener and Janeal Mick). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Common Poorwill *(Phalaenoptilus nuttallii)*, East Boundary fireguard, Suffield National Wildlife Area; 16 June 2004 (23:30 P.M.); photograph (Andy Teucher). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Cypress Hills between Elkwater and Spruce Coulee, Alberta; from about 19 June 2004 (call) and 14 July (seen), until young fledged on 14 August 2004; 6 images of bird and eggs captured from video (Richard Klauke). See also Velner et al. (2004). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Red-breasted Sapsucker *(Sphyrapicus ruber)*, Banff town site; 2-4 November 2003; written description (Brian Ritchie), 2 photographs (Malcolm McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Yellow-throated Vireo *(Vireo flavifrons)*, Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 2 August 2003; short note with measurements of banded bird (Doug Collister), 4 photographs (El Peterson, Steve Lane, Gwen Smiley). First documented occurrence in the province. **CODE 1 RECORD.** Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 24 August 2003; written description with sketch (John Riddell). Probably the former individual. **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Western Bluebird *(Sialia mexicana)*, W of Longview; pair from about late April until at least 17 July 2003; image captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Crowsnest Pass area; 10 July 2004; written description (Yousif Attia). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Wood Thrush *(Hylocichla mustelina)*, Ralston; 16 May 2004; written description (Tim Cowley). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Sage Thrasher *(Oreoscoptes montanus)*, SE of Manyberries along South Manyberries Creek; 29 June - early August 2002; brief note and 3 images captured from video (Richard Klauke), written description (Brian and Nancy Ritchie). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Pine Warbler *(Dendroica pinus)*, N.W. Calgary; 29 September 1987; written description (R.W. Storms). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Calgary (Riley Park); 20 December 1993 to 5 February 1994; several written descriptions (Andrew Slater, Mairi Babey, Harold Pinel, John B. Steeves, Joel Duncan). **CODE 2 RECORD.** NE of Taber; 9 September 2003; written description (Lloyd Bennett). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Hooded Warbler *(Wilsonia citrina)*, Lynnbrook Road / Lynnbrook Close neighbourhood, Calgary; 3 October - 6 December 2004; written description (Pat Bumstead), written description with 4 photographs (Royce Howland), web page with 5 images (Royce Howland). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Summer Tanager *(Piranga rubra)*, Lethbridge; 10 November 2004; PMA specimen Z04.09.1; window kill (Les Sarsfield). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Northern Cardinal *(Cardinalis cardinalis)*, Fort Saskatchewan; 31 October to 28 November 1992; photograph (Leah Gunther; 10 November 1992). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Near Ponoka; 16 February 1993; brief description (Jean & Rodger Dunn). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Near Rimbey; 27 April 1993; brief description (Gabe Paquette). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Edmonton; 21 November 1993 to 8 March 1994; written description (Pat Marklevitz); photograph (Otto Braun). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Cochrane; 29 December 1993; written description (Margaret Warman). **CODE 3 RECORD.** On acreage southwest of Stony Plain; seen for nearly a week at feeder on 28 November 2000; photograph (Randal Hoscheit). **CODE 1 RECORD.** W of Edmonton; had been at a feeder for about 2 weeks on 2 December 2001; photograph (Randal Hoscheit; 4 December 2001). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Near Blackfalds; 1 February to at least 10 March 2003 (apparently gone on 16 March 2003); 3 images captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Edmonton; 25 March 2004; PMA specimen Z04.2.1 (Jean MacIntyre, cat kill). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Edmonton; 20 May 2004; brief description (Warren Finlay). **CODE 3 RECORD.** SW Calgary; from about 15 August - 15 September 2004; brief description (Laureen McMullan and Rausard Danoit). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Fort McMurray; 26 September 2004; brief description with 5 photographs (Joe Price). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

THE CODE DEFINITIONS REPORTED ARE:

ACCEPTED, CODE 1. Records supported by material evidence, i.e. specimens, identifiable body parts, identifiable photographs or sound recordings, whose origin from within the borders of Alberta is in no doubt, that are accompanied by written reports of the circumstances of the observation.

ACCEPTED, CODE 2. Sight records (without supporting material evidence) by multiple observers that are supported by written descriptions that leave no doubt as to the species identity. A Code 1 or 2 sighting must receive four favourable votes and no more than one dissenting vote to be accepted.

