

Nature Alberta

ALBERTA'S NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW



JOHN WARDEN

feature article

Close to Home:

Nature Photography in Alberta: Of Grandmas and Big Horn Sheep



WILD MUSTANG (SEE STORY ON PAGE 10)
ROBERT ALISON



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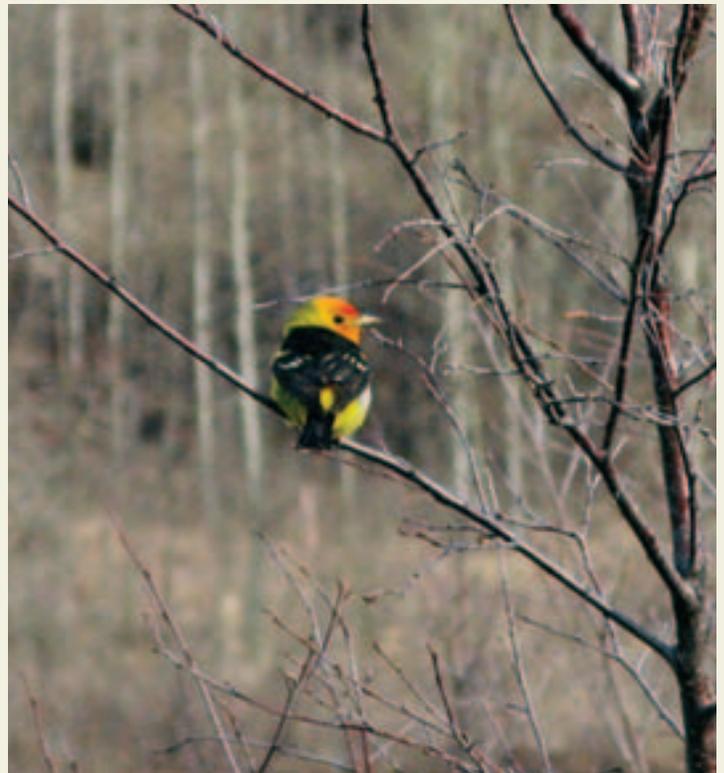
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Nature Alberta:
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Contents

NATURE ALBERTA VOLUME 38, NUMBER 2, SUMMER 2008

Editor's Page BY DENNIS BARESCO 2

Letters to the Editor 4

Book Review: *Wild Alberta at the Crossroads* 6

Alberta Issues in Brief..... 7

Real Wild Mustangs BY ROBERT ALISON 10

First Hand: Encounters of a Grizzly Kind! BY LILI DEBARBIERI 14

In Memoriam: Garry Newton BY DON LEMNA 16

Hot Day, Cool Moose BY SANDRA HAWKINS 17

Up Close Naturally: Bees and more Bees! BY MARGOT HERVIEUX..... 18

Close to Home: Nature Photography in Alberta BY JOHN WARDEN 20

Squirrels unfurled: Columbians
are not Prolific Breeders BY THEODORE G. MANNO..... 24

Eighth Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee BY JOCELYN HUDON,
RICHARD KLAUKE, RICHARD KNAPTON, M. ROSS LEIN, JOHN RIDDELL, BRIAN RITCHIE AND
RAY WERSHLER 28

Wildlife! Starring... Burbot BY DENNIS BARESCO 32

FAN Honours Six Dedicated Albertans 33

Newton's Occasionally Cryptic Crossword! #6 BY GARRY NEWTON..... 34

American Badger Takes to Water BY TERESA DOLMAN 35

Celestial Happenings BY JOHN MCFAUL 37

It's Summer! BY DENNIS BARESCO 38

FAN Club Page 39

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FALL ISSUE. **AUGUST 15**
WINTER ISSUE. **NOVEMBER 15**

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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Friends of Blackfoot Society	

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EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

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Editor's Page

BY DENNIS BARESCO

INSIDE NATURE ALBERTA

The past two issues of *Nature Alberta* (NA) have been somewhat thick: fifty-plus pages. This has caused some problems, but more on that at the end of this column. As for the issue in hand: NA welcomes a couple of new authors along with many other contributors.

Robert Alison's research on wild horses has come up with some fascinating possibilities. Are Alberta's last "wild" mustangs just feral horses? Or, are they actually native, indigenous wildlife? The answer is on page 10.

Encounters-with-wildlife stories are always fascinating and this issue features four such encounters: a grizzly (by Lili DeBarbieri, pg 14); a cow Moose and calf (by Sandra Hawkins, pg 17); and a Badger (by Teresa Dolman, pg 35). The fourth is John Warden's regular nature photography column, on Bighorn Sheep (pg 20), which is the Summer Feature Article. John is an excellent nature photographer, and his accompanying stories are always a great read.

Ever wonder what a Burbot is? Find out in the "Wildlife! Starring..." feature (pg 32). And,

just in case you haven't had enough of ground squirrels yet, Theo Manno has one more story on Columbians – this time, on their non-prolificacy in breeding (pg 24).

CAN YOU SEE THE HUMOUR?

The Alberta Government recently announced the "One Simple Act" program, where everyone's "encouraged to commit to One Simple Act to protect the environment." The Premier committed to planting a tree on the Legislature grounds. "An average tree absorbs 200 kg of carbon dioxide over 80 years," said Stelmach. "Imagine the results if just 10 people in every community in Alberta plants a tree." Ah yes: that'll certainly neutralize the tar sands-related emissions – well, at least three seconds' worth. Environment Minister Renner's promise is: "continuing to replace the light bulbs in his home and constituency office with compact fluorescents."

Can you see the humour in all this? If not, the program is running under the banner, *impACT*. There. Now you can see the humour.

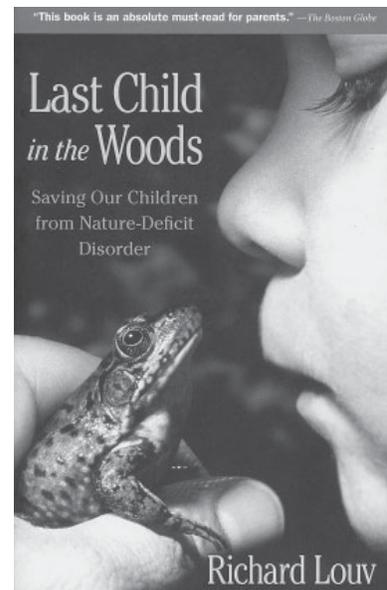
FILE UNDER...

File this under "we've got a lot of work to do". Re: a statement by a 4th grader in San Diego:

"I like to play indoors better, 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are." It's from the hugely influential new book, *Last Child in the Woods*, by Richard Louv. If you're interested in the future, it's a must read.

File this under the "hard to believe" category: Bryce Kendrick, a BC mold expert, told us in a *Globe & Mail* "Letter to the Editor" (June 9 2008) that the fungi spore concentration per cubic metre is 1,000 to 10,000 indoors, and up to 20,000 outdoors. Aren't you glad you don't have microscopic vision?

In the "is this hunting?" file: Alberta hunting guides and



EDITOR'S PAGE

outfitters shouldn't wonder if hunting has a bad name when one reads about a company offering guided ground squirrel hunting. "[E]xpect to shoot thousands of rounds ammo during your hunt" they say. (You could call shooting "gophers" a lot of things, but not "a hunt"!)

Not only that, but "you can expect a comfortable and steady rest as you shoot" from their "shooting wagon." The best part seems to be that "most shots are in the range of 10 feet to 200 yards." Ten feet – now that's sporting! With meals and beds, it's only \$275/day. Go figure.

Finally: you've heard about the tomato *E. coli* scare? I've always wondered why people would buy U.S. and Mexican tomatoes in the first place, because most of

the time they taste nothing like a tomato. Is the colour red that important? Want good tomatoes? See "It's Summer" pg 38.

THE PROBLEM

Now, on to the "problem" of fifty-plus pages. Your Editor could easily fill sixty quality pages per issue; plus, I have ideas that could add a further twenty pages. However, the size of the Summer '08 issue – 40 pages – is around where we are forced to keep it for now. The problem is cost: for layout and design, printing and mailing. There are a number of ideas which we are pursuing to help raise some revenue. For example: we've taken to offering ads; we're actively looking for many more subscribers; we are

looking at having what could be called "Issue Sponsors". Those are just three ideas, with more on the drawing board.

Unfortunately, time – to pursue ideas – is a limiting factor. Nevertheless, if any readers have a lead on a company or group or individual who may be interested in sponsoring a single issue, let me know (na@fanweb.ca) and I'll get in touch with them. As well, let me know if you have any other revenue source ideas (keeping in mind the time factor). Having said all that, one of the most successful promotional tools, no matter what the product, is word-of-mouth, so please promote *Nature Alberta* to everyone you know!

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Great Book!

Three things came together for me recently. In December I noticed a book called *Wild Alberta* at Greenwoods Bookstore. Browsing through it I decided to buy it, but then thought, no...Christmas is coming and what a good gift that would make for me. Christmas came and went and no such gift came my way. Then in the last issue of *Nature Alberta*, I saw the photos on the front and back cover by Robin and Marian White and wondered: is that the same couple that wrote the *Wild Alberta* book? Last night I attended a presentation by Robin and Marian White at the Centennial Library in Edmonton, and...sure enough, all three are the same people.

What a great coup for *Nature Alberta* to have the photos of Robin and Marian White in your Winter 2008 edition. I found Robin and Marian to be charming and dedicated environmentalists, and yes...I now own a copy of *Wild Alberta*. I urge all readers of *Nature Alberta* to take the time to support Robin and Marian in their efforts to create a greener and more natural Alberta.

JOHN WARDEN, EDMONTON

Clarifying Tiger Salamander

It has been brought to my attention through *Nature Alberta* that the University of Alberta website "erroneously" reports an isolated population of tiger salamanders near Grand Prairie. This occurrence is based on *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Alberta* by Russell and Bauer and is thought to be the result of an introduction.

The currently accepted name for this species is the Blotched Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma mavortium melanostictum*) according to Collins and Taggart, (2002, et sequentia - as it is frequently updated as new information becomes available). <<http://www.cnah.org>> The Eastern Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) is regarded as a distinct species.

I am well aware of the long-toed salamander populations (plural) along the Peace River valley and tributaries. I confirmed Robin Walsh's identification of these salamanders when she was doing her significant range extension studies in the 1990's and there are voucher specimens in the University of Alberta Museum of Zoology.

Margot Hervieux brings up the important matter of "reputable

sources" of information. People seeking information from books, checklists, data bases and the internet should be aware that while some of these sources may have been both accurate and up to date when they were created, owing to systematic revisions, range extensions, extirpations, misidentifications etc. they may not be the best sources of current information. Websites have the option of being quickly updated when change is needed; however this is frequently not done. The University of Alberta herpetology web site, for example, has not been updated since 2000 and is badly in need of revision. I am not the webmaster of this site but rest assured that steps have been taken to have it updated.

WAYNE ROBERTS, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY.

Impressed!

My NA just arrived today – wow, what an impressive magazine!! Great photos in the last few issues!!

MYRNA PEARMAN, RED DEER

FAN *News*

FAN welcomes two new Associate Clubs to our family: the **Lee Nature Sanctuary Society**; and the **Grant MacEwan Mountain Club**. FAN now has thirty-nine member clubs, representing about five thousand Albertans. For a list of all the clubs, see page one.

FAN also welcomes a new Appointed Director:

Jim Gendron. Jim has much experience and will be a great addition to our Board of Directors. Several Board changes took effect at the AGM: **Sandra Foss** moved to the position of Past President; **Scott Jubinville** took on Vice-President; and **Dennis Baresco's** term ended (though he remains *Nature Alberta* Editor). The position of President is vacant at this time.

Long-time Office Manager/ Executive Assistant

Karen Rimney has made a career change and has left FAN; her last day was June 13th. Karen was the administrative, ever-present face of FAN, so if you had any business with the organization, you most likely have worked with her. In her goodbye, Karen said: "The time I have had with FAN has been more than an experience; it has been educational – and Fun!" We all wish Karen great success in her new position. As of this date (June 16th), the rather large hole left in the office has not yet been filled.

On the Covers:



FRONT COVER

John Warden has travelled many places in this province with camera in-hand, thrilling *Nature Alberta* readers with his photography and his "Close to Home: Nature Photography in Alberta" column.

This issue, "Of Grandmas and Big Horn Sheep" (pg 20) is the feature story, with suitably dramatic photos.



INSIDE FRONT COVER

A horse is a horse is a horse – but not quite! It could be domestic, feral or native. The magnificent equine in Robert Alison's photo could be mistaken for any of the three, but in reality can only be one of them. See his article, "REAL Wild Mustangs", pg 10.



Few Alberta birds can match a Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) when it comes to brightening up a scene. Jim Uffelmann was at the Cochrane dog park when this pose presented itself.



INSIDE BACK COVER

A lovely series of a cool moose on a hot day in Waterton's Akamina Lake, by Sandra Hawkins (see the story, pg 17).



