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Nature Alberta

ALBERTA'S NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW

WOLVES WITH BLOODIED MUZZLES IN FOREST. SEE "ON THE COVERS," PG 4 AND THE FEATURE STORY, PG 22. BRIAN GENEREUX

feature article

Wolves Grey and Black

FEDERATION OF ALBERTA NATURALISTS

RICK PRICE

RICK PRICE

RICK PRICE

Nature Alberta:
Celebrating our natural heritage

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WANT TO SUBMIT ARTICLES OR PHOTOS?
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NATURE ALBERTA DEADLINES ARE:
SPRING ISSUE.**FEBRUARY 14**
SUMMER ISSUE.**MAY 15**
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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Wood Buffalo Bird Club

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Editor's Page

BY DENNIS BARESCO

FOLLOW UP

First: The Spring "Editor's Page" told of a chance to win a FAN-published book of your choice, simply by quoting "the famous line by Howard Beale (Peter Finch) in the movie 'Network'." No answers were received, perhaps because the deadline was May 15th and many of you may not have received your issue by then. Because of that, the deadline is extended to Sept 15th. Send your name and the exact line by Sept 15 to na@fanweb.ca (or mail to FAN Editor, Box 2513, Medicine Hat AB T1A 8G8) and a draw will be made at the FAN meeting on Sept 26, 2009 to pick the winner from those who answered correctly.

Second: Also in the Spring issue, you were told that you could read a tale of "Man vs Nature" online. Well, it never made it online! We'll try again, so if you are interested in this Spring experience by your Editor, go to www.fanweb.ca under "Events".

Third: The 2008 Spring Bird and Flower Count data is now on the website in "Resources and Services/Alberta Natural History/Birds and Plant sections". 2007 Bird Count data is also there. We will get the 2009 data on the site as soon as we receive it from our dedicated coordinators.

Last: Want books? FAN is holding an unbelievable sale – but believe it! – of many of its Bookstore titles. Check out the insert you'll find with this issue. Order now – while supplies last.

BACKYARD BARNYARDS

There's some good news for those who like to know where their food comes from or who wish for simpler, sustainable living methods. The news also has considerable ramifications – at least, indirectly – for nature.

The movement to allow backyard chicken flocks is growing all the time and is being accepted by a number of progressive – or should I say, "back to the future" – communities.

Vancouver is one of the latest cities to propose urban hen houses. Victoria and several jurisdictions in the lower mainland already allow them, as do several Ontario cities like Brampton, Niagara Falls and Guelph. Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington have allowed urban hen houses for years. Portland even has guided "coop tours" (like garden tours) and Seattle permits miniature goats.

The benefits go way beyond just fresh eggs. Hen houses provide a link to one's food. They satisfy our desire for a closer connection to a more natural world. Many people find the sound of chickens, softly clucking away, as calming. They can be a wonderful educational and enlightenment tool for children. Then, there is simply the sheer enjoyment of it! When I attended

FIR0002/FLAGSTAFFOTOS

university in Calgary, the family across the street had chickens, and the early morning crowing of the rooster was as uplifting as it was delightful, adding a much appreciated sense of rural living to the neighbourhood.

Still, many cities don't allow chickens, which means that quite a few folks are ignoring the law and keeping a few "cluckers" anyhow. As one might expect, there are those whose feathers are ruffled at the idea, though their arguments to date are as weak as a thin egg shell.

INSIDE NATURE ALBERTA

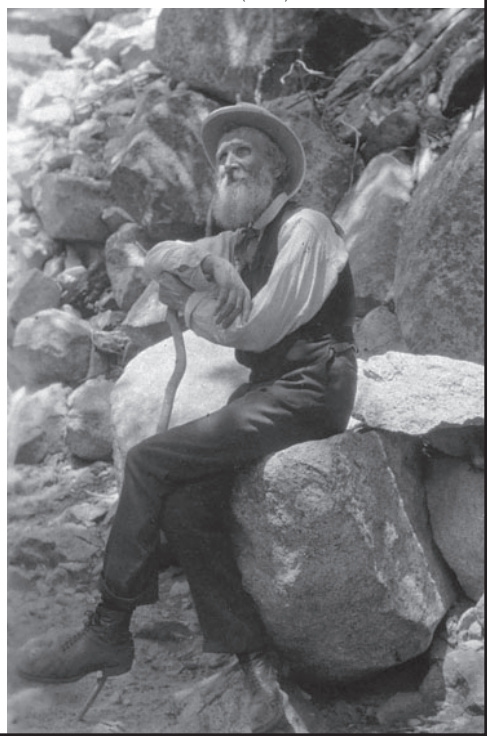
Being an interpreter, I always look for connections, in particular connections between the two "histories": natural and cultural. I look for "stories" that not only tell a story but also instill a sense of understanding and touch us emotionally. There are many different ways of doing that, which is often illustrated in what you read in *Nature Alberta*. Our authors generally try to give you, not just facts and information, but a feel for what the facts and information mean, how they relate to the intricacies of nature and our relationship with nature.

This issue of *Nature Alberta* is no exception, starting with the Feature Story. In the first part, Dick Dekker goes behind the obvious, asking the question: "How Grey is the Gray Wolf?" (see pg 22). In the second part, he goes one step further, discussing "Black Wolves and Climate Change" (see pg 24).

John Warden's regular column is entitled "Working the Land" and makes the connection beautifully (see pg 12): it is a highly enjoyable read. Theo Manno's "Networking without Facebook" (see pg 33) is yet another of his intriguing glimpses into the personal lives of Columbian Ground Squirrels. Debbie and Alan Godkin, in the newest series in *Nature Alberta*, give you a glimpse into the interactions between two families: Downy Woodpeckers and Godkins (see pg 11).

Connections. "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world," said John Muir, the famous naturalist and wilderness preservation advocate. In its own small way, *Nature Alberta* tries to help us be part of that world.

JOHN MUIR. FRANCIS FRITZ (1907)



EDITOR'S NOTE:
As luck would have it, I had more content than room in the Spring issue and had to cut four different articles. Of course, having more stories than room is a "problem" that Editors much prefer to the opposite! However, for reasons of economics, I'm pretty well restricted to 40pgs + covers – though even with the cuts, Spring was 44 pages. Anyway, you'll find "Mystery Tracks" responses in this issue on page 17. – DB]

On the Covers:

FRONT COVER

"March 2007: While driving near Folding Mountain, just east of the Jasper Park boundary, a group of ravens alerted me to a road-killed deer on the south side of the road. Hoping to see eagles on the kill, I turned the van around and watched from a distance on the highway shoulder. Twenty minutes later, and to my surprise, a group of seven wolves (5 blacks and 2 greys) crossed the highway 10m from the van! When no wolves showed up to feed on the carcass, I grabbed my camera and followed their tracks into the woods. I soon came to an opening and found some willows to hide behind. Soon the wolves came into the opening. Later, I dragged the deer into the woods again, positioned myself behind cover and waited. After an hour the animals did something I had not planned on. They went back to the highway and when they found no deer they followed the drag tracks that were now near my sitting spot! So as I sat in my makeshift cover, I watched nervously as the seven wolves walked past 5m away! The wolves dragged the deer a little ways and ate the animal in the space of ten minutes. After they left I investigated the site and found no remains." BRIAN GENEREUX

INSIDE FRONT COVER

Summer is the time for babies and yet another exciting subject for photographers. Rick Price caught a young bison calf snoozing, as well as this wonderfully endearing sight of a newborn fawn tentatively peeking at its strange new world from a very secure vantage point. And what could be more entertaining than half a dozen Coyote pups out for an afternoon of fun?!

INSIDE BACK COVER

Stones of serenity: Bonnie Mullin's photo of Coral Creek captures hikers sitting creekside and enjoying a summer's day in the mountains. Meanwhile, a Hoary Marmot, Alberta's largest marmot, peeks out curiously from behind a jumble of rocks – just in time for Ken Kilcullen to focus and shoot. And Jim Uffelmann's photo of two American Avocets illustrates perfectly why these birds are considered avian works of art.

BACK COVER

An interesting mountain, indeed; but where is it? If you know, you could win a fifty dollar gift certificate. See note to right.

Where is it?

Do you know where the photo on the back cover of this issue was taken?

If so, you could win a $50.00 gift certificate for the FAN Store! Let us know the name of the mountain and where it is. A draw will be made from all the correct answers at the FAN meeting on Sept 26, 2009. Send your answer by **Sept 15** to:

By email: na@fanweb.ca;

By mail: FAN Editor,
Box 2513,
Medicine Hat AB
T1A 8G8

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

"Excellent issue"

Congratulations on Nature Alberta Spring 2009. An excellent issue. As a geologist, I am pleased to see the first of "Focus on the Foothills". I once stood at the brink of Kakwa Falls in early July and was enveloped in its mist. The review of Ben Gadd's Geology Road Tours is very timely, and I was once one of a group that did bombard a Grizzly Bear with snowballs. I look forward to many more excellent issues.

IAN HALLADAY, CALGARY AB

"Stellar Job!"

I have just received my copy of the Spring 2009 Nature Alberta. Congratulations on another stellar job. Of course, personally, I am pleased to see my own articles in print, but the entire magazine is a joy to read. It captures such a wide spectrum of Alberta's natural wonders in addition to drawing attention to serious environmental matters. Well done!

SANDRA HAWKINS, ETOBICOKE ON

Outlet for stories

Allow me to say, Dennis, that I am very pleased with your work as editor of NA, and that you are staying the course despite your other FAN duties. Most editors give up after a while, because the job entails much more work than one generally thinks, and few thanks. By now you know that I can be quite critical in regards to the loose graphic design of NA, but my intent is to be positive in the interest of getting the best publication for Alberta naturalists.

As a frequent contributor, I am more than happy that NA is available as an outlet for my stories and for those of other Alberta writers who have something to communicate to fellow naturalists.

DR. DICK DEKKER, PH.D., EDMONTON

Where are the "gophers"?

Where have all the "gophers" gone?? In spite of Sustainable Resource Development's [SRD] prediction of a population explosion of Richardson's Ground Squirrels, I realized today that I have not seen one this year. Usually, you see remains squashed on the highway, beasties running around and grazing. I usually see the cheekier ones in my backyard. This year, I have not seen a single critter. Today, driving many of the backroads and more rural areas, from Cochrane to Olds to Strathmore – not one!! I asked my son who lives in Calgary and walks their dog on Nose Hill and various other parks. The only place he has seen them is in a patch of grass beside the Aerospace Museum, near where he works.