ACCEPTED, CODE 3. Sight records by single observers that are supported by a written description that leaves no doubt as to species identity, and which receive five favourable votes and no dissenting vote. A Code 3 is the minimum for inclusion in the official provincial list.

ACCEPTED, CODE 4. Sight records by single observers that receive four favourable votes and no more than one dissenting vote. For record adjudication purposes, such a record is acceptable, but does not pass the more stringent requirements for inclusion on the official provincial list. A list of species that have no higher than a Code 4 record may be published as an appendix to the official list.

INSUFFICIENTLY DOCUMENTED. Records supported by material evidence or written descriptions that are not detailed enough to eliminate all other possibilities, or to support conclusively the identification of the species as presented. Placement in this category should in no way be interpreted as a reflection on the veracity of the observation, but should be looked upon as an encouragement to substantiate occurrence of the species in the province more fully.

ERROR IN IDENTIFICATION. Records that are not supported by the documentation available to the committee, or that describe another species from that suggested.

QUESTIONABLE ORIGIN. Records that concern species that are of questionable origin, possibly escapees, and whose wild status cannot be determined accurately.

RECORDS INSUFFICIENTLY DOCUMENTED

Smew *(Mergellus albellus)*, Whitemud Creek Ravine, Edmonton; second or third week of October 1999; written description (Thelma Pirot).

Least Grebe *(Tachybaptus dominicus)*, Clear Lake; 1 July, 16 July and 6 August 2003; written description, video footage (Richard Fyfe).

Sooty Shearwater *(Puffinus griseus)*, Lac La Biche; 4 July 2003; written description (Christine Found).

Snowy Plover *(Charadrius alexandrinus)*, W end of Salt Lake (Reflex Lakes); 26 May 1995; written description (Kevin Cantelon).

Black-legged Kittiwake *(Rissa tridactyla)*, Hwy 61, about 10 km E of Forestburg; 23 December 2001; brief description with drawing (David Muirhead).

Least Tern *(Sterna albifrons)*, SE corner of Namaka Lake; 24 September 1985; written description and field notes (Louis Guillemette).

Common Poorwill *(Phalaenoptilus nuttallii)*, near Taber; 9 - 10 September 1998; written description (Lloyd Bennett).

Sage Thrasher *(Oreoscoptes montanus)*, 4 individuals at Medicine Hat City Landfill; 5 September 2003; written description (Jo-Anne Reynolds).

Golden-winged Warbler *(Vermivora chrysoptera)*, 2nd Chain Lake, SE of Ponoka; 15 May 2004; written description (Ann Barrett).

Pine Warbler *(Dendroica pinus)*, NW Calgary; 1 October 1984; brief description (Lottie G. Garland). Just off Bearspaw Road; 16 August 1991; field notes (Peter Sherrington). SE Calgary; 21 September 1993; written description (Cedric Hitchon).

Smith's Longspur *(Calcarius pictus)*, N of Nanton; 30 December 2002 - 7 January 2003; brief written descriptions posted on Albertabird (Bill Wilson, Malcolm McDonald).

QUESTIONABLE ORIGIN

Fulvous Whistling-Duck *(Dendrocygna bicolor)*, NE Calgary (intersection of Barlow Tr. and Country Hills Blvd); 25 May - June 2003; web page with 7 images (Royce Howland), photograph posted on Albertabird Yahoo! web site (Alan MacKeigan), written description (Andrew Slater). The Committee could not rule out a captive origin for this bird.

Greater Flamingo *(Phoenicopterus ruber)*, Clover Bar, Edmonton; 10 October 1979; University of Alberta Museum of Zoology specimen (UAMZ 5391); found dead, donated by Alberta Fish & Wildlife. Most likely an escapee.

CORRIGENDA

Brambling *(Fringilla montifringilla)* at Edson. The date of the observation was incorrectly reported in Slater (1997) as November 1988 - January 1989, when it should have been November 1989 - January 1990. Also see Quinlan and Kennedy (2005).

Western Bluebird *(Sialia mexicana)* pair at Saskatchewan Crossing; 10-12 July 1991. Photographic documentation of the pair (12 July 2001) was produced by Richard Klauke, elevating the level of support to Code 1 from Code 3 (Slater and Hudon 2004).