All three photos were taken with a Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT SLR, 400mm, f5.6 lens. No flash. ASA 400; top at 1/500th, middle at 1/800th, bottom at 1/640th.



BACK COVER

Ian Gardiner is a regular contributor to *Nature Alberta*, with splendid, breathtaking photos of landscapes and vistas. This issue's "Nature Gallery" features Ian's look at Highwood Pass and

Calgarian Kathy Wilson hiking the trail. Taken with a Nikon F3HP camera, 55mm Nikkor Lens, Fuji Velvia 50 film

BOOK REVIEW

Wild Alberta at the Crossroads

REVIEW BY: TINA REGEHR

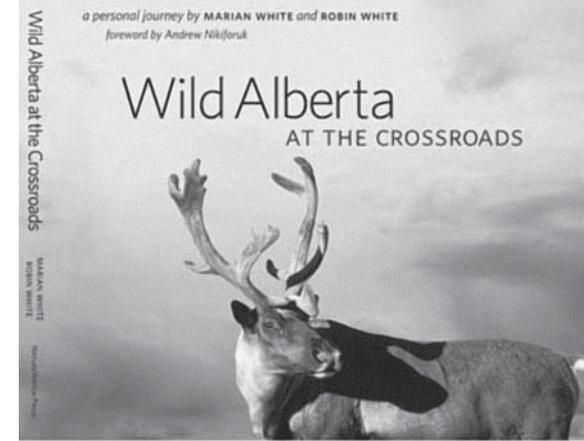
For seven years Marian and Robin White explored – on foot, by canoe, light aircraft, and diesel-powered truck-camper – almost every nook and cranny of Alberta’s wilderness.

Divided into each of Alberta’s six natural regions (mountains, prairies, parkland, foothills, boreal forest, and Canadian Shield), this book documents their journeys through compelling stories and photos that take the reader to places they’ll most likely never see in person.

From the get-go, a harsh foreword penned by Andrew Nikiforuk, it is evident that *Wild Alberta at the Crossroads* is much more than a natural history lesson with coffee-table-book quality pictures. It is an urgent call for all Albertans to “rethink our relationship with Nature and demand that our leaders manage this province more responsibly.” I think it accomplishes this with Robin White’s powerful photos alone, which capture the haunting beauty of nature in fragile tension between the present and the inevitability of change. The natural wonder depicted in these wildlife and wild landscape images are juxtaposed with first-hand confirmations of how area after wild area is being disfigured on

a breathtaking scale by intensive resource development. Even remote forest in the far north isn’t immune to “being overrun by resource-extractive industries driven by a set of values far different from the traditional ones of the aboriginal people who live there.”

It is painfully clear that Alberta is at a critical crossroads, through Marian and Robin White’s warnings. Some are subtle: “50-year-old outlines that show remarkably little sign of healing”; some not-so-subtle: “As if to make up for lost time, they have engaged in a massive onslaught on the forest, converting it to pulp or bulldozing it aside to make room for tens of thousands of oil and gas wells, open-pit coal mines, and an expanding cobweb of access roads.” And don’t even get them started on the tar sands. Their criticism of the Klein government’s addiction to rapid development at any cost does not mince words, and includes a tongue-in-cheek comparison of the Alberta Tar Sands public costs and benefits



Robin and Marion White. NatureWatch Press. 2007

with those of the only survivor of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – Egypt’s Great Pyramid of Cheops.

It would all be so depressing if not for the second part of the book, which outlines nine major changes that the authors feel would make a substantial difference in turning things around, and the plea for ordinary Albertans to carefully examine their own lifestyles and help plan a more sustainable future. Climate change writer George Monbiot pretty much sums it up with the following quote in the book:

“If the biosphere is wrecked, it will not be done by those who couldn’t give a damn about it, as they now belong to a diminishing minority. It will be destroyed by nice, well-meaning, cosmopolitan people who accept the case for cutting emissions, but who won’t change by one iota the way they live.”

It is for these people, politicians who need to be aware of the consequences of their policies, as well as the already-convinced nature-lovers, that this book has been created. In other words, it is for all Albertans who care about preserving the legacy of these beautiful wild places and animals for generations to come.

Wild Alberta at the Crossroads has won an Independent Publisher’s Book Award 2008 in the best Western Canada Regional Nonfiction category. The award was presented at BookExpo America (the world’s second largest book expo) in Los Angeles on May 30. Books will be able to carry “award-winning” stickers and will be promoted to 7000 or more book buyers by the IP group.

No matter where you go in Alberta, wildlife and habitat are under assault by government and specific industries – so much so that this province is fast becoming an international pariah and is earning a reputation as “the throw-away province!”

ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

Kearl Cozy with Cabinet

Victory didn't last long for environmentalists pleased with a court ruling reported in the last Gallon Environment Letter that the environmental assessment of Imperial Oil's Kearl project failed to meet standards for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The judgment indicated that the court agreed that the federal government's position of setting intensity rather than absolute targets for major GHG emitters does not protect the environment. A decision by the federal Cabinet approving the project despite the court ruling is seen by critics as seriously undermining the environmental review process. Is Dick Cheney a member of the Cabinet of Canada? (from: The Gallon Environment Letter, Vol 13, No. 5, June 9 2008; subscriptions available at subscriptions@gallonletter.ca)

Cloak 'N Dagger

“Prime Minister Stephen Harper's obsession with tight message control and muzzling have caused unprecedented delays [up to five times longer on average] in responding to Access to Information requests”, said Liberal MPs Mark Holland and Pablo Rodriguez.

Bio-Fools

Federal Bill C-33 provides a \$2.2 billion subsidy for biofuels and requires that all gasoline include 5% biofuel content by 2010. Yet there is increasing evidence to show that the rush to biofuels will: a) do more environmental harm than good; and b) cause starvation and insurrection. By now, most federal politicians must realize that they've been blatantly duped on the benefits of “deathanol”; saner heads did not prevail when the Bill went to the Senate and was approved.

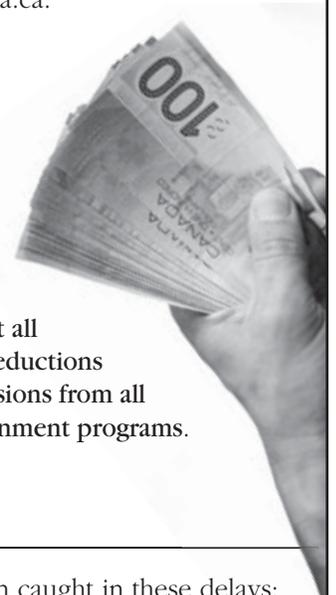
Your Dollars At Work

The federal government has confirmed that it will spend \$1.5 billion taxpayer dollars in additional subsidies to tar sands companies as a result of its slow phase out of tax breaks for one of Canada's largest greenhouse gas emitting (GHG) industries. And “Pumped Up,” a new KAIROS study, concludes that by

The June UN Food Summit in Rome was supposed to end the biofuel scam; instead, as *Globe & Mail* business columnist Eric Reguly put it: “It was a summit in name only. The event could have better been described as a sales convention, as if each country had a booth to hawk its own agricultural policy and badmouth the competition” (“Report on Business”. June 9 2008, pg B1).

For more information, visit www.rightoncanada.ca.

2012, GHG emissions from the tar sands alone may wipe out all anticipated reductions in GHG emissions from all federal government programs.



Mr. Holland pointed out that the government's penchant for secrecy was most recently underscored by its decision to quietly kill the Coordination of Access to Information Requests System (CAIRS), which is used daily by journalists, MPs, lawyers and ordinary Canadians to monitor the actions of this government.

FAN has been caught in these delays: material requested for the hearings into EnCana's proposal to drill 1275 new gas wells in Suffield National Wildlife Area has been outstanding since March 2007. The first documents took 9 months, and came 33% blacked out, the next bunch in slightly less time, but 65% blacked out.

ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

Waterless

A proposal to sell off vast quantities of Alberta's diminishing water resources — the first of its kind in Canada — and massive diversions between river basins pose a major threat to Alberta's remaining supplies of fresh water, according to a report published April 22, Earth Day, by two respected environmental organizations.

Fight to the Last Drop: A Glimpse into Alberta's Water Future,

published by Ecojustice (formerly Sierra Legal Defence Fund) and Bow Riverkeeper, focuses on recent events, including an Aug '07 proposal by the Eastern Irrigation District (the largest consumer of water on the Bow River) to dramatically expand its water licences and use the increased water for purposes other than irrigation and agriculture.

Can't Risk EIA!

The Alberta government will exempt proposed transmission line projects from requiring Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), the government says, already addresses Albertans' major concerns on routing and health. Hmmm ... how can AUC address routing when it is ignorant of the environmental features that contribute to decisions on routing?

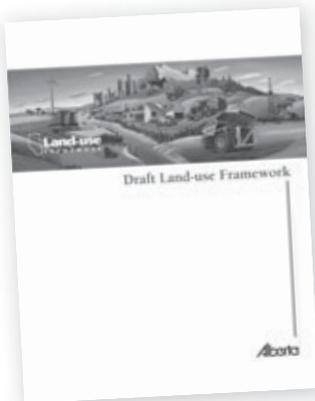
A 132 km-long transmission line(s) from Cypress Hills to connect with the grid at Empress is proposed, at an estimated cost of \$500 million. Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) has filed a Needs Information Application (Dec '07), but the appropriate half of the Alberta Environmental Utilities Board (EUB) has not yet approved it (according to their website).

Direct inquiries to: 780-427-6267; Kim.Capstick@gov.ab.ca, AB Environment.



ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

LUF a LAFF?



The Alberta government released its Land Use Framework (LUF) May 27th. As written, it is essentially meaningless, business-as-usual nonsense. Could it be a vehicle for good planning? Definitely, with a lot of clarity, binding provisions and linking of broad policy to decisions on the ground. The big question: is there any Government sincerity? For a land-use planning checklist, go to: <http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/LUF-checklist-04-07.pdf>

Phase Out

Home Depot chose Earth Day (April 22) to announce the phase out of the sale of cosmetic pesticides across Canada. This sends a clear signal that business and government are catching up to the population in recognizing the importance of erring on the side of caution when it comes



to health and well being. The movement appears to be gaining momentum: the Coalition for a Healthy Calgary remains optimistic that the City, Calgary Health Region and provincial MLAs will take the necessary legislative measures to protect their citizens in similar fashion.

FAN CLUB WINS EMERALD AWARD



Alberta Emerald Foundation
Centre for Environmental Excellence

On June 3, the **Edmonton Naturalization Group**, a FAN Associate Club, was rewarded with the "Community Group" Alberta Emerald Award. The project that earned them the award was "Conserving and Celebrating Edmonton's Native Plants: a made-in-Alberta solution to sustainable yard landscaping." FAN congratulates the Edmonton Naturalization Group for this well-deserved recognition.

Two other winners whom readers will recognize:

Peter Sherrington ("Corporate or Institutional Leadership" category), for his work on Golden Eagle migration; and

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Calgary/Banff Chapter, for its Environmental and Action Education Program.

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE #5 (IN THE SPRING 2008 NATURE ALBERTA)

ACROSS

- 1, 15. PALLISER'S TRIANGLE
8. PARTI
9. CANNERY
10. CROWED
11. DEPEND
12. INTAGLIO
18. SECRET
20. FUTURE
21. HAYRICK
22. RADII
23. CROSSBILL

DOWN

2. AGATE
3. LANCER
4. STRIDING
5. SPARTA
6. TROWELS
7. BIRD COUNT
8. LABRADORITE
11. DENTIFORM
13. TRESPASS
14. RIPTIDE
16. NORDIC
17. SCARAB
19. EXCEL

REAL Wild Mustangs

BY ROBERT ALISON



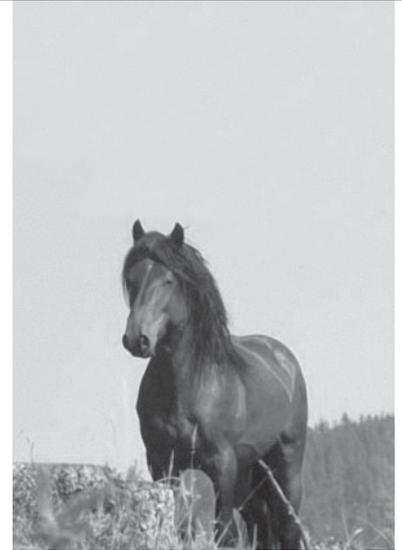
According to the Canadian Wildlife Service, mustangs do not qualify as “native wildlife” under the federal Species at Risk Act because it was assumed they were not actually present in North America when the earliest Europeans made initial contact. Alberta law does not consider wild mustangs to be ‘wildlife’ either. Under the Alberta Stray Animals Act, they are classed as “livestock”.

Neither of these interpretations is defensible scientifically. In the United States, wild mustangs are protected under the “Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act” of 1971. Its foundation is that wild horses

At present, there are about 200 wild mustangs in Alberta, mainly within the Siffleur Wilderness Area northwest of Calgary. Are they “feral”? Or are they, in fact, native, indigenous wildlife? Scientists believe they’ve come up with the answer.

merit protection owing to their huge significance to European settlers, homesteaders and native communities in the Old West. In Canada, wild horses were similarly indispensable, yet that significance has not translated into any formal legal protection for the animals except on Crown Land.