This might explain why there are so few hawks and eagles around now, as "gophers" are a primary food source. I think this should be a huge cause for concern, especially when you have SRD asking for an exemption from the laws, to use strychnine to control the vast numbers.

SANDRA FOSS, COCHRANE

Footprints in the sand?

Did I miss the answer to the question that was in the Fall issue re: footprints in the sand at Fort McMurray....to identify the animal? It was referred to again in the winter issue. We could not find the elusive footprint identification in our Spring 2009 issue.

This household looks forward to Nature Alberta and we have 6 grandsons who enjoy the magazine as well. Thank you for putting out such an informative magazine. Great work.

LEVERNE ELLSWORTH (WIZARD LAKE WATERSHED AND LAKE STEWARDSHIP ASSOCIATION)

EDITOR'S NOTE:
The responses are in this issue, pg 17.

SANDRA HAWKINS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Open letter re: Proposed Sandhill Crane Hunt

Below is the text of a letter I recently submitted to The Honourable Ted Morton, Alberta Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. All Albertans should be made aware of this situation.

I am writing to express my unmitigated opposition to any Alberta Sandhill Crane hunt, now or at anytime in the future. Any such hunt would be ill-considered, not only for the cranes which have an extremely low reproductive rate and subsequent recruitment to their population, but also for the public viewpoint that it would cast on hunting and hunters in Alberta.

We talk of hunting opportunities, yet why would we need to add the crane to the list when we enjoy huge surpluses of the goose species and nearly unlimited hunting opportunities already? I have been a hunter all of my adult life, the most of which I have spent employed as a waterfowl biologist, and, quite frankly, the concept of crane hunting appalls me.

Proponents of the hunt state that government documents note that only two Whooping Cranes have been shot by hunters in Saskatchewan in four decades of hunting, yet 34 of the endangered whoopers disappeared last fall alone during the southward migration. How many of these were shot but never reported?

It is also stated that the hunt in eastern Alberta would not affect the sensitive population that nests in the northern boreal forest. These birds, the Canada Sandhill Crane or *Grus canadensis rowani*, have never been the subject of scientific study and in reality the migratory pathways are ill-defined at best. However, as nearly all northern Sandhill Cranes follow a northwest to southeast fall migration route, it is most probable that these birds do stage in the major concentration sites in eastern Alberta alongside the Lesser Sandhill Cranes, the area where the hunt is proposed.

The Sandhill Crane is believed to be "the most ancient of all birds, the oldest living bird species on earth" (Peter Mathiessen, *The Birds of Heaven*, 2001). A leg bone from the Pliocene, 9 million years ago, has been found in Wyoming. While it is true that the hunts elsewhere to date do not appear to have endangered the crane populations, any additional mortality would be cumulative and may well contribute further to what is an extremely dangerous hunt. According to Dr. Paul Johnsgard (*Crane Music*, 1991), one of the world's most respected avian biologists, the number of the world's crane species classified as endangered has more than tripled since the first Red Data book was published in 1966: from 2 crane species and 1 race of the Sandhill Crane, to 9 species and 2 Sandhill Crane races. An additional 5 of the world's 15 species are listed as unstable, declining, or threatened. The Sandhill Crane is listed as the only one of the world's crane species with a stable population status. It would be absolute folly to further jeopardize this species along with the endangered whooping crane.

The *Northern Prairie and Parkland Waterbird Conservation Plan* (2004) identifies several research needs with respect to the Sandhill Crane, mostly centering on determining factors influencing recruitment to the population. How can we categorize a species as safe when we do not even understand these factors?

It is far easier to continue to protect what should undoubtedly be a protected species, than it would be to discontinue any hunt when this game of roulette does indeed prove to be dangerous. I would propose instead that all cranes be permanently moved to the protected species list.

THOMAS (TOM) S. SADLER, STRATHMORE AB

[See the Sandhill Crane stories, starting page 27. Ed.]

ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

Save Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park

Proposed energy and mining development in BC's Flathead River Valley, right next door to the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, could have a devastating effect on the park as well as all recreation activities and wildlife in a much broader region.

One proposal is for an open pit coal mine in the Flathead, just 35 kilometres upstream from Waterton-Glacier. More than 325 million tonnes of waste rock would be dumped into a tributary of the Flathead River, which forms the western boundary of the Park and provides critical habitat for threatened Bull Trout and genetically-pure Westslope Cutthroat Trout. Vulnerable populations of grizzlies, wolves, lynx and wolverines are also threatened by mining and drilling plans for the Flathead.

Sierra Club BC is asking people to send a message to the BC, Canadian and US governments to tell them that mining and energy development do not belong in the Flathead River Valley, upstream from Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.

A BLACK BEAR, SIPPING FROM A CLEAR STREAM – FOR NOW! – IN WATERTON. RICK PRICE

"D" on Rights Score Card

Perhaps to no one's surprise, Friends of the Earth Canada's first annual Score Card of Environmental Rights available in law to Canadians has "determined that nine out of thirteen political jurisdictions fail to provide adequate environmental rights to individuals residing in that jurisdiction." Six jurisdictions, including Alberta, "have unacceptable provision for the most basic of environmental rights – that of information and notification." Alberta joined Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island as the worst performers in the country, scoring a "D". For further information contact:

Beatrice Olivastri, CEO,
(613) 241-0085x26 or
(613) 724-8690 cellular

Jody Lownds, Environmental Justice campaigner
(250) 814-4117 cellular

Ponderables

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

Endangered Species List Grows

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has increased its list of at-risk wildlife species to 585. Six new species have been added or determined more at risk. The Federal Government has moved with the speed of a snail in initiating the required protection for species at risk. Ironically, a new report by Canadian conservation groups, including Nature Canada, finds only one species, the Banff Springs Snail, has received the full protections of the 6-year old Species at Risk Act.

A Spring count by Alberta Fish and Wildlife showed that the number of Greater Sage-Grouse in the southeast were down again: this year 66 males were counted on 10 leks (mating grounds); last year it was 84 males.

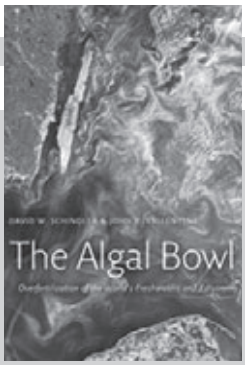
Is Carbon Capture and Storage Good Strategy?

Billions of taxpayer dollars are being pumped into carbon capture and underground storage research, but David Suzuki and Faisal Moola are questioning how good a strategy this is. Besides the technology, at this point, being mostly wishing and hoping, no one has any idea what will happen to the carbon dioxide underground (eg., will it stay there??), what the long term effects will be, what effect it may have on the massively abundant underground protoplasm and a number of other questions that have not been answered. The only sure things are that it will be hugely expensive and of use only in a limited number of scenarios.

As Suzuki and Moola say, "But if we humans are good at anything, it's thinking we've got a terrific idea and going for it without acknowledging the potential consequences or our own ignorance." To read the full article, go to www.fanweb.ca, under "News". You can also learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org.

MINI BOOK REVIEW

The Algal Bowl:
Overfertilization of the World's Freshwaters and Estuaries



David W. Schindler and John R. Vallentyne

The greatest threat to freshwater quality worldwide is nutrient pollution, which is resulting in massive algal blooms that are choking out aquatic life. *The Algal Bowl* "…should be required reading for every politician, civil servant, farmer, fisherman, hunter, paddler and cottage owner who has any stake in the management of freshwater in western North America," said Ed Struzik in an *Edmonton Journal* review (April 5, 2009).

Renowned water scientists David W. Schindler and John R. Vallentyne share their combined 80 years of experience with the eutrophication problem to explain its history and science, and offer real-world solutions for mitigating this catastrophe in the making.

"The first Algal Bowl was a classic", said Daniel Conley of the University of Lund, Sweden, "and really was influential for both the study of lakes and for people who appreciated the environment, especially the eutrophication of lakes. David Schindler is the ideal co-author for a new edition."

INDUSTRIAL WIND FACILITIES ARE A MAZE OF TOWERS, FAST-SPINNING BLADES, WIRES – AND ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION. WWW.WIND-WATCH.ORG

OPINION

Wind Turbines on Public Land

BY HENRY BINDER

A few months ago, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) passed a resolution to proceed in seeking permission from the provincial government for installation of wind energy facilities on Crown lease lands.

Since the resolution was sponsored by Cypress County [in southeastern Alberta], it is apparent that the target of the resolution is Crown grazing leases.

On a related front, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) is currently seeking input/ submissions on the Alberta Electric System Operator's (AESO) application for approval of extensive new transmission reinforcement development in Southern Alberta, based on forecast development of wind generation. A Needs Application Hearing was scheduled for Monday June 22, 2009. (Details regarding the process are on AUC's website www.auc.ab.ca.)

Regarding the AESO application, someone should probably prepare an economics study revealing the hidden costs, such as spinning reserve requirements, and other negative attributes of subsidized wind power generation. There should also be some investigation of whether the funds for such extensive reinforcement might not be better spent by providing subsidies to more local power generation, such as solar panels on roof tops. It is time to move away from the destructive mindset of reaching into and sacrificing wilderness areas to serve our needs, especially now, when other viable options are available. Also, an alternative like subsidized solar power might provide more significant long term employment opportunities and it fits in nicely with the concept of net zero energy buildings.

Wind energy facilities on Crown grazing leases require consideration of the following issues:

1. Disruption and destruction of some of the best remaining native grassland habitat, when these areas should be kept free of development, given the rather large expansion of wind facilities being planned. Alberta land use planning that accounts for conservation and resource management can play a role here.

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC LANDS? WWW.WIND-WATCH.ORG

OPINION

2. AAMDC's resolution is promoted as furthering the development of renewable energy, a good thing. What may not be widely known is that lessees will collect the payments for construction of wind facilities on Crown land.