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THE AUTHORS ARE MEMBERS OF THE ALBERTA BIRD RECORD COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY JOCELYN HUDON

FAN CLUB PAGE

NATURE ALBERTA

Alberta's Great Tree Hunt!

BY LIBBY FAIRWEATHER

The Alberta Heritage Tree Project wants to celebrate your favourite trees.

In a program designed to raise awareness about the impact trees have on our lives today and historically, the Heritage Tree Foundation requests nominations of trees YOU consider special. The criteria are broad: the old, large, rare, those with historical or cultural significance, and much more.

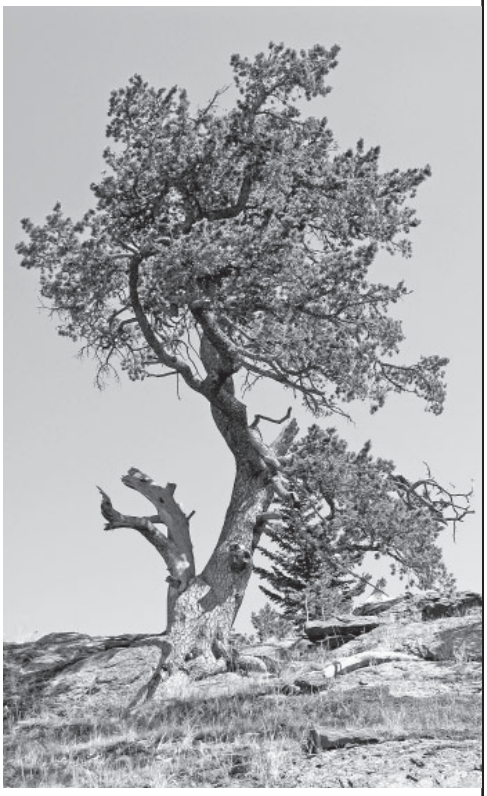
Nominations may refer to an individual tree or a group of trees, a grove, avenue, garden, arboretum or shelterbelt. Perhaps there is a tree that has acquired status as a community landmark or grows in an unusual location or has an unusual shape. Trees within Environmentally Significant Areas, or that provide nesting homes for rare birds can also be considered in nominations. Additional criteria and information can be found by visiting our website; www.heritagetreefoundation.com. There is no limit on the numbers of trees you can nominate!

Upon receiving nominations, Regional Selection Committees, consisting of local individuals from a wide variety of disciplines, will select trees to ensure they match the criteria. Perhaps you would enjoy, as part of the regional team, selecting trees in your community for Heritage recognition. Call or email us at the contact information below.

Upon selection, each tree will receive a plaque which will, with the landowner's permission*, be placed on the trunk or directly in front of the tree. This common identifying feature will make it easier for community members to locate a Heritage Tree. Heritage Trees will appear in an upcoming book; *Heritage Trees of Alberta* (June 2007) and feature botanical, historical and cultural information on specific trees.

What makes our project special and enduring though, is documenting the stories behind the trees you nominate. Trees provide a living link to our past. They hold stories and carry meaning for people. From the community or from your travels within the Province; please share your tree story with us. Help us to celebrate Alberta's natural history. We hope your special tree will be featured!

LIMBER PINE JOHN WARDEN



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SNOWY OWL, EAST OF CALGARY
DAVID LILLY
PHOTOGRAPHED ON DECEMBER 26, 2005 USING A NIKON D100 CAMERA AND 500 MM LENS

LIMBER PINE, NEAR WHIRLPOOL POINT JOHN WARDEN
PHOTOGRAPHED ON OCTOBER 10, 2004 USING A CANON POWERSHOT PRO1 DIGITAL CAMERA

ELK NURSERY GROUP ON MILK RIVER SANDBAR CARITA BERGMAN
PHOTOGRAPHED ON JULY 31, 2005 USING A MINOLTA DIMAGE S414 DIGITAL CAMERA

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Nature gallery

GREY COPPER, SLOUGH EAST OF CALGARY IAN GARDINER
PHOTOGRAPHED IN JULY 2004 USING A NIKON F3HP DIGITAL CAMERA WITH A 200 MM MACRO LENS AND FUJI VELVIA 50 FILM

NATURE ALBERTA

FEDERATION OF ALBERTA NATURALISTS 11759 GROAT ROAD, EDMONTON, AB, T5M 3K6 PHONE: 780.427.8124 FAX: 780.422.2663