Alberta has Canada’s last viable herd of wild mustangs, and it is in dire need of protection. A Wild Horse Protection Act, reflecting the animals’ historic provincial significance is an urgent necessity before the remaining population dips below the critical number required to sustain genetic integrity. In view of Alberta’s ongoing focus on preserving its heritage, the few wild horses that remain merit protection owing to their historical significance and



WHOAS

because they are one element of diversified wild fauna.

Wild horse hunting has been unlawful in Alberta on Crown Land for more than two decades, but there are no laws protecting the animals on private property, and a popular practice is to drive them from Crown Land onto private property, where they are destroyed. According to the Wild Horses of Alberta Society, at least eight wild mustangs are known to have been destroyed in 2007, and that figure is probably a minimum since other losses were likely undiscovered.

Misunderstanding, especially by government officials, has tainted the interpretation of the significance of wild mustangs in Alberta. The animals are not officially considered to be ‘indigenous fauna’ owing to a US interpretation of that term which excludes any wildlife species that was not actually present in North



ROBERT ALISON

Real Wild Mustangs...continued

America when the earliest Europeans arrived on the continent. Canada has borrowed that interpretation as the main criterion for deciding whether or not a species qualifies as “native” wildlife.

In the case of wild mustangs, that interpretation is incompetent and immaterial. There is irrefutable evidence that all horses evolved solely from ancestral North American stock. Fossils at the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument in Idaho confirm ancestral horses, very similar to modern wild mustangs, were present in North America 3.5 million years ago. Those ancestral horses are in the same genus (*Equus*) as wild mustangs. Horses present in North America 1.7 million years ago were almost indistinguishable from modern wild mustangs (*Equus caballus*). According to Richard Harington, Curator Emeritus of Quaternary Zoology at the Canadian Museum of Nature, horses that naturally occurred in the

Yukon and the northern Prairies in Pleistocene Times (about 1.7 million years ago) were *E. caballus*, “extremely similar to modern wild horses in Canada”.

All horses developed from an ancestral ancestor “eohippus” that occurred in North America close to 50 million years ago. Local habitat conditions generated various diverging phenotypes. According to Jim Burns, Curator of Quaternary Paleontology at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, some of the ancestral North American wild horse stock eventually relocated to Eurasia via the Bering Land Bridge. Subsequently, the native North American horses appear to have died out entirely by about 10,000 years ago.

Harington says there are at least two horse bone specimens, one from the Prairies, suggesting that not all the native stock disappeared. But, if the entire original population did not vanish, a viable population did not survive. Subsequently, horse development continued

in Eurasia, where domestication produced several breeds. In 1519, Hernán Cortés brought about two dozen Spanish mustangs to Mexico for the use of the Conquistadores. They were *E. caballus*. Several eventually escaped to the wild, and their numbers grew very rapidly, since the habitats they encountered were those in which they originally developed.

By the 1700's, over three million wild horses are thought to have occurred in North America, about one-quarter of which were on the Canadian prairies. Zoologists have traced their movements up the Mississippi Valley into Alberta and Saskatchewan by 1776. They pioneered into Canada on their own, crossing into the Prairie provinces as wild herds. Early European explorers and pioneers confirm their huge numbers in the 19th Century. There is no historic evidence whatsoever that they were brought to Canada by humans, nor that they were captive livestock. Some were



ROBERT ALISON

Real Wild Mustangs...continued

eventually captured by the Natives of the Prairies. Others remain in a wild state. Some of the stock kept currently by some Natives are directly related to that original stock, especially so in the Blackfoot-Peigan-Sarcee reserve.

Wild horse hunting, primarily for slaughter for pet food, intensified so rapidly in the early 20th Century that by 1974, the total wild mustang population in Alberta had collapsed to fewer than 1000 animals (excluding the Suffield Block herd). Some had been hunted for sport, but many wound up at slaughterhouses in Calgary, where they sold for about \$400 each.

By the 1970's, public sentiment in the United States had pressured the Administration to

put into place federal protection for wild horses. In 2005, the US Senate banned the killing of wild mustangs ("American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act"). Canada has no comparable legislation. That is largely due to the prevalent and erroneous contention by government officials that wild mustangs in Canada derive from escaped domestic livestock and, even if they didn't, they are not indigenous fauna.

There is indisputable evidence to the contrary on both counts. Genetic testing of several wild mustangs from the remaining Alberta herd, conducted by Philip Sponenberg at the University of Virginia, confirms that the animals he tested are genetically identical to the

Spanish mustangs brought to Mexico by the Conquistadores. There is no evidence that any interbred with any domestic livestock in North America, and any contention that they did so has never been confirmed by any scientific data whatsoever.

In March, 2007, samples from 11 additional wild mustangs from the same area of Alberta were submitted for genetic testing to the University of Texas Equine Genetics Lab. Test results confirm those animals, from the last wild herd, are "remarkably similar" to the wild Spanish mustangs brought to North America in 1519. Those animals are extremely similar to the horses that developed millions of years ago in North America, Harington says.

Real Wild Mustangs... continued



WHOAS

The Conquistadores merely returned them to their ancestral homeland.

Curiously, Alberta Sustainable Resources Development is either unaware of the ancestral history of wild horses in North America, or chooses to ignore it. Scientists claim that the wild mustang is clearly a case of an indigenous animal, temporarily displaced, that returned to its place of origin. Fossil and other evidence proves that ancestral horses were in Canada long before the earliest Europeans arrived on the continent. When the Europeans came, the wild horses they encountered were hugely important in the development of the Prairies, and before that,

they were of great significance to Natives on the Prairies, the foundation of the bison-hunting culture. That is why Alberta's last few wild mustangs should be protected, as a national heritage treasure.

Protective legislation would confirm and enshrine their historical significance, before they vanish altogether. Their gene pool is already dangerously diminished and without protection, the last herd seems doomed. There are about 8,000 wild mustangs in the United States, mostly on land controlled by the Bureau of Land Management. Those animals are also genetically almost identical to the original

Spanish mustangs. A wild mustang protection initiative in Canada could conceivably contemplate translocating some of the surviving American wild mustangs to supplement our waning population.

Whatever its components, wild horse protection in Alberta is long overdue. There is something irresponsible about passing along to succeeding generations a wild fauna that is diminished in diversity, and it is currently impossible to bring back a wildlife species after it is gone.

If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions please contact Feral.Horses@gov.ab.ca.

W.H.O.A.S

A great acronym! WHOAS stands for the Wild Horses of Alberta Society. Its mission "is to ensure the provisions of all aspects of the conservation and humane treatment of free roaming horses in Alberta." It has five specific objectives: 1) protection; 2) sanctuary; 3) management; 4) education; 5) community.

WHOAS has a fine website (www.northernhorses.com/wildhorses/) with much more information for those who "care about the heritage and plight of these remarkably beautiful, free-roaming wild



WHOAS

horses." The group suggests that you "write to your MLA letting him/her know of your concerns for the plight of these horses." Also: "Write to Ted Morton asking for changes to the current legislation", with a "cc" to the Premier.

WHOAS can be contacted at Box 614, Didsbury AB, T0M 0W0, or by emailing President Bob Henderson: bob1603@telusplanet.net.

First Hand: Encounters of a Grizzly Kind

BY LILI DEBARBIERI

*I had come to Alberta to work on a behavioral study of the Columbian Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus columbianus*). Since our field station was located deep within Sheep River Provincial Park, staff made weekly trips into town to gather supplies and enjoy civilization.*

One bleak, spring morning, while stranded near the park entrance with an incapacitated vehicle, three of us waited for a tow truck or someone from the field site for rescue. Eventually, we flagged a visitor down. As the man opened the side door of his truck, cigarette smoke spewed forth. After only heckling us over our predicament, he left.

Next up, a hunter inexplicably inquired “have you seen a moose?” After asking this all important question, he drove off, also uninterested in our mess.

Trying to keep our bodies warm and fatigued minds occupied, we cursed our luck. Suddenly, as snow began to fall, a grizzly bear appeared behind us. Most likely, it was there to investigate the visitor centre garbage.

There is something inherently terrifying in the name “grizzly”. The word conjures up images of bloodlust and ferocity; “black” or even “polar” does not pack the same primal punch. City girl

that I am, no one was more fearful of these animals; nightmare had become reality.

Calmly and clearly we repeated: “go away”, “go back into the



All about Grizzlies:

Grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) are a wide-ranging species found in the Arctic, western Canada and the north-western United States. Larger than black bears (*Ursus americanus*) and ranging in color from blonde to brown, grizzlies have a distinctive shoulder hump and facial disk. Grizzly bears are mostly herbivores, although they may have a varied diet. Occasionally garbage, livestock, and grains serve as food sources from a

habitat shared with humans. Due to their slow reproductive rate, grizzlies take several years to reach maturity, and have small litter sizes with long intervals between litters. Cubs are born in January or February and remain with their mother for 2-5 years.

Increased human access to bear territory, primarily through roads, adds to the frequency of contact and potential conflict between humans and bears, and is the greatest threat to grizzly livelihood to date. Studies suggest Alberta may have less than 700 grizzlies, though there is no reliable estimate.

[Editor’s note: The Grizzly Recovery Team, which was recently dismissed by the Alberta Government, found them to be a Threatened species-at-risk. A few recovery efforts are underway to try to stave off extirpation; sadly, there is still considerable foot-dragging and avoidance of protection.]

Lili DeBarbieri is a freelance travel writer specializing in adventure travel, volunteer vacations and wildlife. Previous credits include Alabama Living and Transitions Abroad. Contact her at tora_yuri04@yahoo.com

First Hand: Encounters of a Grizzly Kind... continued

forest”, simultaneously backing off in the opposite direction. With a terrified look that conveyed “three human creatures within close proximity!” the bear wasted no time retreating down the road.

At no time, during or since, was my impression that of someone who had narrowly escaped from the “clutches of death”. Nevertheless, I was more than willing to give the bear some space! Had we stayed near the visitor centre for just a few seconds more, this encounter may have proved much more disastrous without the same space and opportunity for both parties to move away.

Awestruck by this dominant yet vulnerable creature, we looked on as a brown speck diminished on the horizon, wondering what afternoon might bring.

If you have a first-hand experience with nature, send it in and share it with other naturalists. After all – there are 8 million stories in the nature city. Yours... could be one of them.



WHAT TO DO WHEN....

Bears in general react to humans in various, unpredictable ways depending on the animal's sex, age, health, the season, whether cubs are nearby, or if there is an escape route available. Although far from the ferocious man-killers depicted in the media, grizzlies can be dangerous, particularly when surprised. Alberta's BearSmart program recommends following these basic rules to stay safe:

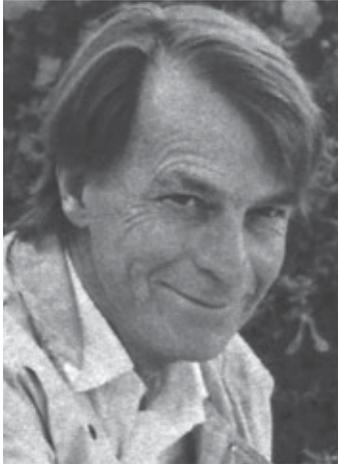
- Assess the situation. Is it a black bear or a grizzly? Are there cubs, and where are they in relation to you and the bear?
- Do not make any sudden moves or loud noises. Avoid direct eye contact with the bear.
- Talk quietly while slowly backing up; always give a bear enough opportunity and space to leave on its own.
- Never run from a bear. A bear will often make a “bluff” charge, only to turn away at the last moment. Running away will trigger a more aggressive response.
- In the rare event of an attack—cover your neck and head, roll into a “cannonball” position and play dead until the bear leaves.
- However, if attacked at night, consider it predatory in nature and fight back!
- All things considered, stay in groups when in the wilderness. A group of people is far less likely to be attacked than an individual.

USFWS, CHRIS SERVHEEN



In Memoriam

BY DON LEMNA



Garry Newton

Garry Newton, a longtime member of the Grasslands Naturalists and contributor to Nature Alberta, passed away suddenly, on May 15 2008, in Medicine Hat AB.

He is survived by his mother Phyllis Newton and his special friend and partner, Elwood Amundson.

Garry was born July 2 1939 in the City of York, in Yorkshire, and came to Medicine Hat with his parents in 1948. He attended the University of Alberta and finished his science degree (zoology) at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

As a young man, Garry traveled extensively, seeing large parts of North America, Europe, Central America and Australia. He lived on the Island of Rhodes for several years and often spoke of his time in Greece with pleasure and enthusiasm. He worked in Australia for about a year before returning to North America.

Garry was passionately interested in nature. He enjoyed his active involvement with the Grasslands Naturalists and made many good friends in the Society. He contributed in a major way to the creation of the book *Prairie*

River. He enjoyed making the necessary field trips along the river in order to make the detailed observations required to complete the book's illustrations and maps.