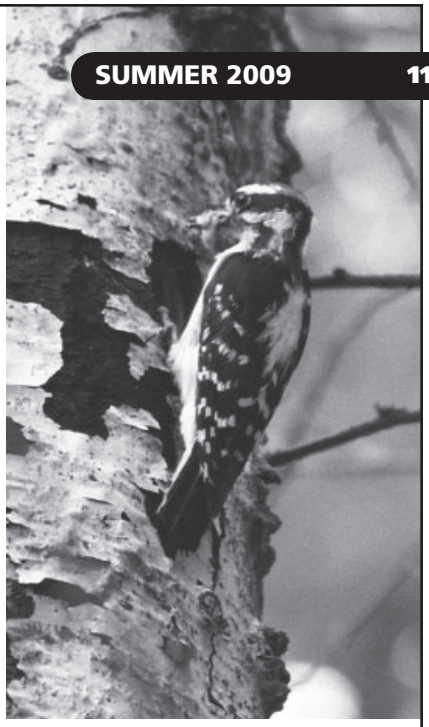
   Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) has indicated that this would be their policy, with payment price to be negotiated between the lessee and the proponent, similar to what occurs with oil and gas development on leases. This means payments of money that should go to the Crown will instead go to the lessee, a rip off for all Albertans.

   Also, since Crown lease does not have valuable alternative market uses like private land, payments will likely be less than for installation of wind facilities on private land. So the market incentive of the payments policy is to make Crown land the preferred option for development of wind facilities. One way to correct this misguided incentive program is for the Crown to charge a royalty, but ASRD has no intention of doing this. A royalty on wind energy is not a novel idea. Prince Edward Island for instance has considered a Crown royalty on wind energy exports, on the basis that all should benefit from this resource.

3. If ASRD plans to follow a wind facility payments policy similar to that for oil and gas, it should also be reminded of the Thurber Report which addressed the inequity of significant payments going to lessees. The essential elements of the report were enacted, but the legislation never received royal assent.

4. Bottom line of course is that unnecessary destruction of habitat can be avoided by simply not permitting wind facility development on Crown native grasslands.

DEBBIE & ALAN GODKIN



Nature Diary: "Downies" put on a show

BY DEBBIE AND ALAN GODKIN

"NATURE DIARY" is a new series to Nature Alberta. *Like many naturalists, Debbie and Alan Godkin, from Westlock AB, have numerous stories of their experiences with nature – stories they love to share with other naturalists!*

When I saw the adult Downy Woodpeckers packing suet from the feeder, I knew they were feeding nestlings nearby. I went outside so I could better see the direction of flight the male Downy took upon leaving the feeder. I had the urge to duck, as I felt a swish of air as it flew off right over my head and landed on a branch of a poplar tree just across the driveway from the house. This was too easy, I thought. In years past, I had tried to locate the nest but inevitably the Downy always nested deep down in the trees where no wheelchair could go. How convenient to nest so close to a food source.

A young male poked his head out of the nest hole and was begging for food, when the adult male landed. The male flew onto the tree trunk, climbed up a few feet to the nest entrance, and deposited the food down the open mouth of the hungry nestling. Quickly, the male flew off. There was some shuffling going on in the nest hole. A young female poked her head out just as the adult female came with more food. The adults were unconcerned with my presence and continued to feed their young.

The young appeared to be near fully-fledged. As in past years, I'd noticed that the Downy Woodpeckers only introduced suet to their offspring's diet a few days before they were ready to leave the nest. I wondered if this had to do with an inability to digest suet at an earlier age.

Two days after I first noticed them packing suet, the adults brought their young to the feeder. Interestingly enough, the adults didn't actually bring the young directly to the suet feeder, as they were always more cautious than that. Usually they left the young in a tree close by, while they collected some suet and then flew back to where they had parked their young. On several occasions when the over-eager young didn't stay put, following the adults right to the suet, the adults wouldn't feed them there but flew back to a nearby tree, usually with the hungry youngsters right behind. It was only by the fourth or fifth day that the adults became less cautious and fed the young at the suet feeder, and by the seventh or eighth day the young had figured out how to get the suet for themselves.

All in all, there is nothing like a close-up look at nature in motion.

DEBBIE & ALAN GODKIN

Close to Home:

Nature Photography in Alberta

BY JOHN WARDEN

JOHN WARDEN

Working the Land

My love for chicken stew with dumplings originates way back in one of my earliest childhood memories.

It was harvest time at our family farm, nine miles east of the town of Vulcan. I was maybe four years old, so it would have been the mid nineteen-fifties. My grandmother on my mother's side had come out from town to the farm to help my Mom cook for the men who were helping with the harvest. Grandma had prepared chicken stew with dumplings. I remember the three of us driving the food out to the field and how the warm smell of chicken stew filled the car.

My Dad and the 'hired men' gathered around the combines and the trucks and we ate dinner in the field. The family story goes that I went around to each of the men, asking for a bite of their meal. While I don't remember that actual part of the story, I'll never forget the taste of the food – absolutely wonderful. I do have a memory of the men hunkered over eating and that the air was a golden yellow, thick with wheat dust and chaff. I remember that the land seemed to stretch out as far as I could see. Thinking of it now, I see a group of hungry men who were working the land.

The early history of Alberta is full of people who worked and cared for the land. There is a photograph of my grandfather on my Dad's side. He's in the middle of a group of local Vulcan men and they are all wearing cowboy hats and long handlebar moustaches. You can tell from the photo that these are hard-working men. My grandfather died while my Dad was still a boy, so of course I never met him, but even from the photograph, you can tell he was a man who worked horses and cattle. You get a sense that he was a man who was part of the land. And my father worked and cared for the land after him.

My Mom's mother came to Alberta in April of 1913 when she was seventeen years old. I seem to remember her telling me that at first, she lived in a sod house, built into the side of a coulee and then in a converted wooden granary that had a dirt floor. She writes in her biography of chasing Pronghorn Antelope on foot and of hunting Coyotes on horseback. She was a woman of the land who writes of falling in love with Alberta the first day she arrived as a 'settler' in Brooks.

As you can see, my grandparents on both side of the family had connections to the land. They had to care for and manage the land in order to survive. While most of us today no longer have the opportunity of working the land

WORKING HORSES NEAR TURNER VALLEY. JOHN WARDEN

like they did, I do think that we all continue to have the responsibility of managing the land, managing our earth in order to survive.

My family and I moved away from the farm when I was five, but I came back to the family farm for the summer when I was sixteen. My uncle worked the farm at that time and he taught me to drive truck and tractor and to pull plows and harrows and seeders. In the afternoons, I would drive tractor and he would nap in the pick-up truck. Flocks of gulls would follow the tractor, their white wings and bodies contrasting against the freshly over-turned earth. Working late into the summer evenings, with fiery orange and red sunsets etched across the prairie sky, I would try to remember the colors and patterns so that I could paint them one day. I didn't know then that my paint brush would be a camera.

I certainly never worked the land like my parents and grandparents. But even the few weeks I spent learning to care for the land that one summer seems to have created a connection – a connection across generations and a connection with the land. I suspect that it is because of my parents and grandparents and their early stewardship of the land that I learned to work landscapes in my own way – for their artistry and for their beauty.

Alberta is over 660,000 square kilometers of land. It's a big place with big skies and every kind of landscape. Whether it's the mountains and foothills or the prairies, parkland and badlands, the natural beauty of Alberta is 'close to home' for all of us. The magnificent landscapes of Alberta surround us and it is important that we take the time to enjoy and appreciate them. But we also have a responsibility. We have the responsibility to care for, manage and sustain those landscapes, to be the stewards – the guardians even – so that the land survives for the generations that follow us.

One of the strengths of *Nature Alberta* magazine is that it allows us all the opportunity to begin to communicate. It creates a forum that allows us to share ideas and issues about how to care for our natural Alberta. Maybe sharing our ideas will lead to action – doing the things that will help to care for our land.

Perhaps a first step is to slow down. By slowing down, we can breathe out a little and take the time to have some fine chicken stew with dumplings in the

Close to Home: Nature Photography in Alberta…continued

middle of a farmer's field – with our families. Maybe that is a start or a catalyst to opening ourselves up to the experience of the land around us. I think it was for me. Somehow it is through connecting with the land that we will realize the importance of saving the land, saving it from ourselves and for ourselves.

I taught myself how to make chicken stew with dumplings when I was about fifty years old and I made it for my kids. They loved it. They're adults now, living on their own, but they still ask for it when they come home to visit. Chicken stew – maybe they'll make it for their children, at harvest time when light is gold and thick with the chaff of wheat and the sky still stretches out across the Alberta prairie, as far as you can see.

BIG SKY AND CANOLA FIELDS NEAR SHERWOOD PARK. JOHN WARDEN

WORKING THE LAND NEAR HORSESHOE CANYON. JOHN WARDEN

In Memoriam

Miles Timothy Myres (1931-2009)

BY IAN HALLADAY

WAYNE NELSON

With the passing of Tim Myres on January 22, 2009 we lost a distinguished scientist and an enthusiastic promoter of natural history organizations in Alberta and indeed in all of Canada.

Tim was the founder of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists in 1970, having recognized that Alberta naturalists needed an organized voice to speak on conservation issues. He served as its first president and maintained an active role in the years that followed. He edited the initial editions of FAN's newsletter, later to become *The Alberta Naturalist* and now *Nature Alberta*. He saw to the organizing of the Alberta Ornithological Records Committee under FAN and was a member of that committee in its early years.

His early researches in Canada were on West Coast waterfowl. His graduate studies involved the social displays of seaducks. Later he turned to radar studies of bird movements and his graduate students at the University of Calgary researched birds as diverse as falcons, grassland songbirds, gulls, grebes, shearwaters and shorebirds, as he believed that non-game birds were understudied. He commented often that governments seemed interested only in birds that were edible.

Tim's contributions to us lay principally in three areas. Firstly, he was a superb organizer. In addition to bringing together Alberta's natural history organizations of the day into FAN, he was one of those who established the Canadian Nature Federation in 1972. Earlier he had organized the British Columbia Nest Records Scheme. His time on the executive of the Calgary Bird Club and his role with its successor, the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society, saw that organization become engaged in a wide variety of scientific and conservation activities. Secondly, he contributed vigorously to the conservation movement in Alberta at a crucial time in its history by writing briefs that were accurate and influential and encouraging other organizations and individuals to do likewise. At a time when National Park policies were under review with major developments on the horizon, Tim stated at a hearing in Banff, largely tongue-in-cheek, "the internal combustion engine should be banned from National Parks". One can imagine the excitement that provoked. Lastly, he was a firm believer of the contributions that amateur naturalists can make in our world. He involved local amateur naturalists in his researches and he encouraged his students to join their local natural history organizations.