He was a great gardener, but that could not quite rival his affection for birds. Birding was the great hobby of his life. He was constantly observing them: through the kitchen window, tramping around the sloughs of southern Saskatchewan with Elwood, on the open prairie – everywhere he went.

He loved reading. He'd read – and knew them well – most of the world classics and Nobel prize winners in literature, even Thomas Mann. He was quite taken with South American writers and magic realism; Gabriel Marquez was one of his favourites.

He had a great sense of humour, but he did prefer quiet humour – irony and wit, especially. Easily bored by certain subjects, he preferred to discuss the things he was interested in – such as evolution, genetics, books, movies, flowers, art and mathematics. He possessed a strong character and was solid and reliable. Those

things which he set out to master, he truly mastered. When he and his partner Elwood decided to learn marquetry together, they entered the craft fully and proceeded, step-by-step, until after a few years, they were producing perfect and beautiful marquetry pieces.

Garry was first and foremost a committed artist. Art was central to his life. He drew. He taught drawing. He painted. He did watercolours and other things as well, but etchings were his main course. His etchings were of a very distinct kind – very unusual – and they ranged over a wide variety of subjects and topics, reflecting the many intricate corridors of his mind. His major production, which took years to complete, is the bound book “Album Casares,” which reflects his fascination with South America. It is a colossal piece of work, full of magnificent prints produced by the laborious process of etchings.

We will all miss Garry dreadfully, but we have some consolation ... Although his wry smile, unruly hair and physical presence may be gone, some greater part of Garry remains with us. He's still here in our memories of him, and his spirit is still fully present, in and among the beautiful things he created during his lifetime.

Hot Day, Cool Moose!

BY SANDRA HAWKINS

Waterton Lakes National Park offers great diversity of habitat in a relatively small package.

While seeking respite from the summer's heat one day last July, we drove the 16 km Akamina Parkway from Waterton town site to Cameron Lake, 400 metres higher and, invariably, much cooler. From the Cameron Lake parking lot, an easy 0.5 km (one way) trail, situated amidst tall evergreens and Spanish Moss, leads to Akamina Lake. If one is quiet, a surprise often awaits the patient observer. The lake is shallow, warm and very sheltered. On this idyllic afternoon, a cow Moose (*Alces alces*) and her calf were enjoying the day. See the photos on the inside back cover!

The cow appeared first. She proceeded to feed, head under water with much splashing, shaking and ear wiggling. After some soft grunting sounds, her calf exited the forest and flopped down on the shore with legs extended out front and ears constantly a-swirl against menacing gnats.

Although we stood in knee deep water for over an hour, the calf never did venture into the lake. Instead, it fell asleep behind tall grasses and disappeared from sight. The cow continued to feed and allowed us to photograph her.

SANDRA HAWKINS



Sandra Hawkins grew up in the Red River Valley of Manitoba, completed undergraduate degrees in Winnipeg, then attended the Universities of Wisconsin (MS: geomorphology/ historical geography) and Toronto/ ROM (MMS: Master of Museum Studies).

After teaching college-level math and English for several years, a lifetime love of nature demanded greater fulfillment. Photography became the avenue for preserving memories of days passed amidst wild places. Part of each summer is usually spent in Alberta. Although she has travelled to every corner of the province, one of her favourite locations for photography is Waterton Lakes National Park and its adjacent prairie. Sandra now lives in Etobicoke ON.

Up Close Naturally: Bees and more Bees!

BY MARGOT HERVIEUX

On sunny days, the dandelions in my backyard are abuzz with bees thoroughly probing the flowers. Bees are one of our most common pollinators and many different kinds can be spotted visiting blossoms.

If you think that spring bees look bigger than summer bees, you are absolutely right. For most bees and wasps, only the queens over-winter so the big ones we see early in the season are queens. Once they start laying eggs and producing daughters, the queens stay in the hive and the smaller workers take over the food gathering tasks.

Unlike their carnivorous cousins the wasps, the majority of bees live on nectar and pollen. Flowers produce nectar for the sole purpose of attracting insects or birds that might carry pollen to other blooms. Not only do bees transfer large amounts of pollen as they gather the offered nectar, they also actively collect pollen to feed their growing larvae.

Most of the bees we see are honey bees, either domestic or wild, but there is a variety of other bees that live in our woods and fields. The most familiar are the bumble bees. These large, furry bees live underground in abandoned mouse and vole holes. There, the colony of only a few dozen bees raises more

bees and stores small amounts of honey in little mud pots.

A less well known bee is the digger bee. These solitary bees dig out a series of chambers in sand or other light soils. A small mass of nectar and pollen is placed at the end of each chamber and then an egg is added. The larvae live on the food left by their mothers and then over-winter as adults before emerging in the spring.

Mason bees are also solitary bees but they create chambers for their eggs by lining holes in tree bark with mud. Another bee, the introduced leaf-cutter, builds compartments for its eggs out of tiny circles they cut from leaves.

The life of a bee is full of risks. Birds regularly include them in their diets and crab spiders capture them when they visit flowers. Bees are also killed in large numbers by vehicles and by pesticides



Margot's column first appeared in the Peace Country Sun. Archived copies of past columns are available at www.peacecountrysun.com.

Up Close Naturally... continued

aimed at problem insects. Most recently, colonies of honey bees are being wiped out by disease and parasitic mites, and commercial honey production across the continent is seriously threatened.

To many of us, anything black and yellow is just plain scary, but our lives would



be very different without bees. As one of the world's most important groups of pollinators, bees ensure the production of a wide variety of food and

forage crops. They are also the only known source of honey, a product I certainly wouldn't want to do without.

TOURS FOR NATURALISTS

YUKON & DEMPSTER HIGHWAY

Tour III, 19-29 June 2008 (11 days) Tour IV, 1-11 July 2008 (11 days)
Cost \$2900 + GST (dbl occup) from Whitehorse

The Yukon is a fabled land whose very name evokes archetypal images of wilderness and a frontier populated by colourful characters. It is a land of untrammelled wilderness and the midnight sun, the immortal characters, real and imagined, of the Klondike gold rush, Sam McGee and Diamond Tooth Gertie, the heroic men of the Northwest Mounted Police, and the inspiring sentiments of the bard of the Yukon, Robert Service. On this tour we will experience both the natural and human landscapes of this fascinating and beautiful land, visiting **the Klondike, the Dempster Highway, the Mackenzie Delta, and the Arctic Ocean.**

The heart of our adventure is the drive up the Dempster Highway from Dawson City to Inuvik. The Dempster, 750 kms of good gravel, is the only public road in North America that extends north of the Arctic Circle. Along its route we cross two mountain ranges, traverse wild river valleys, muskeg and tundra, and cross the mighty Mackenzie River on a ferry. **At latitude 66N we cross the Arctic Circle and enter the Land of the Midnight Sun.** The Dempster is renowned as a naturalist's paradise with its varied and beautiful landscapes, large mammals, myriad wildflowers and much sought after birds such as **Gyr Falcon, Willow Ptarmigan, Long-tailed Jaeger, Hawk Owl, Wheatear and Smith's Longspur.** Join us on this adventure to the Land of the Midnight Sun, the big country immortalized by Robert Service.....the Yukon.

THE SUNSHINE COAST FOR NATURALISTS

21-25th July 2008 (5 days) Cost \$1525 + GST (dbl occup) from Vancouver
Price includes all meals

The Sunshine Coast exemplifies the best of coastal British Columbia as the temperate rainforest meets the blue of the Salish Sea in a confusion of magnificent fjords and green islands. We visit the Sunshine Coast's scenic highlights, including **a full day cruise to world famous Princess Louisa Inlet.** We also visit Jedediah Island and take a sunset cruise. Our base is the Rockwater Secret Cove Resort. **The Sunshine Coast's culinary offerings are an important part of this tour and we will sample the best available. All meals are included in the tour price.**



Spirit of the
Wilderness

Leaders: Tony Greenfield & Dr. Rand Rudland
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Spirit of the
Wilderness



FEATURE ARTICLE

Close to Home:

Nature Photography in Alberta

BY JOHN WARDEN



JOHN WARDEN

Of Grandmas and Big Horn Sheep

I remember my grandmother as being a really good spotter. On family vacations or evening drives out to Fox Lake near Hanna where she lived, she was always the first one to see a bird or an animal.

I suspect that she was simply trying to keep my brothers and me occupied so we wouldn't wrestle in the back seat. Regardless of the reason, our attention would be diverted from pummeling each other to see the hawk or gopher, coyote or antelope that she was pointing out on the Alberta prairie landscape. My own love for nature surely must come, in part, from

the times that she spent pointing it out to me.

My grandmother came with us on a family vacation when I was fifteen and we traveled the Icefield Parkway from Banff to Jasper. I have photographs from that trip of Mountain Goats (*Oreamnos americanus*) at the Kerkeslin Goat Lick.



JOHN WARDEN

At Tangle Ridge viewpoint, I have a shot of a Big Horn Ram (*Ovis canadensis*) with his head inside the window of our car. Fortunately, we have since learned not to feed or lure wild animals into our cars.

Forty years later, in June of this past year, I was coming down from the Bow Summit on the Parkway when – using my Grandma’s spotting skills – I noticed a ewe and

her lamb in a sunny meadow of spring flowers, just above a small waterfall. There was no one around when I stopped and got out of my car. The ewe was a bit nervous at first, so I lay down on my belly, using my forearms tripod-like to support my camera. It was spring and the ewe’s coat was shaggy and starting to come off. I log-rolled around the meadow to get to the best point of view and took around a hundred images before

capturing a shot of the lamb peering nervously at me from between his mother’s legs.

It was one of those Zen moments where everything came together and it was just me, the sheep, the wild flowers and the meadow. When I got the image I wanted, I stood up. There was a whole crowd of passers-by who had stopped to watch us. They started clapping and cheering, so perhaps they were



JOHN WARDEN

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

as impressed by the sheep and scenery as I was.

High mountain habitat shots of sheep in their natural rock face environment can be very dramatic. One of my favourites is of a ewe apparently trapped on a thin rocky ledge with no-where to go. She looks lost and vulnerable. After an hour or so though, she gathered up her courage and sprang away to safety.

Most tourists travel through the parks of Alberta during the

summer months when ewes and lambs are plentiful, but Big Horn Sheep can easily be found throughout the year. The rams come down out of the high country in the fall and by December they are in their 'rut' providing opportunities for action shots. January through March, after the rut, the rams can be photographed with battered and broken horns. In spring, their heavy winter coats are shedding and lambs are now part of families.

In Alberta, we can find Big Horn Sheep wherever the landscape is mountainous: Waterton, the Crowsnest Pass, the Highwood Pass, Kananaskis Country, Banff, the Icefield Parkway, Jasper, and along the David Thompson Highway from Rocky Mountain House to Saskatchewan River Crossing.

My Grandmother passed on many years ago, but what she taught me has remained. I have tried to teach my own children to appreciate nature. As they grew up we went 'tromping'

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

in the woods and hiking through dark and scary forest groves at night. We played traveling games of counting hawks and spotting animals in fields along the highway. When they were just little, we trekked along a steep and narrow ledge at Eagle Hill between Olds and Sundre and we explored old barns and haylofts where pigeons came thundering out and scared us all half to death. My

children are adults now, and my hope is that they will instill an appreciation of nature with their children. While I don't have grandchildren yet, when I do, I know of places 'close

to home' where I can point to a Big Horn Sheep and they can begin falling in love with the nature in Alberta.

JOHN WARDEN



Squirrels unfurled:

Columbians are not Prolific Breeders

BY THEODORE G. MANNO, DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES, 331 FUNCHESS HALL, AUBURN UNIVERSITY, AL 36849, USA (E-MAIL: MANNOTG@AUBURN.EDU)

*The Alberta Legislature recently considered legislation that endorsed the systematic extermination of “gophers” from Alberta, including Columbian Ground Squirrels (*Spermophilus columbianus*).*

Complete annihilation is considered impractical and unlikely, but sentiment from prior extermination efforts (e.g., Matschke et al. 1978; Askham 1985) has remained among many provincial citizens. The fervor revolves around two major concerns. First, because of possible competition with livestock, concern over Shaw's (1916) calculation that 385 *S. columbianus* consume as much

forage per day as one cow has apparently mounted over time. Second, and even more notably, ranchers grumble that the rodents are prolific breeders, destined to ravage agricultural land unabated as their colonies grow indefinitely.

Are Columbian Ground Squirrels the fast-breeding enemies that some agriculturalists allege? Results from my ongoing study on free-ranging Columbian

Ground Squirrels along the Gorge Creek Trail in Sheep River Provincial Park (50° 38' N, 114° 38' W, elev. 1500 m) suggest that, in fact, Columbians replace themselves quite slowly under natural conditions.

Columbian Ground Squirrels are diurnal, herbivorous, and colonial rodents

(Elliott & Flinders 1991). Females live in stationary clusters of kin that are overlapped by the territory of a reproductive male. Gestation is about 24 days; lactation is about 27 days and occurs underground. Weaned juveniles appear aboveground in mid-June. The squirrels at Gorge Creek are of known age, identity, and matrilineal genealogy, and my observations commenced in the spring of 2006 at colony DOT.