Miles Timothy Myres was born in London, England on 16 May, 1931. He spent his early childhood in the countryside in Oxfordshire where he developed a keen interest in natural history and particularly in birds. He

In Memoriam…continued

attended Winchester College, King's College Cambridge and the University of British Columbia, obtaining his Ph.D. there in 1960. He subsequently returned to Oxford before joining the staff of the University of Calgary in 1963 from where he retired in 1987. In recent years he lived in Jersey. He leaves his wife Pat and stepdaughter Shauna.

Tim's contributions in Alberta were a few decades in our past but he laid foundations in organizations and in the inspiration of individuals from which we continue to benefit today. He leaves a lasting legacy in the natural history of Alberta.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:
In 1986, Tim Myres received FAN's Loren Goulden Award for outstanding contributions to nature in Alberta.

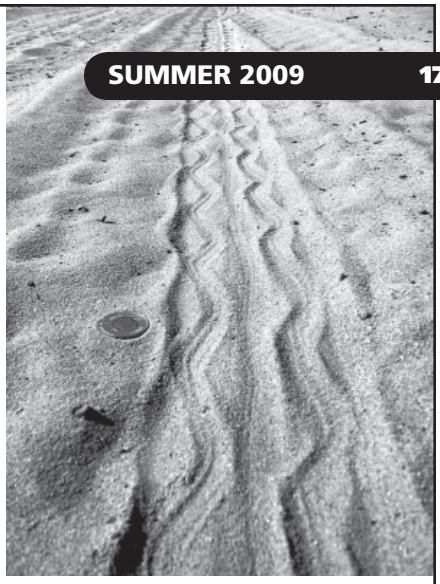
"King" Cougar
(b. 2001-03; d. 2009)

At 82kg, he was the King of Cypress Hills and quite possibly one of the largest male Cougars in the province. But on April 11, 2009, he met his match: a swift kick from an elk broke his ribs which then punctured his lungs. "It was a surprise, shocking, I didn't expect him to die," said University of Alberta cougar researcher Michelle Bacon in an interview with the *Medicine Hat News* (May 2, 2009). "But, that is the risk of being a predator."

In April 2008, Ms Bacon caught and placed a radio collar on "King" [see the story in *Nature Alberta*, Vol 38, # 4, Winter 2009). For the next year, she tracked and located his kill sites; in the end, he had totaled up 60 kills of deer, Elk and Moose.

His death "was too bad", said Ms Bacon to *Nature Alberta*, "but we got a great year of data out of him and it is pretty neat to see that big predators die in the act of predation."

His summer/fall home range was extensive: approximately 250km^2 – meaning almost all of the Alberta side of the Cypress Hills extending well into Saskatchewan. There was little doubt that he was the "King of the Hills!"



Mystery Tracks!?

In the Fall '08 issue, Nature Alberta *published Ted Johnson's photos of "mystery tracks" taken north of Fort McMurray and asked readers to identify them.*

Originally, Ted had said: "I think they are turtle tracks but have never seen any where the foot marks are inside the shell line." Five readers responded with some intriguing theories; their thoughts are below, in order received (the first three were aware of Ted's turtle theory). Many thanks to those whose curiosity moved them to theorize – though the mystery remains!

1) Peter Jonker (Saskatoon SK):

I'm pretty much stumped on these. Nevertheless, I feel confident to say that it was not a turtle that made this track - the two lateral grooves sinuate perfectly parallel to one another, and feet would not make grooves like that. This, of course, added to the fact that turtles that far north have never been documented and seem extremely unlikely!!! My best guess is this: a beaver was carrying a relatively stout, leafless branch, the blunt end of which featured a short fork that was dragging on the sand behind its tail. Thus the tail itself created an initial, slightly sinuous trough (what you may be tempted to see as a turtle shell imprint) and the dragging, forked stick behind the tail created the parallel grooves that one would otherwise have to imagine as imprints left by feet. Beavers, like porcupines, do waddle somewhat from side to side when walking.

2) Connie Browne (U of A, Edmonton AB):

The tracks do look like turtle tracks, but are weird. Freshwater turtles don't normally drag their shell and legs like that. The only turtle that I've seen drag its shell and limbs when it walked on land was an extremely overweight red-eared slider that had practically no leg muscle because it lived in a tiny tank its whole life and never really walked much before. It dragged its shell and hind limbs and pulled itself along mostly using its front legs. I'm guessing that this one is also an out-of-shape released pet.

3) Kris Kendall, (ACA Biologist, Sherwood Park):

I personally cannot confirm the tracks as turtle. You may be interested to know that there are several locations within the province where painted and red-eared slider turtles (pet store turtles or those collected in BC or elsewhere) have been released and subsequently observed. A theme of many of these introductions is that they are all in locations where people recreate, which leaves me to belief that folks are releasing collected turtles as they travel through the province .. . or perhaps they are simply liberating pets. Some of these turtle introductions may result in turtles surviving the winter and persisting in their new environment. Other summer observations may be 'one off' observations given that the individual turtle may not be able to survive the winter at the location released. Basically a death sentence...

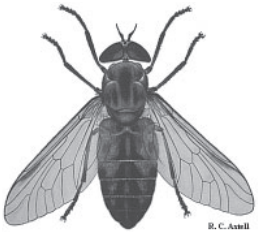
Some sites have multiple turtle observations associated with them, which may suggest that either the turtles are 1) breeding (viable eggs were found at one of the sites); or 2) have a number of age classes released. It is my opinion that, while turtles may be able to persist at given waterbodies that support overwintering, foraging and basking opportunities, breeding habitat and breeding ability may be a limiting factor at some of these sites.

4) Donna Wakeford (Edmonton):

I can't resist a guess of the owner of the mystery tracks on page 29 of the Fall *Nature Alberta* - tiger salamander (waddles, low to the ground, drags its feet and tail, went from one pond to the next). The person in the office next to me used to have a salamander as a pet, so I'm hoping she'll confirm my guess.

5) Doug Kelker

I am a member of the Friends of Blackfoot. Referring to your mystery tracks of the Fall issue, I have seen a similar track somewhere in my past that was made by a snake. So my reasoned answer is a snake, but I do not know what kind.



HORSEFLY. R.C. AXTELL, DEPT OF ENTOMOLOGY, NCSU

DEERFLY. R.C. AXTELL, DEPT OF ENTOMOLOGY, NCSU

Wildlife! Starring…

"Horse Flies & Deer Flies"

BY DENNIS BARESCO

Summer in Alberta is spectacular, exhilarating and a blessed time to be outdoors. That is, until you are driven to madness by biting and stinging insects!

Mosquitoes, wasps, hornets, fire ants, "no-see-ums", biting midges – and two in particular that can make a summer afternoon intolerable: deer flies and horse flies.

Deer and horse flies are, with all the other flies, in the Insect Order Diptera, with Alberta hosting several dozen species of these large members of the Family Tabanidae. Generally, they like hot weather, sunny and calm days, water bodies (including marshes and wetlands) and damp places (like low meadows and forests) – unfortunately, all those places that naturalists like, too. Their larvae are aquatic, which results in adults being very abundant near those waters; however, being very strong fliers, they can wander long distances from their larval beginnings.

Adult males do not bite, feeding on pollen and nectar. Thus, it is the females that cause all the trouble; their main diet is blood, mostly from the preferred large ungulates, but also from any warm-blooded animal they can target – including humans. They especially like those who are taking a swim!

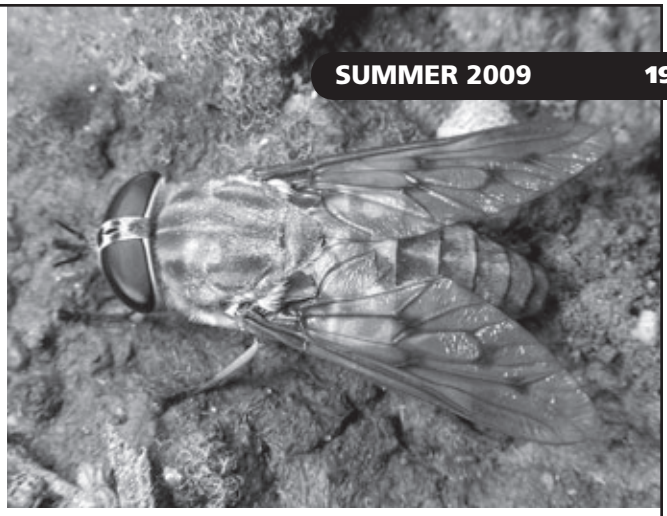
Their vicious "bite" isn't a bite at all, since flies don't have mouthparts capable of biting. What the female does, with her knife-like mandibles and maxillae, is make surgical cuts in the shape of a cross, then suck up the considerable amount of blood that flows from the wound. The blood, of course, is required for her to nourish the eggs developing inside her after mating. However, knowing all this is no consolation for the extreme pain and itching deer and horse flies cause, nor for the potential from their saliva to cause allergic reactions, equine infectious anemia and hog cholera. They may also carry and transmit anthrax, tularemia and loa loa filariasis (an eye disease endemic to Africa).

Deer flies are the smaller of the two, but often attack in small swarms; they generally go for the head and neck. Horse flies are less numerous and seldom attack in swarms, often targeting bare legs. Both attack quickly, circling their hapless prey then gliding in for a blood feast. Fortunately, they are large enough that people can usually see them before the attack.