I trap Columbians shortly after emergence from hibernation in early to mid-April. After trapping, I usher subjects into a cloth bag, restrain them by hand, weigh them with a spring balance, and fit them with numbered metal fingerling eartags for long-term identification (National Band & Tag Co., Newport, KY). For visual identification from a distance, I paint each animal with a unique symbol using black dye (Lady Clairol Hydrience; Proctor and Gamble, Stamford, CT). Assisted by 4-m-high towers and 10x42 binoculars, trained field assistants and I observe



THEODORE MANNO

Squirrels unfurled: Columbians are not Prolific Breeder...continued

Columbians from dawn to dusk during a 3-week breeding season in April-May, and for about 8 hours daily until July.

I consider males to be reproductive if I observe them copulate or if they exhibit a pigmented scrotum and large descended testes at the time of trapping (non-breeding males lack these characteristics). I identify a female as breeding if I observe her copulate or if she is lactating (with long, turgid nipples) in May or June (Manno 2007).

I use the established methods to discriminate between females that fail to wean a litter and females that aborted their pregnancy before giving birth (Michener 1985). Maternity of litters is easy to establish because female Columbians rear their young in separate nursery burrows. Using the methods of Hoogland (2001), I surround nursery burrows with traps immediately following the first emergence of juveniles aboveground. Thus, I capture and mark all littermates before they co-mingle with juveniles from other litters.



FIGURE 1. COLUMBIAN GROUND SQUIRRELS INHABIT MOST OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA. CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, THEY ARE NOT PROLIFIC BREEDERS. THE JUVENILE PICTURED HERE (NAMED "CHEEKY") WAS BORN FROM A LITTER OF 2 JUVENILES IN 2007, AND PROBABLY HAS ONLY A 50/50 CHANCE OF SURVIVING TO 2008. THEODORE MANNO

My data indicate that, in four ways, Columbians reproduce more moderately than often assumed by the general public. First, female Columbians come into a single annual estrus and are sexually receptive for several hours on only one day during the three-week breeding period. Consequently, no female weans more than one litter per year. Second, both sexes defer breeding until after their first year. Specifically, females never copulate before their second breeding period, and males are not sexually active until their third, sometimes fourth year of life (Fig. 2). Thus, on an annual basis, about one-quarter of females and two-thirds of males on the colony do

not copulate. Third, less than three-fourths of females that copulate wean a litter ($65/90 = 72.2\%$). About one-tenth ($11/90 = 12.2\%$) of these females copulate but abort before giving birth, and others lose their litter sometime during lactation. Fourth, weaned litters usually contain only 2-3 pups (avg.: 2.6 ± 0.1 pups per litter, $N = 65$ litters; Fig. 3), and most of these pups do not live to become yearlings. For 33 pups weaned in 2005, only 20 (60.6%) were still alive in 2006; for the 89 pups that were weaned in 2006, the percentage that were alive in the next year was even lower (28 survived = 31.4%). Most of the perished pups disappeared during winter hibernation ($62/64 =$

Squirrels unfurled: Columbians are not Prolific Breeders...continued

96.9%); one was taken as prey by a raven (*Corvus corax*), and the other was killed by another study animal and cannibalized (Manno 2007).

These results for 2 years of study are consistent with the long-term findings of those before me for *S. columbianus* (Elliott & Flinders 1991), and they indicate that Columbian Ground Squirrels are not prolific breeders. Unlike many species of small rodents and rabbits, which multiply quickly and may therefore interfere drastically with agriculture (Tamarin 1985), these data suggest that Columbians may not be capable of such epidemics. Since the study colony contains plentiful vegetation and is probably favorable

for squirrel reproduction, my results are probably indicative of reproductive tendencies for *S. columbianus* under natural conditions. Indeed, delayed sexual maturation and production of only 1 litter per year are also characteristics of other ground squirrels and prairie dogs (Sherman 1989; Hoogland 2001). Most notably, this comparison applies to Richardson's Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus richardsonii*) (Michener 1985), a species that is also often credited with multiplying unabated and destroying land in Alberta.

Perhaps because pups from different litters mingle atop burrow mounds and create the illusion of large size (Hoogland 2001), or because Shaw's (1916)

compromises the ability of many agriculturalists to view ground squirrels objectively, ground squirrels are alleged to be our enemies. According to some, Columbian and Richardson's Ground Squirrels, along with other burrowing rodents, are prolific breeders that vanquish forage and must be exterminated systematically and immediately (e.g., Randall 1976; Montana Dept. of Ag. 2006). However, the "gopher-occupied" land at Gorge Creek contains thigh-high grass during summer—at least until the cattle are shuttled into the park for their requisite foraging. I suggest that perhaps the flexibly-living squirrels are the result, rather than the cause, of fields that are barren and brown.

I cannot argue that ground squirrels are always harmless to farmers and

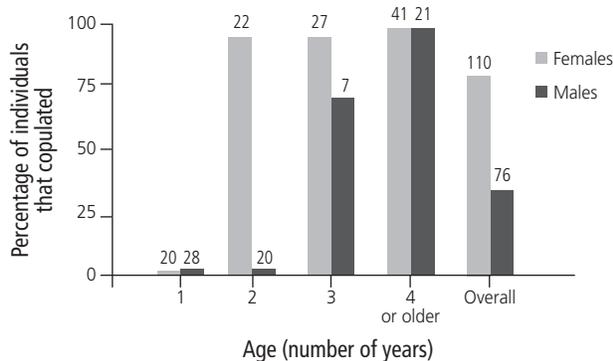


Figure 2. Age versus percentage of individuals that copulated (male and female) for Columbian Ground Squirrels at colony DOT in Sheep River Provincial Park, 2006-2007. Females deferred breeding until their second year, and male delayed until 3-4 years after their birth. The numbers on top of the bars represent the number of individuals in the sample.

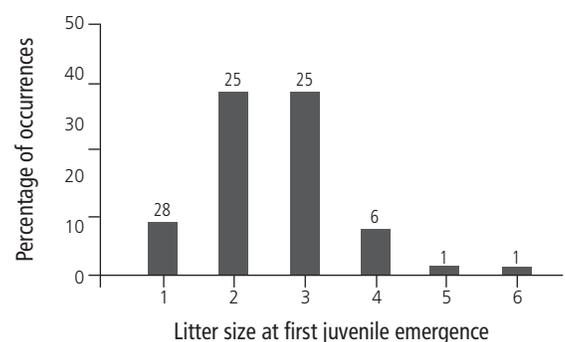


Figure 3. Litter size at first juvenile emergence for Columbian Ground Squirrels at colony DOT in Sheep River Provincial Park, 2006-2007. The most common litter sizes were 2 or 3. The numbers on top of the bars represent the number of individuals in the corresponding litter size category.



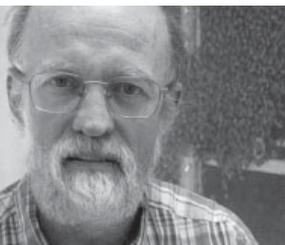
ranchers. However, my results show four factors that impede reproduction in Columbians, and comparisons with literature suggest that the same factors probably slow reproduction in Richardson's as well. If ground squirrels are not prolific breeders, then they are unlikely to multiply unabated and destroy agricultural land quickly. Thus, recent attempts to eradicate ground squirrels from Alberta entirely on account of their alleged reproductive prowess seem inappropriate, misguided, and impractical. I urge the public to examine such evidence closely,

Squirrels unfurled: Columbians are not Prolific Breeders...continued

as a compromise between agriculturalists and naturalists in Alberta will be more realistic and effective if based objectively.

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Gerald Hilchie Wins!

In the Spring '08 *Nature Alberta*, readers were tested to identify a bumblebee and the flower it was visiting; the photo was on the inside front cover. The first to do so was Gerald Hilchie, of Edmonton. For his efforts, Gerald wins a year's subscription to *Nature Alberta*. Gerald wrote:

"The bumble bee on the flower appears to be a queen Bombus ternarius Say, because it has a dark head; a similar species, Bombus huntii Green, has the same body pattern but has yellow hair on the vertex of the head. Both species are found in Alberta. The flower being visited is Golden Bean, Thermopsis rhombifolia (Nutt.) Richards, a common spring prairie flower of the pea family."

It pays to read every single page of *Nature Alberta*!



Eighth Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee

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

Year of Remarkable Growth!

It was another year of remarkable growth for The Official List of the Birds of Alberta. With the addition of Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*), Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*), Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) and Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) in this report, the list of species known to have occurred historically in Alberta grows to 413 species, 13 more than only a few years ago (2002) (Hudon 2005). Since the creation of the Alberta Bird Record Committee (ABRC) in 1994, an

average of two new species have been discovered in the province annually, clearly a pace that is not sustainable.

Since publication of the Seventh Report of the ABRC (Hudon et al. 2007), the Alberta Bird Record Committee has reviewed and reached decisions on 95 records, including several sightings of rare loons, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Northern Parulas from the backlog of un-adjudicated records from the 1980s and 1990s.

The Fork-tailed Flycatcher record is the same sighting that was not accepted in an earlier report

(Slater 1999). It is now accepted based on newly unearthed documentation, as well as an improved knowledge of the species' patterns of vagrancy (Lockwood 1999).

Finally, the provincial list is amended to bring it in line with the 48th supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union's "Checklist of North American Birds" (Banks et al. 2007). This entailed returning the Turkey Vulture to the Falconiformes, and returning the scientific name of the Belted Kingfisher to *Megaceryle alcyon* from *Ceryle alcyon*.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), near Taber; 6 – 26 May 1990; 1 slide (Lloyd Bennett), also photo in *American Birds* 44: 445 (1990) and *Alberta Naturalist* 25(1): 12 (1993). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Photographic documentation was produced, elevating the level of support to Code 1 from Code 2 (Slater and Hudon 2004). Near Taber; 25 July 1991; 1 slide (Lloyd Bennett) and brief description in *Alberta Naturalist* 25(1): 12 (1993). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Photographic documentation was produced, elevating the level of support to Code 1 from Record Insufficiently Documented (Slater and Hudon 2004). Near Taber; 17 May – 7 June 1993; 2 slides (Lloyd Bennett) and brief description in *Alberta Naturalist* 25(1): 12 (1993). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Photographic documentation was produced, elevating the level of support to Code 1 from Code 3 (Slater and Hudon 2004).

Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), English Bay, Cold Lake; 21 – 26 October 2005; image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! photos (Ted Hindmarch). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 3 November 2006; written report (Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Two at Carburn Park, Calgary; 5 November 2006; and downstream from Glenmore Bridge; 6 November 2006; written reports (Tanya Barkauskas, Jim H. Davis), the first with an image. Possibly the bird seen a few days earlier. **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*), Ghost Reservoir; 27 October 2002; 1 slide (Bill Walker). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Bow River at Morley; 15 – 30 October 2005; written report with 3 images (Joan & Malcolm McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Two Jack Lake, Banff National Park; 19 September

2006; written description (Jason Rogers). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Clear Lake, near Stavely; 8 – 9 July 2007; brief description posted on Albertabird (Bill Wilson). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), NE arm of Railway Slough, SE of Irricana; 13 October 1991; written report (Reid Barclay). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Ghost Reservoir; 11 – 13 November 1992; written reports (Ray Wershler, Ross Dickson, Terry Korolyk), the second with sketch. **CODE 2 RECORD**. Rescued from a freezing North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton; 20 December 1992; photo in *American Birds* 47: 485 (1993) and past notes on slide and video material (Jocelyn Hudon). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Bruce Lake; 15 May 1993; written report with drawing (Gwynn Chovel). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Seebe Dam; 11 November 1993;

RECORDS ACCEPTED...continued

written report and notes (Terry Korolyk). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Ghost Reservoir; 12 November 1993; written report (Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Immature, Cold Lake; 2 November 1996; 2 images posted on Albertabird Yahoo! photos (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Glenmore Reservoir, Calgary; 11 November 1998; written report with sketch (Andrew Slater). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Immature, Glenmore Reservoir, Calgary; 29 October – 7 November 2000; 3 slides (Bill Walker). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Lake Wabamun; 13 – 14 November 2004; written reports (Terry Thormin, Kevin Hannah). **CODE 2 RECORD.** Immature, spillway below Dickson Dam, W of Innisfail; 7 December 2004 to at least 5 January 2005; written report with 4 images (Brian Ritchie), 2 images posted on Albertabird Yahoo! photos (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*), Vermilion Lakes, Banff, Banff National Park; 21 March 2006; written report (Ross Dougherty). **CODE 3 RECORD.** "Canadian Wilds" section of Calgary Zoo, Calgary; 19 – 29 August 2006; written report (Dwight Knapik). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*), pair in Wild Horse area; 26 April 2006; written descriptions (Dennis Burns, Jason Rogers), 4 digital images of pair at nest in the area (Brian Ritchie). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*), Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 28 – 30 March 2006; written report with sketches (Ray Wershler), written reports (Eric Tull, Mike Mulligan), brief descriptions posted on Albertabirds (Bill Wilson, John Bregar). **CODE 2 RECORD.** Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 12 – 19 November 2006; two digital images (Bill Walker), five images posted on Albertabird Yahoo! photos (Rob Worona [4], Brian Elder [1]). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*), Lake Minnewanka, Banff National Park; most of August 2007; written report (Jason Rogers and Mike McIvor) and 4 digital images (Michael Shuster), 2 images posted on Albertabird Yahoo! photos (Alan Fishkin). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*), NW Calgary; 27 April 2006; two photographs (Holle Hahn). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Medicine Hat; from late October to about third week of November 2007; several images (Ron Chaykowski). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), found dead south of Coaldale; 2 November 2006; specimen brought to Alberta Birds of Prey Centre in Coaldale and donated to The Royal Alberta Museum (accession number Z06.1.14). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Found dead at farm W of High River; 8 November 2006; specimen donated to The Royal Alberta Museum by Don and Joyce Moore (accession Z08.8.4). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*), Cypress Hills Provincial Park (E of Reesor Lake, above Battle Creek); 17 June 1987; written report (Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Cypress Hills Provincial Park (E of Reesor Lake); 17 June 2001; written report (Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Near Purple Springs; 10 July 2005; written report (Lloyd Bennett). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Cypress Hills Provincial Park (along Reesor Lake Road); 8 August 2006; written report (Dwight Knapik). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*), picked up in downtown Calgary; 6 October 2006; turned in to the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation in Madden; 3 images (Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation). **CODE 1 RECORD.** *First documented occurrence in the province.*

Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), Brule (hamlet); 21 June 2007; written report (Linda Morgan) and 8 digital images (Beth MacCallum). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), Lake Minnewanka, Banff National Park; 16 – 18 June 1985; 2 images (Diane McIvor). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Lake Louise (hamlet); 14 and 15 June 1994; images and transcription of field notes (Mike Potter). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Carburn Park, Calgary; 9 – 14 August 1996; 1 slide (Bill Walker) and written report with sketch (J.B. Steeves). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Police Point Park, Medicine Hat; from mid-February to late Fall 1996; written report (Ben Velnor *vide* Dennis Baresco). **CODE 2 RECORD.** About 75 km north of Hinton; 10 June 1997; brief description in Schaffer (1997). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Wardlow; 4 June 2004; written report and 2 images (Jerry Pilny). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Onefour; 4 June 2004; 3 digital images (Jason Duxbury). **CODE 1 RECORD.** N of Jenner; 1 July 2004; written

report (Dwight Knapik). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Near Etzikom; 16 July 2004; written report with 2 images (Joan & Malcolm McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Near Crowfoot Ferry on the Bow River; 26 June 2007; 8 digital images (Tim Schowalter). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*), near Sundre; about 1 – 9 July 2006; 14 digital images (Gerrit Wyna). **CODE 1 RECORD.** *First documented occurrence in the province.*

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), Ponoka; from 1 October 2007 to about 15 April 2008; several photographs (Judy Boyd [2], Murray Mackay [6]). **CODE 1 RECORD.** *First documented occurrence in the province.*

Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*), Pyramid Corrals, Jasper, Jasper National Park; from 14 May 2007 to about 15 June 2007; two written reports and several images (Anne Williams [4], Karen Metz [1]), brief description (Jason Rogers). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*), near Fairview; 26 May 1998; brief description (Ken Dies). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Near Water Valley; 10 and 11 June 2000; written report (Doug Collister) with 9 images (Peter Sherrington). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Kinbrook Island Provincial Park; 30 May 2004; written report (Yousif Attia). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Edmonton; 18 May 2006; written description posted on Albertabird (Thomas J. Simonsen). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Access road to Dinosaur Provincial Park; 20 – 21 May 2007; written report and 2 images (Milton Spitzer); video on web [http://www.webfoundations.com/webfx/RareBirds/Scissor-tailed%20Flycatcher.wmv] (Brooke Clibbon). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Pakowki Lake, along SR 885 south of Etzikom; 8 – 9 June 2007; written report with 3 images (Joan and Malcolm McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*), Drumheller; 1 June 1988; written description (Jim Wedgwood) and articles in *Alberta Bird Record* 6(4): 118–119 (1988) and *Blue Jay* 47(2): 113–117 (1989). **CODE 3 RECORD.** *First documented occurrence in the province.* New information elevates the level of support to Code 3 from Record Insufficiently Documented (Slater 1999).

RECORDS ACCEPTED...continued

Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*), Mountain View; 11 – 12 October 2007; written report and 4 digital images (Nancy West). **CODE 1 RECORD**. *First documented occurrence in the province.*

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*Poecile rufescens*), Jasper, Jasper National Park; from late November 2006 to at least 9 March 2007; 4 digital images (Doug Faulder), written report (Jim H. Davis). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*), Lethbridge; 14 September 2006; written report with 3 images (Doug and Teresa Dolman). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Claresholm; 22 – 25 May 2007; written report (Jason Attwell). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) near Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary, SW of Edmonton; 24 May 2004; written report and 3 images captured from video (Michelle and Curtis Manly). **CODE 1 RECORD**. E of Wild Horse; between 25 June and 25 July 2006; written report with images of adults, eggs in nest, nestlings and fledglings (Geoff Holroyd). Two unhatched [unfertilized] eggs donated to The Royal Alberta Museum (accession

Z06.5.1). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Near Rolling Hills; 23 May 2007; brief description posted on Albertabird (Bill Wilson). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Northern Parula (*Parula americana*), Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park; 23 May 1985; written description (Doug Collister). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 15 August 1995; written report (Olga Droppo). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Park Lake Provincial Park; 25 August 1998; written report with field notes (Doug and Teresa Dolman). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Cominco Natural Area, SE Calgary; 8 September 2000; written report with 6 images (Ross Dickson). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Sandy Beach, NW of Edmonton; 28 October 2000; window kill donated to The Royal Alberta Museum by Marilyn Shinyei (accession Z00.27.1). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*), Weaselhead area of Glenmore Park, Calgary; 8 September 2007; written report (Richard Clarke). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), Airdrie; 22 and 25 May 2007; several images and video sequences (Jeffrey Casey [7 + 3]; Sheelagh Schulze [9]). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*), Warner Stables, Banff National Park; 21 May 2007; brief description (Reno Sommerhalder). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*), near Picture Butte; 1 May 2006; 2 digital images (Marianne Klok). **CODE 1 RECORD**. NW Calgary; 28 – 29 May 2006; two images (Terry Korolyk). **CODE 1 RECORD**. W Lethbridge; 26 May – 1 June 2007; written report, copy of field notes and 4 images (Teresa and Doug Dolman). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*), Bashaw; 4 May 2006; one digital image (Ron King); another image posted in *Edmonton Journal* on May 9, 2006 ("Painted Bunting pays visit to Bashaw" by Scott Hornby). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*), W of Rocky Mountain House; from 28 May to at least 6 June 2004; written report and 5 photographs (Melvin & Carol Kraft). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

RECORDS INSUFFICIENTLY DOCUMENTED

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), near Ponoka; 18 April 2006; brief written description (Murray Mackay).

Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*), female collected in what is now probably Jasper National Park in the spring or summer of 1826 by Thomas Drummond; illustration and text in *Fauna Boreali-Americana* (Swainson and Richardson 1831) and supporting documentation (Jason Rogers). Unfortunately, many uncertainties about this record prevent its acceptance. In Adolph Meadows, Jasper National Park; 23 January 1958; copy of Jasper National Park Wildlife Card #994.22.13.03 (A. Burstrom).

Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*), two females and 5 young of the year along "Chain Lakes Road", about 18 km N of Hanna; 25 September 2006; written report (Anne Williams and Gord Ruddy). This would be an exceptional record, considering that the species is not believed to have bred in the province since at least the 1930s. (Houston 2002).

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), Lesser Slave Lake across from the Bird Observatory; 5 July 1997; brief description (Jason Rogers).

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), Scotch Meadows, Banff National Park; 25 – 28 June 1996; written report (Brian Parker).

Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*), along Tyrrell Creek Trail, Banff National Park; 1 June 1991; brief description (Mike Potter *vide* Jason Rogers).

Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), Priddis Greens; 26 – 27 July 1995; written report (Lorraine Smith). Near Pine Coulee Dam in Willow Creek valley; between 25 May and 4 June 2007; written report (Bill Moore). Redwood Meadows; 31 May 2007; written report (Katherine Corkery and Hermann Teichtmeister). Redwood Meadows; 3 June 2007; written report (Katherine Corkery and Mimi Hurt).

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), SW Edmonton; 3 and 9 September 2007; written report (Marlene Kirwin) and correspondence with Jocelyn Hudon.

Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*), three on Bald Hills, Maligne Lake, Jasper National Park; 18 July 2006; written report (Hugh Dorrington).

Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*), Patricia Lake, Jasper, Jasper National Park; 2 September 2007; brief description (Dave Elphinstone).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), Banff Recreation Grounds, Banff National Park; early June 1993; brief description (Alan McDonald).

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*), Vermilion Lakes, Banff National Park; 30 August 1970; very brief description (Michael Perrone *vide* Jason Rogers).

ERROR IN IDENTIFICATION

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), near Yaha Tinda Ranch, W of Sundre; 2 September 1991; brief description (Ernie Ewaschuk). The species should not exhibit a red plumage at this time of year.

References

Banks, R.C., R. T. Chesser, C. Cicero, J.L. Dunn, A.W. Kratter, I.J. Lovette, P.C. Rasmussen, J.V. Remsen, Jr., J.D. Rising, and D.F. Stotz. 2007. Forty-eighth supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds. *Auk* 124:1109-1115.

Houston, S. 2002. Spread and disappearance of the Greater Prairie-Chicken, *Tympanuchus cupido*, on the Canadian Prairies and adjacent areas. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 116:1-21.

QUESTIONABLE ORIGIN

Smew (*Mergellus albellus*), wetland along Hwy 5 just E of Mountain View; 7 April 2007; 8 images and written report (Gary Kurtz).

Hudon, J. 2005. The Official List of the Birds of Alberta: now 400 species and counting... *Nature Alberta* 35(1):10-18.

Hudon, J., R. Klauke, R. Knapton, M.R. Lein, J. Riddell, B. Ritchie and R. Wershler. 2007. Seventh Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee. *Nature Alberta* 37(2):31-33.

Lockwood, M. W. 1999. Possible anywhere: Fork-tailed Flycatcher. *Birding* 31:126-139.

Swainson, W. and J. Richardson. 1831. *Fauna Boreali-Americana, or the Zoology of the Northern Parts of British America. Part Second: The Birds.* London: John Murray.

The authors are members of the Alberta Bird Record Committee, chaired by Jocelyn Hudon, Curator of Ornithology, The Royal Alberta Museum.

Ponderables

"If a man would move the world, he must first move himself."

-- SOCRATES

Schaffer, W. 1997. Red headed Woodpecker sighting north of Hinton, Alberta. *Alberta Naturalist* 27:69.

Slater, A. 1999. Second Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee. *Alberta Naturalist* 29(2):30-31.

Slater, A., and J. Hudon. 2004. Fifth Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee. *Nature Alberta* 34(1):15-18.

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.

Ponderables

"I'll say it a dozen times, people have to remember that the Oil Sands are owned by the people, they're not owned by the oil companies."

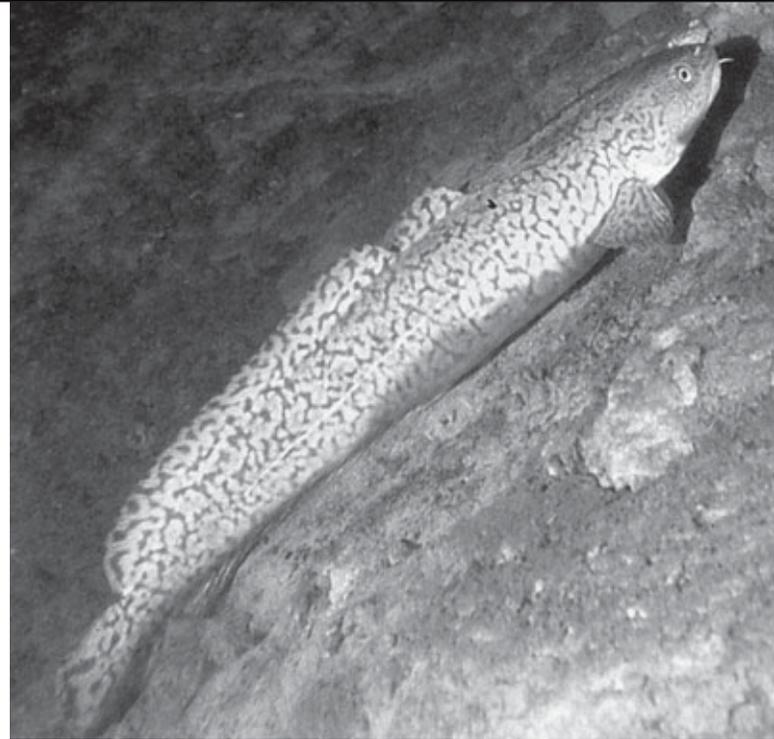
PETER LOUGHEED, PREMIER OF ALBERTA 1971-1985

Wildlife! Starring...