Deer and horse flies can be so bad that some areas are virtually unusable during summer days. For ungulates, both the loss of blood and the energy expended

DEERFLY. BRUCE MARLIN (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

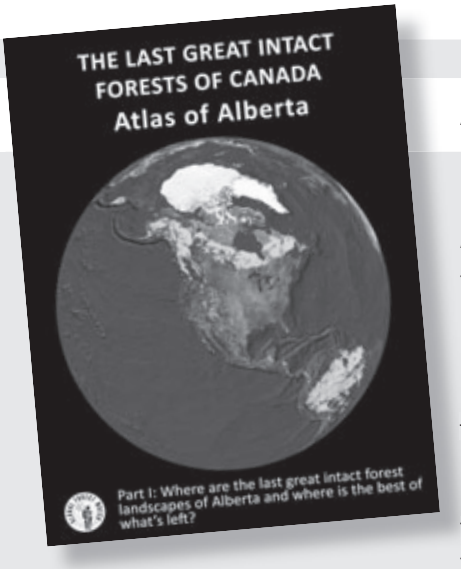
HORSEFLY. DENNIS RAY (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



Wildlife! Starring…Horse Flies & Deer Flies… continued

wildly running to escape attacks are potentially serious effects. Stories abound in various parts of the world of people being forced by horse fly attacks to move out of an area. There has even been the suggestion that delegates ended debate early and signed the U.S. Declaration of Independence on July 4th so they could escape the plague of horse flies in Philadelphia that summer!

Obviously, deer and horse flies deserve their bad reputation, belonging to that group of animals that we tend to see as having no redeeming qualities and as candidates for complete eradication. However, there is a plus side to deer and horse flies, never mind the fact that control of them is almost impossible. They provide a large, tasty, protein-filled meal for predators like birds and dragonflies. They are interesting creatures, with big, colourful, beautiful eyes. If you are a bat or owl watcher, or prefer nature in deep shade, you have little to be concerned about. And, of course, that's just the niche they've carved out for themselves to survive: it's what they do. Remember that the next time this giant fly rips your neck open!



ATLAS OF FOREST LANDSCAPES RELEASED

Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC) has released its two-part atlas of Alberta's Last Great Forest Landscapes.

The atlas reveals a dramatic reduction in large blocks of Alberta's natural boreal forest landscapes due to the astonishing scale and pace of industrial allocations and disturbances – primarily logging and oil, bitumen and natural gas developments – which have occurred throughout most of the province's forest regions since 1990, but mainly within the province's boreal forests.

GFWC mapped remaining blocks of intact forests, recent industrial changes to Alberta's forests, threats to important wildlife species, rapidly expanding province-wide oil and gas footprint, effects of bituminous sands industrial operations on air, water, land, logging and logging tenures, encroaching industrial disturbances within Aboriginal traditional lands, protected areas and greenhouse gas and toxic pollution.

The publication of this atlas was triggered by the Alberta Government's new Land-use Framework, which acknowledges that the province's land, air and water are not unlimited and can be exhausted or degraded by overuse. In fact, the government's framework states that 'we have reached a tipping point.'

Despite the multiple disturbances, rapidly expanding threats and declining ranges and populations of key focal species, large ecologically intact boreal forest landscapes do remain. However, only one-third of these intact forests have been protected so far, providing excellent opportunities for further conservation and stewardship. The atlas, maps, and photographs can be downloaded at:

www.globalforestwatch.ca

FAN News

Awards Night

At an evening of fine food, good entertainment and inspiring art, FAN handed out its Awards for dedicated involvement in naturalist activities. The honours were part of the FAN Annual General Meeting in Edmonton on April 4, 2009. The art was courtesy of guest Sandra Kunz, some of whose work can be seen at www.ravenillustration.com.

A GOOD CROWD WAS ON HAND FOR THE DINNER, AWARDS AND LU CARBYN'S TALK ON WOLVES AND BISON. VI BIJELIC

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Volunteer Awards were given to Judy Boyd and Suzanne Visser, both of whom are associated with the Spring species counts as provincial compilers for FAN. Compiling this data takes a considerable amount of work, and those who take these duties on are truly providing a valuable service to FAN.

Judy Boyd has been FAN's provincial compiler for the May Bird Count for the past three years and the Red Deer River Naturalists (RDRN) Coordinator since about 2000. She has enthusiastically developed the Young Naturalists Program and has been on the FAN Board for five years, four of those as FAN Secretary.

Suzanne Visser has been doing part of the May Flowering Plant Species Counts for many years. In 2008, she took on full responsibility as provincial compiler for the Count, leading to her receiving the Volunteer Award.

FAN VICE-PRESIDENT SCOTT JUBINVILLE PRESENTS THE VOLUNTEER AWARD TO JUDY BOYD (LEFT) AND SUZANNE VISSER (RIGHT). VI BIJELIC

FRANK & ALICE HARPER MEMORIAL AWARD

Bill Heinsen, nominated by the RDRN, is the 2008 recipient of FAN's Frank and Alice Harper Memoraial Award.

Bill has been a hard-working director for RDRN since 1996. He has been a tireless advocate for natural history education and conservation. Bill oversaw the long and often arduous process of funding and producing *NatureScape Alberta: Creating and caring for wildlife habitat at home* in 2000. It was Bill's dedication to this project that resulted in RDRN being able to co-publish, with FAN, this impressive volume, which is available through the FAN Store. He also oversaw the production and marketing of another successful RDRN publication, Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring Guide (2002), also available through the FAN Store, and assisted with the publication of RDRN's most recent bird checklist.

Bill is a tireless behind-the-scenes operator. In addition to the very important and time-consuming job of Treasurer, he keeps the office organized, maintains the membership list, answers telephone and email inquiries, prints off the newsletter mailing labels, and handles the mail and correspondence. He has also keyed in all the historical RDRN Christmas Bird Count records and, as RDRN's webmaster,

JUDY BOYD PRESENTS THE HARPER MEMORIAL AWARD TO BILL HEINSEN. VI BIJELIC

developed a very extensive and impressive website.

Bill sent this note to Past President Sandra Foss:

Please extend to the FAN Board my sincere thanks for the Frank and Alice Harper Memorial Award. It is a great honour to be recognized by one's peers, more than one realizes until it happens. I wish FAN all the best in the challenges that are being undertaken and know that they will continue to carry on the work which they have been doing so well in the past. Thanks again.

—Bill Heinsen

HONOURARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Former FAN Executive Director Glen Semenchuk received an Honourary Life Membership for over 20 years of consistently dedicated service, both paid work and as a volunteer. His achievements have been many with FAN, beginning with fundraising for and the editing of the first *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta*. He was a founding member of the Alberta Conservation Association and put in ten years on that Board for FAN, the first three as Board Chair. Glen received the prestigious Loren Goulden Award from FAN for 2007. He continues to diligently volunteer for FAN and work with other organizations for the conservation of nature in Alberta.

LONGTIME FAN DIRECTOR DON STILES PRESENTS THE HONOURARY LIFE AWARD TO GLEN SEMENCHUK. VI BIJELIC

AB Community Spirit Program

FAN was one of nearly 1,500 Alberta-based non-profits to benefit from Alberta's Community Spirit Program. The goal of the Community Spirit Program is to help increase private charitable donations by individual Albertans to Alberta's non-profit and charitable organizations. It does this by matching 100% donations that organizations receive up to $10,000, with a reduced matching for higher amounts.

FAN received $10,486.50 for 2007. The Program distributed $19 million dollars for 2007 and will continue in 2008 and 2009. Said Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: "This program is a way for eligible organizations to receive additional funds as a result of cash donations they already worked so hard to obtain." Definitely, the program is very much appreciated by FAN! The program continues this year, so hopefully many people will generously donate to FAN in 2009!

For more information on the program, including a list of 2007 grant recipients and grant amounts, please visit www.communityspiritprogram.ca.

Two New Clubs

Two new Associate Clubs were welcomed into the FAN family at April's Annual AGM: the Cochrane Environmental Action Committee (see story, pg 43), and the Sturgeon River Watershed Group. Both groups are very active and well known in their areas for their skills, knowledge, experience and dedication.

Milestone: 40 Years!

FAN will be celebrating its 40th Anniversary in 2010. From an initial seven groups, FAN has grown to a membership of 42 clubs representing over 5,000 naturalists. A small group of FAN volunteers is planning a variety of activities to celebrate the milestone. If you would like to be involved, please contact FAN: fan@fanweb.ca; or 780-427-8124.

Milestone: 60 Years!

Nature Saskatchewan marks their 60th Anniversary in 2009 and FAN sends its congratulations and thanks. Nature Saskatchewan has been an essential part of the Canadian conservation community since 1949, promoting the appreciation and understanding of our natural environment, and protecting and preserving natural ecosystems and their biodiversity. For more information on Nature Saskatchewan, check their website: www.naturesask.ca.

Be Part of the Team

FAN is an exciting organization! And there's an opportunity for you to be part of our team of active naturalists by volunteering for FAN. Many different activities are available: from helping out in the office, to research, to project assistance. For more information, check the FAN website, www.fanweb.ca, under "How to help: Volunteer at FAN" – or call us at (780) 427-8124. Don't have time? You still help immensely by donating to FAN (secure on-line or by mail). We sure hope we'll hear from you!

FEATURE ARTICLE

Wolves Grey and Black

BY DICK DEKKER

How Grey is the Gray Wolf?

In the standard textbook on Canadian mammals by Ottawa zoologist A.W.F. Banfield, the common species name given to Canis lupus was just Wolf, while the American name has always been Gray Wolf. Unfortunately, the American label, including its spelling, has now also been adopted in Canada. This is a pity, because this colour-based name is clearly a misnomer.

Forty years ago, provincial zoologist J.D. Soper described five different subspecies of wolves for Alberta, while Banfield recognized seventeen for Canada. The number of subspecies inhabiting all of North America, based on physical characteristics and geographic range, ran to several dozen. More recently, however, by scientific consensus, the continental total has been drastically whittled down to only three or four subspecies. They include the white Arctic Wolf, the Red Wolf of the American southeast, and the Gray Wolf.

The present range of the Gray Wolf extends right across the continent from Montana to Minnesota and from Alaska to Labrador. But there is a marked difference between east and west. With very rare exceptions, all eastern North American wolves are a shade of tan-grey, resembling the Coyote. By contrast, the pelage colour of western Gray Wolves shows extreme individual variation. For instance, in two 1950s wolf control campaigns by government agents in Alberta and British Columbia, in which a total of nearly one thousand wolves were poisoned, the black percentages were 31 and 33%. The proportion of blacks in Alaska is in the same order of magnitude.

Formerly, black wolves were also common in Mississippi and Florida. More than half a century ago, the renowned American wolfers Stanley Young and Edward Goldman named two smallish southern subspecies *Canis niger* and *Canis niger rufus*. This indicates that the current name of Red Wolf is actually a misnomer as well.