Burbot

BY DENNIS BARESCO

Burbot (Lota lota) is a rather odd-looking, eel-like fish: slim and elongated, with unusual fins, a flat head, wide mouth and a hanging barbel – a filament of tissue – under the jaw.



The maximum size of Burbot is eight-plus kilograms and about one metre in length.

Found throughout Canada (except Nova Scotia and the Atlantic islands), Alberta's Burbot are common, occurring in lakes and streams throughout most of Alberta, though rarely in the mountains. They prefer lake bottoms and cool water: they will not feed if the temperature is above 23°C.

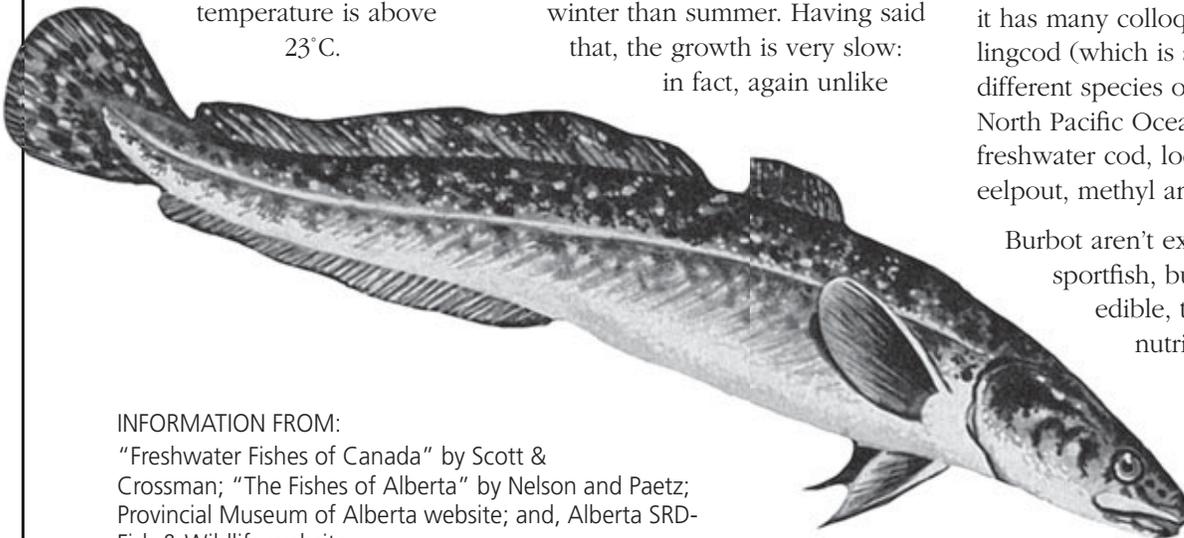
Night-feeding predators, they eat everything from fish eggs (they apparently have a fondness for whitefish eggs) to aquatic insects, smaller fish and even rodents.

Several quirks set Burbot apart from most fish. First, they spawn in winter (January to March) under the ice. After they reach maturity (at about three years of age), they grow faster in the winter than summer. Having said that, the growth is very slow: in fact, again unlike

most fish, growth is quite limited after maturity, even though they can live to be fifteen years old. Spawning – only at night – entails a writhing ball of ten to twelve individuals that moves over the bottom.

The barbel – used for touch and smell – has led people to call Burbot a catfish. It is not. In reality, it is a cod – the only true freshwater cod. Like many fish, it has many colloquial names: lingcod (which is actually a different species of fish in the North Pacific Ocean), ling, maria, freshwater cod, loche, lawyer, eelpout, methyl and lush.

Burbot aren't exactly a sportfish, but they are edible, tasty and nutritious.



INFORMATION FROM:

"Freshwater Fishes of Canada" by Scott & Crossman; "The Fishes of Alberta" by Nelson and Paetz; Provincial Museum of Alberta website; and, Alberta SRD-Fish & Wildlife website.

Illustrations from Wikipedia.

FAN Honours

6 Dedicated Albertans

Six naturalists were recently honoured for their unselfish dedication toward the conservation of Alberta's natural environment. The awards, given annually by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN), were handed out at the FAN banquet and AGM on Saturday April 26 in Edmonton.

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Three outstanding Volunteers were each presented with a 2007 Volunteer Award:

Dick Clayton of Edmonton:

For the tremendous amount of work done over the years as FAN's Membership Secretary and as *Nature Alberta's* Circulation Manager.

John McFaul of Calgary: For his continuing *Nature Alberta* column, his contribution to FAN's website, and assisting FAN in other activities.

Greg Wagner of High River: For furthering FAN's objectives in researching and assisting with some important issues of the day as well as past volunteerism.

HONOURARY LIFE MEMBER AWARD:

Dawn Dickinson

Dawn Dickinson, of Medicine Hat, was presented with the 2007 Honourary Life Member Award.



JOHN MCFAUL ACCEPTS HIS AWARD FROM OUT-GOING PRESIDENT SANDRA FOSS
VID BIJELIC

Ms Dickinson's commitment to the grasslands of southeastern Alberta has been nothing short of extraordinary, and she has worked with passion and dedication for the conservation of prairie habitat and wildlife. As a professional zoologist, Ms Dickinson's wide-ranging knowledge, expertise and skills have been vitally important in all the area's conservation initiatives. She has always exhibited a single-minded determination to base decisions on sound science and has never wavered nor been intimidated from abandoning her principles; as such, Ms Dickinson is widely respected for her credibility and integrity.

LOREN GOULDEN MEMORIAL AWARD:

Margot Hervieux

FAN's Loran Goulden Memorial Award was presented to Margot Hervieux of Grande Prairie. Ms



GREG WAGNER ACCEPTS HIS AWARD FROM OUT-GOING PRESIDENT SANDRA FOSS
VID BIJELIC

Hervieux, one of the founders of the Peace Parkland Naturalists, has been a vital part of FAN for 20 years. A writer and researcher, she is also a superb educator and nature interpreter, bringing awareness and understanding to children and adults about nature in Alberta.

FRANK AND ALICE HARPER MEMORIAL AWARD:

Lorna Allen

FAN introduced a new award this year, the Frank and Alice Harper Memorial Award (see Spring 2008, Vol 38, Number 1) – dedicated to a Lethbridge couple who worked ceaselessly to ensure the success of their local naturalist group. Recipient for 2007 was Lorna Allen of Edmonton. As a founding member, in 1986, of the Alberta Native Plant Council, Lorna was integral to the inception and development of the group and has logged a remarkable 22 years of dedicated volunteer service.

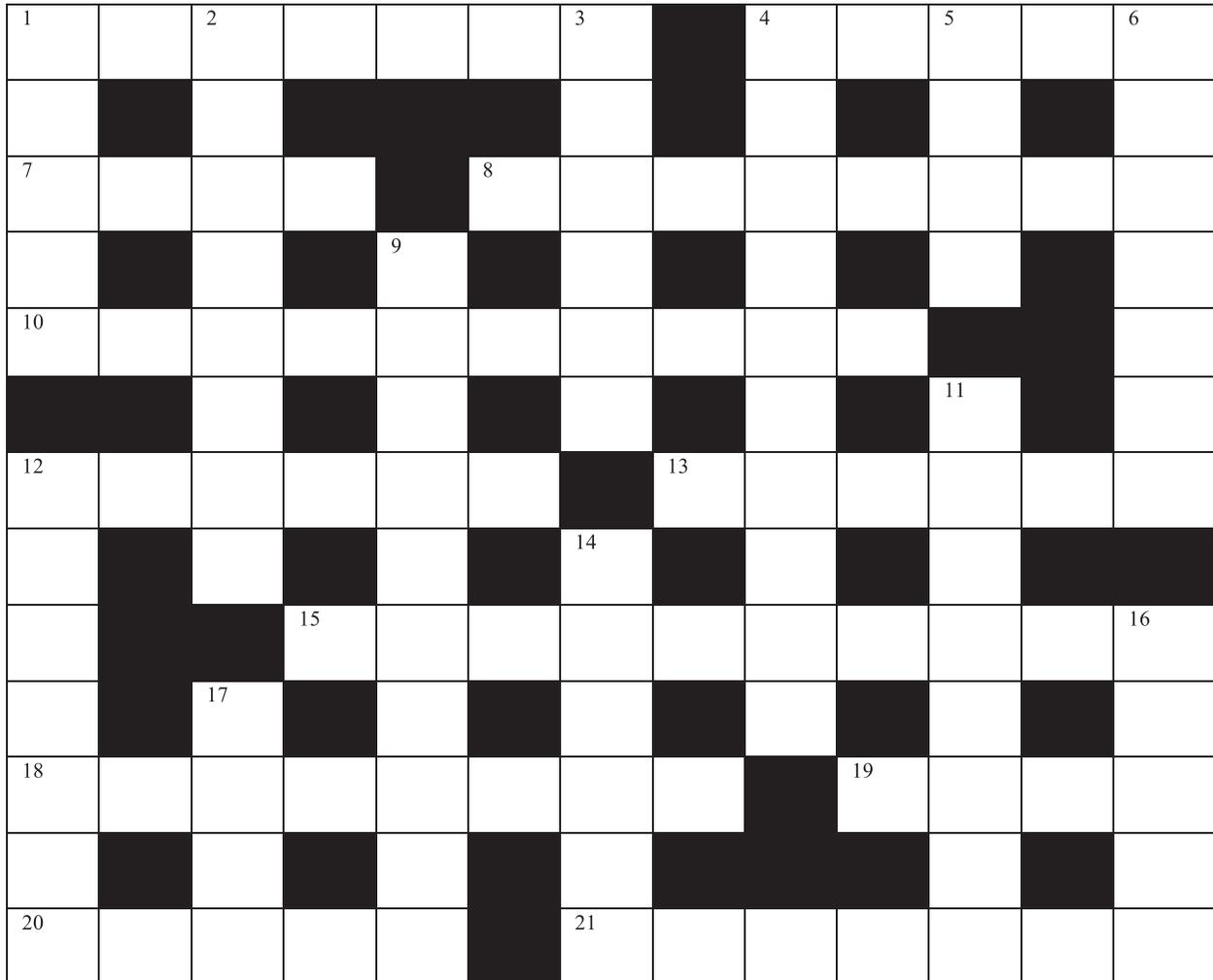


DAWN DICKINSON RECEIVING AWARD VID BIJELIC

NEWTON'S OCCASIONALLY CRYPTIC CROSSWORD!

#6

The sixth – and FINAL – crossword awaits you! Check the answers for #5 (in *Nature Alberta* Spring '08) on page 9.



ACROSS

1. A town in Palestine (7)
4. A piece of twill which might trouble a chameleon (5)
7. There's no end to a description of this pet (4)
8. Activity of spies and cartographers (8)
10. The bridge-player is usually better off if these aren't trumps (10)
12. Presumably he has an aim in life (6)
13. Donkey in the print-studio? (6)
15. But he may travel without papers (10)
18. It makes your paint go farther (8)
19. (see 1 Down)
20. Whichever way you look at it, it's a principle (5)
21. His work rests on horses (7)

DOWN

- 1, and 19 Across: This ornithologist certainly had a collecting license (5, 4)
2. Pheasant or duck? (4-4)
3. Flattened (6)
4. Place carefully in a monastery (3, 2, 5)
5. Greedy (4)
6. Follow Sirius (3-4)
9. Huge state flower (4-6)
11. Tiny predator (5, 3)
12. Surrounding (7)
14. Salad for a novice golfer (6)
16. Place of greatest degradation (5)
17. To daze or bewilder (4)

Answers will be in the Fall '08 issue – how'd you do??

American Badger

Takes to Water

BY TERESA DOLMAN

In the fall 2007 issue of Nature Alberta there was a “Nugget” regarding an urban badger in Medicine Hat. It reminded me of an encounter with a badger within Lethbridge, which I would like to share with NA readers.

It happened the morning of August 21, 2001, when my husband, Doug, and I were walking the paved trail which follows the shoreline around Henderson Lake. For readers not familiar with Lethbridge, Henderson Lake is a 24-hectare lake located within Henderson Lake Park in south Lethbridge. On the north side of the Park are picnic sites, playgrounds, a concession booth and boat launch. On its west side are Henderson Outdoor Pool and the Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden, with the busy Mayor Magrath Drive immediately to the west of the Pool and Garden. The entire south side of Henderson Park is bordered by Henderson Lake Golf Course. Finally, on the east side lies Henderson Campground and Whoop-Up Exhibition Park, both of which are bordered by 43rd Street S. For many years, this road marked the east edge of the City, with open fields beyond,

but recently the area has begun to see various commercial developments.