In our Rocky Mountain National Parks, melanism has always been common in wild canids. In the 1940s, 55% of 80 wolves seen by park wardens were described as black. In the summers of 1966-1985, I saw 132 wolves at their dens in Jasper's upper Snake Indian Valley, and the black percentage was 53%. In Yellowstone National Park, where wolves from western Canada were reintroduced a decade ago, the black contingent of the current population of 100-160 runs to about half.

As a volunteer wildlife researcher in Jasper National Park, I have monitored wolves and their prey species on a wintering range in the lower Athabasca valley for 26 years. My methods were simple and required no more than patience and a bit of luck to be in the right place at the right time. Each day, around

Dick Dekker previously covered the story of "Wolf Wars" in the excellent Feature Story for the Fall 2006 issue of *Nature Alberta* (Vol 36 #3), which can be read on the FAN website (www.fanweb.ca).

WOLVES THAT WERE COMPLETELY BLACK AS PUPS COMMONLY FADE TO A MIX OF BLACK AND SILVER-GREY IN A MATTER OF A FEW YEARS. SOME BLACK WOLVES HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO TURN PRACTICALLY WHITE. NOTE THE BLACK EARS AND TAIL OF THIS ANIMAL. DIFFERENCES IN FUR COLOUR MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO RECOGNIZE INDIVIDUALS IN WOLF PACKS. DON MACKENZIE

sundown and just after dawn, I spent an hour or so on a ridge overlooking the study area, which included open river flats and partly wooded montane meadows.

Over the years, I saw wolves on about 150 days of some 600 spent in the field. Quite often, the sighting involved just a single animal, at other times a pack. The size of the local wolf pack changed from year to year and varied from five to thirteen, except for 1983 when it declined to two. Mean or average pack size over these 26 winters was 7.9 members. Of all wolves seen – some five hundred in total – 74 percent were black. This is the highest proportion ever reported anywhere. In 1992, all 13 members of the local pack were black. And between 1992 and 1996 I failed to see a single grey wolf. During that same time period, park wardens reported few greys from other districts in Jasper.

COLOUR VARIATIONS

Western wolves can be split into two major shades, either grey or black. The fur of a typical grey wolf is cream-coloured on throat, belly and legs (see photo on page 24), with darker accents along the spine, and a black tip to the tail. The pelage of a grey wolf changes little with age. By contrast, the black variant can go through a complete metamorphosis. Black puppies often feature a white spot on the chest. Black adults may have white feet or a whitish face, and after one or more years, the dark pelage of nearly all blacks fades to bluish-grey, brown-grey, or silver. Some even turn white, which was closely observed in Yellowstone National Park. There, two radio-tagged black wolves, transplanted from Alberta, became practically white after just two years. Extreme bleaching of formerly black wolves has also been reported in captive situations.

In view of the fact that most or all wolves become grey or greyish with advancing age, Jasper's high percentage of blacks may be indicative of

a young population. The mortality rate of these park wolves is not exactly known but believed to be high. Subject to trapping and hunting on the park boundaries, this fleet-footed predator occasionally runs afoul of vehicles and trains inside the park. Senior warden Wes Bradford, who keeps track of these data, reports that the average yearly number of fatalities over the past decade was around four, with a peak of ten in 1996. The traffic toll of hoofed mammals as well as wolves is expected to grow as the highway and railroad corridors that transect the park get busier.

LOBOS OF THE OLD WEST

Based on historical records, the wolves of the American frontier, prior to their final extermination earlier this century, included black animals as well as whites. Interestingly, in a paper published in the Canadian Field-Naturalist, biologists Philip Gipson and Warren Ballard reported that one-third of 59 notorious cattle-killing lobos of the Old West were white. Several of these crafty survivors that became adept at avoiding traps and poison were known to have reached an old age of fifteen or more. Apparently, having your hair turn silver or white with increasing age is a characteristic that we share with the wild ancestor of "man's best friend."

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Black Wolves and Climate Change

A group of 15 geneticists and biologists has recently written that the black fur of wolves is "a gift from the dogs" and that it gives them a camouflage advantage over their grey cousins if the tree line advances northward due to climate change.

Based on DNA analysis, the black fur is said to have been caused by a mutation that was lost to wolves in ancient times but was subsequently reacquired after wolves hybridized with domestic dogs. And this was most likely to have happened, the scientists speculated, about 15,000 years ago after some wolves crossed over from Asia into Alaska via the land bridge that developed between the two continents during the Pleistocene ice age.

In my opinion, the scientists exaggerated the significance of their finding by claiming that black wolves have an evolutionary edge over their grey cousins that make them better adapted to climate change, because black fur, the scientists thought, gives a camouflage

A TYPICAL GREY WOLF WALKING ALONG THE ROADSIDE IN JASPER NATIONAL PARK. UNLIKE SOME OTHER GREY WOLVES, THIS POWERFUL-LOOKING ANIMAL FEATURES A PROMINENT BLACK TIP TO THE TAIL. WES BRADFORD

THIS WOLF IS PART OF THE SAME GROUP ON THE COVER; SEE THE STORY IN "ON THE COVERS", PG 4 BRIAN GENEREUX

advantage to a forest-dwelling predator, especially if snow-free ground increases in extent due to climate warming.

These arguments are fanciful because the effects of climate change may vary in different landscapes. We Albertans have been told time and time again that a warmer and dryer climate is supposed to lead to the demise of our forests and create more open terrain. If so, the so-called camouflage advantage for a black animal would be lost. Furthermore, in my 45-years of field experience in Jasper National Park, black wolves are at all times more visible than grey ones, even among the trees.

The taxonomic origin of wolves is complicated and was vigorously debated at the Second North American Symposium on Wolves held at the University of Alberta in August of 1992. Based on the fossil record, Professor Ronald Nowak argued that the forbearer of all wolves is the Red Wolf of the American southwest. Long ago, the ancestors of these American wolves crossed over into Asia and Europe. There, they grew to the large size of the present-day Gray Wolf and much later returned to North America, where some acquired a black coat. Apparently there are no black wolves in Eurasia where all of them are grey.

Be that as it may, melanism in wild mammals is not confined to the Gray Wolf. It also occurs in the Red Fox, where it can have nothing to do with hybridization with dogs because foxes and dogs have different chromosome numbers, which prevents interbreeding. Melanism is also evident in squirrels, especially in the eastern Grey Squirrel. After this large species was introduced near Vancouver, the sight of black squirrels has become routine to visitors of Stanley Park.

Black fur has even been reported in our common Richardson's Ground Squirrel (commonly called "gopher"). Colonies of black "gophers" have been seen in fields near Tofield and west of Edmonton, as well as in the Yukon and Jasper National Park.

So what is so exceptional about black fur in wolves, and why bring it up in the context of climate change? Or has climate change become the buzzword in wildlife research?

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WORLD'S BEST AT THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM

Featuring stunning photographs that reveal the splendour, drama and variety of life on Earth, the North American premiere of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the Royal Alberta Museum (Edmonton) is certain to inspire and engage.

THE EXHIBITION WILL BE PRESENTED FROM MAY 23 TO SEPTEMBER 13.

Visitors will experience a collection of more than 80 winning and highly commended entries, chosen by an expert panel from almost 17,000 entries from around the world. The museum will be supplementing the touring show with a host of photography workshops, presentations and a film series. Details on museum hours and program schedules are available online at www.royalalbertamuseum.ca or by calling 780-453-9100.

PAUL HORSLEY

Sandhill Cranes:

Proposed hunt a No Go

Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) has announced that there will be no Sandhill Crane hunt in Alberta – at least, for now.

SRD had been considering a proposal for a 2009 fall hunt. A considerable number of concerns were raised by FAN, other groups, biologists and the public [see "Federation of Alberta Naturalists Response to Proposed Sandhill Crane Hunting Season", see below, and "Letters" pg. 6].

"Kudos to [SRD] Minister Morton," said Glen Semenchuk in a *Calgary Herald* article (June 3, 2009). "If the population numbers (of Sandhill Cranes) go up substantially, we can justify it. But we're still going to have the concern about the accidental shooting of the Whooping Cranes."

It seems likely that the idea of a hunt will resurface, particularly given the words (in the *Herald* article) of SRD's Dave Ealey: "***At this point***, we have decided not to follow through with the plan" [emphasis added']. For now, however, whoopers, sandhills and probably a number of other large birds are a bit safer from legitimate hunters.

FAN Response to Proposed Hunting Season

The following was sent in April 2009 to Jim Allen, Head, Game and Priority Species, Wildlife Management Branch, Fish and Wildlife, Sustainable Resource Development, as FAN's response to the proposed hunting season on Sandhill Cranes. It is an excellent summary of the issue.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed initiation of a Sandhill Crane [SHC] hunting season in Alberta. We are still somewhat concerned that FAN had to request this review and that we were not automatically on the list, especially in light of the fact that you quote from our recent publication. In general the Federation of Alberta Naturalists has a number of concerns in the Fish and Wildlife Division adding this species to the list of hunted wildlife.

The literature shows that Sandhill Cranes do not breed until they are 2 – 7 years old and rarely raise more than one young to fledging. Low annual recruitment rates are a limiting factor on the ability of this species recovering from population declines and as such hunting mortality is a factor in regulating the size of the population.

Your synopsis states: "The latest photo-corrected surveys provide a 3-year average (2004-06) of 378,420 birds, which is well within the mid-continent population management plan objectives of 349,000 to 472,000 birds." This also shows that the population is in the lower quarter of the acceptable range. Combined with the low recruitment range


RICK PRICE

Sandhill Cranes: FAN Response to Proposed Hunting Season…continued

and the ability of hunting to affect populations, we feel that a more prudent management strategy would be to use the precautionary approach, used by your department in the management of other species, and not even consider opening a season until population numbers were documented, at least, in the upper half of the acceptable population management plan objectives. If you initiated the hunt, would there be provision to closely monitor the numbers so that the hunt would be suspended if it fell below the acceptable range?

The hunting justification document also states that "Alberta classifies the SHC nesting in the province as a 'sensitive' species due to the susceptibility of cranes nesting in the boreal forest to disturbance and threats to nesting habitats. However, Alberta's status report recognizes while the nesting birds are considered 'sensitive', the SHC population is "doing very well with no concern about population status"." If the species is "sensitive" because of threats to disturbance and threats to habitat in the boreal forest of Alberta, then in today's scenario that promotes and facilitates industrialization of the boreal forest, we should have a concern about population status. Using just one industrial use as an example, there has been an escalation of well sites drilled over Alberta's forest landscapes that are within the Western Canada Sedimentary Basin. These well sites are accompanied by a widespread system of industrial infrastructure consisting of roads, pipelines and power lines. When you overlay the areas that also have been allocated for logging, which includes clear cutting and more roads, the prime breeding areas for cranes have potential for significant impact.

Again using the precautionary principle why would a season be promoted when the management agencies of the Government of Alberta, who acknowledge the crane's vulnerability, do not have a handle on the effects of this development on Sandhill populations?

Your justification piece also lacks information on the annual harvest by Alberta First Nations. Again because you are dealing with a population in the lower quadrant of its acceptable range, this harvest could be significant from a management point of view.

As to the question of mis-identification, we feel that the risk of taking one Whooping Crane makes the risk very high. Your statistic on the number of Whooping Cranes shot is very suspect as we do not feel that a hunter taking the wrong species is going to have very much incentive to admit to the mistake. You indicate that two Whooping Cranes were shot in Saskatchewan over the years. The following newspaper articles confirm our concerns. Excerpt from an article in the *Wichita Edge* (Saturday, September 24, 2005):

SEVEN CHARGED IN WHOOPING CRANE DEATHS

Seven central Kansans were charged in U.S. District Court on Wednesday in connection

WHOOPING AND SANDHILL CRANES TOGETHER. JIM KRENTZ

Sandhill Cranes: FAN Response to Proposed Hunting Season…continued

with the death of two whooping cranes last fall. They told wildlife officials that they mistook the endangered cranes for legally hunted sandhill cranes on a Nov. 6 Stafford County goose and sandhill crane hunting trip. The wounded birds were found by local farmers, and captured by wildlife officials. They eventually died while undergoing treatment…."

The following article from the Texas Parks and Wildlife website indicates Whooping Crane shootings in Texas:

"Oct. 16, 2006: Record Numbers of Whooping Cranes Expected This Fall"

Shooting deaths of whooping cranes are rare (seven whoopers from the Texas flock are known to have been shot since 1968)…

Just these three records account for a significant percentage of the Whooping Crane population. Do we want to take the chance of adding to this number?! The areas and seasons as set out do not guarantee that local populations will not be affected by the hunt as simplistically as outlined. The information from the Atlas shows that breeding cranes from north-eastern Alberta will be traversing the proposed open areas from September through December.

There is also the possibility of a rare subspecies (Greater Sandhill Crane) in SW Alberta. We feel that there should be an interest by fish and wildlife biologists in studying the population in southwest Alberta to determine this. We want to raise this as a red flag before any hunting is allowed.

In summary FAN is opposed to the initiation of a season at this time. We feel that more thought must go into it especially in light of the fact that breeding areas in Alberta are under pressure from all forms of development; and that the populations are not sufficiently high to provide a buffer to compensate for impacts to breeding areas.

GLEN SEMENCHUK,
Executive Director

Sandhill Cranes are the most abundant of the world's cranes, distributed intermittently throughout North America and extending into northeastern Siberia and Cuba. There are six Subspecies: the Canadian Sandhill (Grus canadensis rowani) is the most prevalent in Alberta, while the Greater (G. c. tabida) may be breeding in the southwest of the province.

Canada's Sandhill Cranes all winter in the southern United States to Central Mexico and Cuba. As with many species, the main threat to the populations is loss or degradation of habitat in nesting, staging and wintering areas. For example, during migration approximately 80% of all Sandhill Cranes use a relatively short (75 miles/120km) stretch of Nebraska's Platte River. Over-hunting can be devastating to small breeding populations during migration and on their fall staging areas.

RICK PRICE

SANDRA HAWKINS

First Hand: Crane Spring Stop-over

BY IRMA ROWLANDS

Every April, whenever I am outside, I listen for a distinctive rolling rattle, and looking up, I see long skeins of hundreds of Sandhill Cranes hurrying north to their breeding grounds in northern Canada and as far away as Alaska and Siberia.

On a magical day, many waves of cranes pass over, legs trailing and necks outstretched.

Last winter, I read that over 500,000 Sandhill Cranes, representing 80% of the world's population, stop for several weeks on a stretch of the Platte River in Nebraska on their northward journey from wintering grounds in southern United States and Mexico. Since I was well over my biblically-allotted three score years and ten, the opportunity to see this spectacle of nature had to be seized now. So in late March, before sunrise, wearing parkas and winter boots, Judy and I, two long-time birding friends, joined eight other birders at the Audubon Society's Rowe Sanctuary near Kearney, Nebraska. We followed the guide to a blind on the side of the Platte River.

In the semi-darkness, peering through spaces in the walls of the blind made of hay bales we could see hundreds of grey lumps in the shallows of the river and on the sand banks. The increasing light revealed the cranes in the thousands, sleeping, standing on one foot and with heads under wings. Gradually they began to wake up with croaks, head scratchings and wing flappings, followed by intermittent "dancing". This fascinating activity is believed to be a way of releasing energy or part of a courtship ritual.

Some of the movements, running at other cranes with lowered head, suggest aggression against invasion of space. The dancing is characterized by jumping – sometimes as high as five feet, bowing, stick tossing and wing flapping. In an hour or so, the early birds began to take off, flying low in circles in small groups. Soon, more groups took off, circling to gain altitude. The wings and voices of thousands of birds created an impressive din. After a few hours they were all gone, to spend the day foraging in the fields for waste corn which makes up 95% of their stop-over diet. The birds spend several weeks here to gain roughly ten percent of their body weight to build up reserves for the long flight north.

Sandhill Cranes are handsome, with a uniform grey color except for a bright spot of bare red skin on the head. The wings have feathery

JUDITH JOHNSON

First Hand: Crane Spring Stop-over…continued

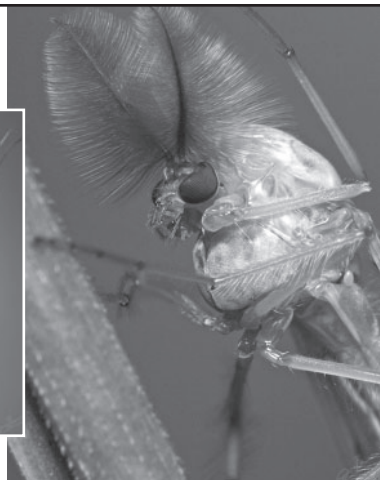
plumes which look like peplums on ladies' dresses. They grow to be 3 ½ feet (1.1m) tall, weighing 7-8 pounds (3.2-3.6 kg) and having a wing spread of 6 feet (1.8m). They mature at 4 or 5 years, may mate for life and live to be 18 to 24 years old.

The Platte River, because of its shallow braided channels, provides a safe place to roost for the night. Predators cannot approach quietly. Unfortunately, the river today has a much smaller volume of flow than it did a century ago; several dams in the headwaters in the Rocky Mountains impede its flow.

Judy and I had another reservation at a different spot on the river to watch the cranes returning to roost after sunset. Again we were in a blind. The morning sights were spectacular, but the evening drama was even more so. For hours we watched and heard in wonder and awe, the roar of wings and voices of thousands of birds as they circled in groups, swerved, landed in fields near the river, rose again and finally chose a spot for the night, standing close together filling the shallow river for long distances from bank to bank. At times the entire sky was dark with birds. Roosting concentrations of 20,000 cranes per mile have been observed on the river. The sight and sound will be a permanent vivid memory for me.

A few weeks later, at home again, I hear the familiar sound once again and I pause and look up to see the thin grey lines in the sky and marvel at this natural cycle that has been unaltered in nearly ten million years.

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.



CLOSEUP OF CHIRONOMID MIDGE.
WWW3.BIO.UU.NL

CHIRONOMID MIDGE.
WWW3.BIO.UU.NL

Up Close Naturally: Midges by the Millions!

BY MARGOT HERVIEUX

Those who live near or visit a lake during the summer have found themselves facing large swarms of midges or fish flies.

These relatives of mosquitoes don't bite but their numbers can sometimes be overwhelming.

Chironomid midges, like their mosquito cousins, have a dual life cycle. The larval stage is spent in the water while the adults live their life in the air. There are many species of midges, and they are wide spread, living in ponds, lakes, marshes and even sewage lagoons.

Midge larvae, also known as bloodworms, are either free swimming or live in burrows in the soft mud of the lake bottom. They aren't picky about water conditions and can be found in sandy, weedy or rocky areas with clean or polluted water. Their favourite food is algae.

When ready to emerge as an adult, the pupa wiggles its way to the surface, the skin splits open and the midge crawls out. After its wings dry the midge is ready to fly off and join its fellows. The discarded skins float in the water for a few days and are often noticed by swimmers.

The sole focus of adult midges is to mate and lay eggs. They only live a day or two and don't feed. After mating, eggs are usually laid on the water surface or on aquatic vegetation. The eggs hatch in a few days or weeks, depending on water temperature, and we usually see two generations of each species in a summer.

It is easier to find a mate when gathered in groups; that is why midges swarm. The males form the swarms and the females drop by to choose a mate. Different species prefer different swarming locations, but in our area most seem to form clouds above trees or fence posts.

Chironomid larvae and adults are important sources of food for a variety of wetland creatures. Fish, dragonfly larvae and other aquatic insects all dine on the midge larvae. When the adults emerge, they quickly become food for swallows, dragonflies and Franklin's gulls.

There is no question that large swarms of midges can be both annoying and a bit freaky. However, not only are these large hatches of insects critical food sources for growing nestlings and young fish, but the aerial dances of midges, and the birds that hunt them, are fascinating to watch!

AMY SANCETTA/ASSOCIATED PRESS
New York's Jorge Posada applies bug spray to Mariano Rivera as gnats swarmed during Friday's game.