We were on the south side of the lake next to the golf course when we noticed an American Badger (*Taxidea taxus*) loping towards us from the golf course. We stopped to watch. It hesitated, turned back and ran off a few meters but then reversed direction, crossing the path within three meters of us and arriving at the water's edge. It looked out over the water from some large boulders lining the shore, then turned and ran past us, heading east. However, a couple leading a large dog had come up to us from the east. The badger spotted them, reversed

direction once again and ran back to the edge of the water. After climbing onto a boulder, it hesitated only momentarily before launching itself into the water with a lovely belly-flop and swimming across the lake, tail up and paddling like a dog. At this location the lake is about 200 meters wide. We watched it complete the journey and then lost it on the far side, but hoped it would make its way eastward, which is the only direction that would take it towards more



American Badger Takes to Water...continued

appropriate badger habitat.

Recently I began wondering just how common it is for badgers to swim. After all, their preferred habitat is definitely terrestrial - open grasslands, fields and pastures where they can dig out their favourite foods, Richardson's Ground Squirrels and Northern Pocket Gophers. A visit to our library and an internet search produced some answers.

It seems that badgers are not at all adverse to venturing into at least shallow water, as studies on their diet reveal them to eat amphibians (such as frogs and salamanders), fish (such as carp and salmonids), grebes (eggs and young) and invertebrates (such as water beetles, snails and crayfish). On the other hand, observations of badgers swimming any distance across deeper water are few and far between, although one author does state that the badger can "swim well for a mile or more.... and it can even dive." The front toes of the badger are partially webbed, which is an adaptation in digging out underground prey, but which is also of some advantage if it has to swim. Some instances of



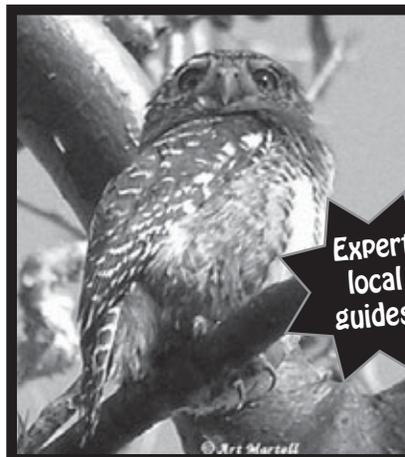
TERESA DOLMAN

long-distance swimming may result from disturbance as was the case when our badger came too close to humans and a dog. Young badgers, born in late April to early June, disperse at three to four months of age, and it has been suggested that such dispersing young may account for sightings of badgers in unsuitable habitat. Our badger and the one Dennis Baresco saw in Medicine Hat were both seen

in August, which would fit with this theory. In any case, we felt very lucky to have observed a badger swimming.

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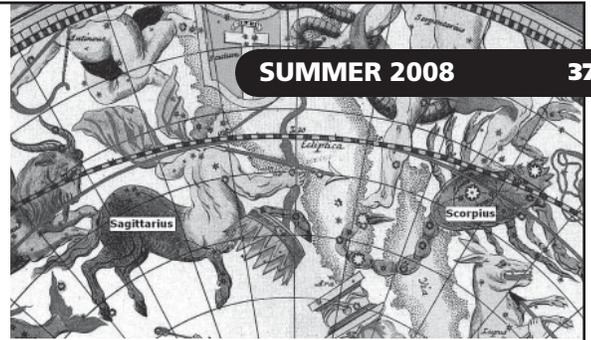
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CELESTIAL HAPPENINGS

Starry Nights

Summer/Fall (August to October)

BY JOHN MCFAUL



FEATURED CONSTELLATIONS – SAGITTARIUS AND SCORPIUS

The Ecliptic, which is the path that the planets move along, is to be found arcing low above the southern horizon during the summer and early fall. Its location this summer is marked by the gas giant Jupiter which is currently in Sagittarius. Sagittarius and Scorpius are the two prominent constellations that are located just above the southern horizon at this time of year.

Sagittarius the Archer is often depicted as being shaped like a tea kettle. It is thought to represent a centaur with the upper body of a man attached to the lower body of a horse. It has a bow drawn with an arrow pointing to Scorpius. Sagittarius is noteworthy as the centre of the Milky Way Galaxy is located in its direction. It is about 30,000 light years from the Earth.

The sun is in Sagittarius between December 19th and January 19th. This is markedly different than the dates given by astrologers (Nov. 22 to Dec. 19). Their dates depict the position of the Sun over 2000 years ago. Due to the wobble in the Earth axis of rotation, the apparent position of the Sun has shifted westward 30 degrees, so that the astrological dates are out of

phase of the astronomical dates by about a month.

Scorpius the Scorpion is only partially visible above the horizon. Its tail extends below the horizon at our latitude. Scorpius was the Scorpion sent by Apollo to sting the mighty hunter Orion. This was done because Apollo did not want Orion to form a relationship with his sister Artemis who was the goddess of the hunt and the Moon. Orion escaped the scorpion by diving into the sea. Apollo then tricked Artemis to

shoot an arrow at Orion while she thought he was just a dark spot in the water. She did have Orion placed into the starry heavens well away from the Scorpion. Thus Orion is prominent in the winter, but leaves as the Scorpion rises in the summer.

At the heart of Scorpius is the super-giant star Antares. Its name means “The Rival of Mars.” This is a result of its prominent red colour. Antares is thought to be about 700 times the diameter of the Sun. If placed at the position of the sun its surface would extend out to between Mars and Jupiter.

CELESTIAL HAPPENINGS

Sun: Rise - Aug. 1 (05:50 MDT), Sept. 1 (06:44 MDT), Oct. 1 (07:36 MDT)
Set - May 1 Aug. 1 (21:29 MDT), Sept. 1 (20:22 MDT), Oct. 1 (19:09 MDT)
Times are for Edmonton.

Moon: Full - Aug. 16, Sept. 15, Oct. 14
New - Aug. 1, Sept. 29, Oct. 28

Planets: **Mercury** will be best seen in the evening twilight low in the western sky during the middle of August. On Aug. 19th – 21st it will be just below the much brighter Venus.

Venus will be low in the western sky through August into the middle of September. On August 14th it will be near Saturn and Mercury. On Sept. 11 it will lie close to Mars.

Mars continues to sink lower into the evening, western sky. It will be very close to Venus and Mercury on September 11th.

Jupiter skirts the south to south-western horizon in the late evenings.

Saturn gradually gets closer to the western horizon until it gets too close to the Sun to be seen. In October it becomes a morning object rising just before the sun. On August 13th it will be less than 1 degree from Venus.

Meteor Shower: The Perseid Meteor Shower peaks in the early morning of August 13th; 50 meteors/hour

Orionid Meteor Shower peaks on October 21st. 25 meteors/hour

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



It's Summer!

BY DENNIS BARESCO

THE YUM YUMS OF SUMMER

Carrots – cukes – melons – corn – berries – honey – fresh bread! It's all available at over 100 different **farmers' markets** throughout Alberta. There is absolutely no better, healthier place to buy your produce during the summer – assuming you want fresh, super-tasty, locally-grown food. And, at many markets, that includes meats, eggs, dairy, crafts, spices and...well, you name it! Prices are often competitive – and even if they're a bit more expensive, just how much is it worth to have a tomato that actually tastes like a tomato instead of cardboard?!



If organic produce is available, so much the better. In a report by Boulder CO's Organic Centre, *Still No Free Lunch*, food scientists have found that modern food from high-yield crops “produces 10-25% less iron, zinc, protein, calcium, Vitamin C, and other nutrients.” The report also found that “organic food may have as much as 20% higher nutritional content for some minerals, and

30% more antioxidants, on average, than conventional fare.” (Information cited in *The CPPA Monitor*, March 2008. “Crop yields are expanding but nutrition left behind.” By Alana Herro.)

For info on Alberta's farmers' markets, check out: www.albertafarmfresh.com; or www.sunnygirl.ca; or www.albertamarkets.com; or your local papers.

“Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass on a summer day listening to the murmur of water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is hardly a waste of time.”

JOHN LUBBOCK

♪ Summer breeze makes me feel fine
 Blowin' through the jasmine in my mind.
 Sweet days of summer -- the jasmine's in bloom
 July is dressed up and playing her tune. ♪

SEALS & CROFTS

“A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken.”

JAMES DENT



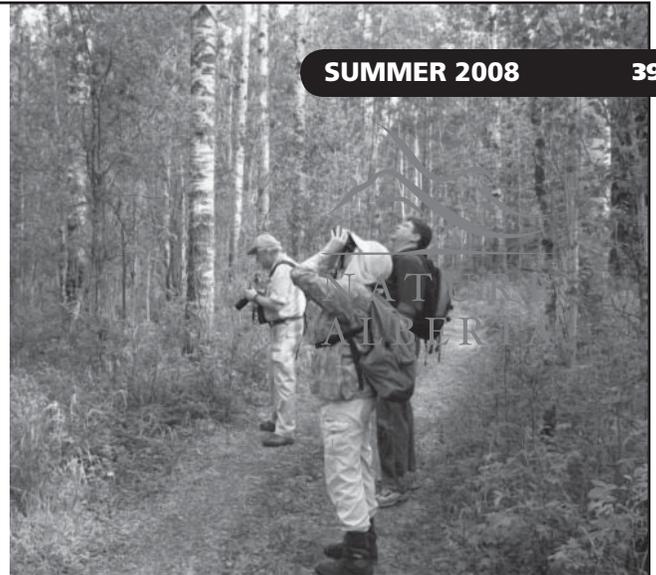
The highest temperature ever recorded in Alberta was 43.3C (110F): July 21, 1931 at Brooks, and July 18, 1941 at Fort MacLeod.

The largest “summer snowfall” in Alberta was on June 29, 1963: 111.8 cm (44 inches), at Livingston Ranger Station.

FAN CLUB PAGE

Lac La Biche Birding Society

BY TED JOHNSON



Lac la Biche is located in what is considered northeastern Alberta but is really just north of the center line of the province. It is about 220 km from Edmonton, so is easily accessible to a large percentage of Albertans.

From a naturalist's point of view, Lac la Biche is very fortunately located. It is right on the dividing line between the Dry Mixed Wood and the Central Mixed Wood Boreal Natural Sub-regions of Alberta. The area to the north of the lake is Central Mixed Wood, with only a small band of agriculturally-impacted land along the lake. To the North is reasonably pristine forest which gets some of the rarer northern birds.

South of the lake, in the Dry Mixed Wood Natural region, there is more agricultural development so it tends to get some of the regular Parkland Natural Region species. There are still some large tracts of undisturbed Dry Mixed Wood left that have that ecotype's

species. Our May bird count regularly turns up close to 200 species. A total of 225 species can potentially be seen in the area, some of which are at the most westerly edges of their ranges.

Lac La Biche Lake has been a Federal Bird Sanctuary since 1920, a Provincial Wildlife Sanctuary since 1930 and has recently been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA). Churchill Provincial Park, an island in the lake, is famous for its selection of old growth boreal birds. Lakeland Provincial Park and Lakeland Recreation Area, lying just east of Lac La Biche, are also becoming birding destinations of renown.

The Lac La Biche area has had a long history of naturalist interest, right from the time of David

Thompson. In 1992, a group of local birders started doing the Christmas Bird Count. Some got involved in other birding activities, such as the first Alberta Bird Atlas project and the IBA designation. This led to the formation of the Lac La Biche Birding Society in 1998, which was also the first year of participation as a club in the May Species Count. This has become one of our major annual events, as it is always followed by a truly amazing pot luck supper!

We do a number of Breeding Bird Survey routes for Bird Studies Canada, Owl survey routes, Backyard Bird Counts, Bailey Birdathons, and of course the Christmas Bird Count. The club hosts a number of field trips every year, as the lake is a major

FAN CLUB PAGE

staging area in both spring and fall. There are large colonies of Ring-billed and California Gulls (*Larus delawarensis* and *L. californicus*), Western and Red-necked Grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis* and *Podiceps grisegena*), and, though not appreciated, Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) and American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*).

The Society was involved in the establishment of the IBA and has since been working on monitoring and a signage program at all of the lake's boat launches to inform users about the sensitivity of the nesting colonies.

We have installed and maintain over 600 bird boxes. They were put up as bluebird trails, but we have not had a great deal of success, only getting about 15 pairs a year. However, we

get 75 to 90% nesting by Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*), and we attribute the increase in swallow numbers in the area to the nest box program.

On the Natural History side of the Club's activities, we hosted Botany Alberta 2004, leading various tours about plants, birds and history of the area. We have also held tours for various other groups upon request.

The Society has about 23 regular members and all of the problems of small Naturalist clubs. We are getting older, and young members are hard to attract and hold. Busy people do not want to take on



the work of the Executive, so change is not very rapid – and, of course, funds are hard to accumulate.

But with birding in the area being excellent to fantastic year-round, it is a great place to be a birder. So come and visit us. The Society can be contacted by email at laclabichebirdingsociety@yahoo.ca or by phone call Jennifer at (780) 623-7247.

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**SEE HOT DAY,
COOL MOOSE! PAGE 17**
SANDRA HAWKINS



Nature *gallery*



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