MIDGES FROM LAKE ERIE MAY HAVE COST THE NEW YORK YANKEES THE WORLD SERIES IN 2007 WHEN THEY SWARMED THE FIELD, BUGGING ALL THE PLAYERS, ESPECIALLY PITCHER JOBA CHAMBERLAIN. ARTICLE FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS, IN *ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS* (OCT 5/07).

WHITNEY CRANSHAW, COLORADO STATE UNIV., BUGWOOD.ORG

Margot also writes a column for the Peace Country Sun, archived copies of which are available at www.peacecountrysun.com.

The Small World of Columbian Ground Squirrels: Networking without Facebook

BY DR. THEODORE G. MANNO

In the 1990's, some college students in Pennsylvania, USA appeared on Jon Stewart's television show to demonstrate that Kevin Bacon could be connected to practically all other Hollywood actors via no more than six common appearances in movies.

Their unintentional use of the "six degrees of separation" theory confirmed the classic scientific studies of Stanley Milgram showing a "small world" between people in a portion of the American population. It also foreshadowed the emergence of technology-based social networking tools such as Facebook and MySpace, which are said to play on the natural tendency of humans to build coalitions and cliques or expand their social influence.

Social networking has since become integrated into the popular culture. But, the same behavioral tendencies can be found among actors that are neither famous, North American, or even human—and no fancy websites are needed.

The Columbian Ground Squirrels (*Spermophilus columbianus*) along the Gorge Creek Trail in Alberta's Sheep River Provincial Park have been my loyal research animals for three years*. I have observed thousands of "friendly" social interactions between over 70 individually marked squirrels during a 3-year period, including "kissing" (oral contact that does not lead to a fight), sniffing, playing, and grooming. By generating a computer map of the interactions, I have noticed that squirrels, like humans, have "friends"—i.e., pairs of individuals that have friendly interactions more frequently than expected from random associations (Fig. 1). These social ties create a complicated and rich structure within the society, a phenomenon not easily seen during a routine walk through a ground squirrel colony.

FIGURE 1 Study Buddy—I have observed and recorded thousands of amicable interactions between over 70 squirrels during three summers at Gorge Creek AB. I sometimes have the squirrels take their own notes during my coffee breaks. Unfortunately, the squirrels seem to have no affinity towards coffee, eschewing my continued offers of a cup of dark roast for some chunky peanut butter.

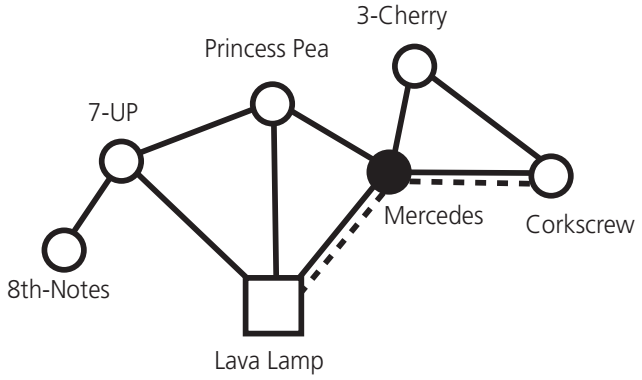
The Small World of Columbian Ground Squirrels…continued

CLOSELY KNIT

During a 3-week breeding season when females have their annual day of estrus and copulate with one or several males, the squirrels at Gorge Creek have two major communities that are further divided into two and four subgroups, respectively. Subgroups are "families" consisting of a few adult females, 1-2 young non-reproductive individuals of both sexes, and a dominant, territorial male. For instance, Mercedes, a 6-year old male and the Kevin Bacon of the squirrel world, is linked to reproductive females such as 7-Up, 3-Cherry, Eighth Notes, and Princess Pea (Fig. 2). The friendships result from squirrel "dating", which is courtship by both sexes during attempts to find the best possible breeding partners. Social groups are at their strongest during the mating period, with females having less social contact with members of both sexes after becoming pregnant. But the groups maintain their cohesion as long as the most socially active individuals (the dominant males) remain in their midst (Fig. 3).

Although the breeding system of the ground squirrels is typically inconsistent with that of humans, parallels between squirrel and human networks are numerous. It turns out that just like Milgram's study, the entire colony of squirrels can be connected by three degrees of separation – meaning that any two randomly selected squirrels can, on average, be connected by three intermediate individuals. "Popular" squirrels (those with many connections through social interaction) that are of similar age and reproductive status tend to interact with each other, leaving the loners on the periphery of the colony – kind of like the students in a high school. The squirrels also have cliques: individuals are more likely to be connected to "friends of their friends" than with other squirrels, and the social groups accept outsiders that arrive nearby only if the outsiders are friendly with a member of the group.

Some of the colony's extroverts are so friendly with members of their groups that the larger, most structured portions of the social network form around them. I believe that this may become important were the colony subjected to some sort of disaster. Simulating a situation where the squirrels are hunted by humans, I have removed squirrels from computer models one by one to see if and when the squirrel social network would disintegrate. Removals of random individuals have little effect, but the targeted removal of these very connected squirrels, who are usually dominant males and sometimes



THEODORE MANNO

FIGURE 2. Duke of Squirrel—Columbian Ground Squirrels are connected through a complicated series of friendly social interactions. This partial network shows how Mercedes, the dominant reproductive male with many "friends" and depicted as such with a colored circle, is connected to reproductive female squirrels such as 7-UP and 3-Cherry during their courtship. Squirrels can also be connected through the "friends of their friends". For instance, Corkscrew can be friends with Lava Lamp (a non-reproductive female, depicted by a square), but only because they both have a relationship with Mercedes. On average, any two squirrels in the colony can be connected as "friends" in this fashion through three intermediate squirrels.

FIGURE 3. Pearl of a Squirrel—Lava Lamp, a young, non-reproductive female, calls out to her squirrel "buddies" during social interaction.

The Small World of Columbian Ground Squirrels… continued

reproductive females, tend to break up the network into fragmented groups after more than seven are removed.

LESSONS LEARNED

A detailed examination of the social activity ruins any notion of an egalitarian society among the squirrels. The way the colony is structured combined with the simulated removals suggests that, as for human societies, different squirrels have different roles according to their sex and age, and the influence of these roles in the society is apparently powerful. For instance, as for Bighorn Sheep studied in southern Alberta, the human act of trophy hunting for males, who are larger and emerge earlier from hibernation than females, can dismantle the social structure of the squirrel colony during breeding and annihilate the population much more than random hunts. In such cases, the rest of the social group will usually disperse and the females may not join another group or find another mate until the following year, reducing the colony's population more than the hunt totals indicate. By the same token, knowing which squirrels are connected to others might enable wildlife managers to sequester those individuals during the spread of an infectious disease such as plague, as better connected individuals may be more likely to encourage the onset of death.

Most of all, I have learned of social behaviors by varied species, including humans, that seem to result from a natural tendency to maintain a social network and to have structure in a society. Given my eagerness to share the similarities between human and ground squirrel behavior with regard to sociality, one might consider my statements to be anthropomorphic. Actually, I do not maintain that the similarities between human and squirrel social networks make the squirrels "advanced". Rather, they suggest to me that our human behaviors may really be quite basic. As we keep an open mind, we are sure to discover more fascinating phenomena within the social behavior of squirrels, humans, and other animals.

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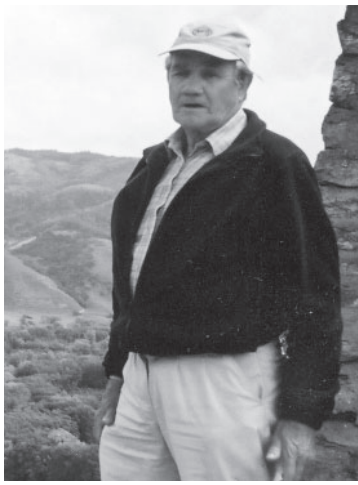
*Dr Manno has written two previous articles for *Nature Alberta* on the Columbian Ground Squirrel; "Squirrel-esque!" Vol 37, # 2, Summer 2007; "Squirrels Unfurled: Columbians are not Prolific Breeders." Vol 38, # 2, Summer 2008. (Dr. Manno is an educator and freelance writer based in Arizona.)

Dick Clayton:
A Great FAN Volunteer & Naturalist

BY PAT CLAYTON



PAT CLAYTON

After sixteen years as FAN Membership and Nature Alberta *Subscriber Secretary, Dick Clayton has decided to retire from the position and has passed the duties on to Ted Hindmarch, who is also a FAN Appointed Director.*

Richard Charles (Dick) Clayton was born in England and emigrated to Edmonton in the early 1950s to work in the Esso Oil Refinery. He and Pat raised two sons and while working shifts, Dick used some of his free time to assist Fred and Eileen Coffey with the mailing out of the *Alberta Naturalist*. Fred was then FAN Treasurer and his wife Eileen kept the Membership and Subscriber mailing lists. Four times a year, a bunch of friends assisted with the sorting and stuffing of hand addressed envelopes, this all taking place on the Coffey's living room floor in the late 1970s.

When Fred, and later Eileen, died, Dick took over the task of Membership Secretary and volunteered in that capacity for the next sixteen years. Hand addressed envelopes gradually gave way to computer generated labels and lists, but the basic card system was carried on as inherited from Lyman Mathews (Graham Greenlees' father-in-law) who was the first Treasurer/Record keeper/Mailer of the fledgling *Alberta Naturalist*.

Over the years, Dick was assisted in the mailing out job by various good friends, but his was the task of reconciling the ever varying demands of Canada Post, and later Heritage Canada as well, for detailed records. At one point, there were thirty separate bags of mail that had to be hauled to the downtown Post Office such were the demands of the Post Office's Coding System. There were also times when Canada Post would phone and demand that Dick go back downtown and re-sort the bags to their latest (and again changed) requirements. Sorting mail on a cold and drafty loading dock is not a fun job!

Throughout the years, Dick kept his sense of humour, treated all the *Alberta Naturalist* and *Nature Alberta* subscribers with courtesy and kept meticulous records. He hand wrote notes to answer their questions or to thank them for donations. He has never sought the limelight, preferring to work quietly in the background, whether it was serving as Treasurer for the Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary, packing and delivering boxes of the first *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta*, maintaining a section and leading hikes on the Waskahegan Trail, or serving on the Condo Board and undertaking maintenance chores.

He still undertakes maintenance and monitoring chores for the Wagner Natural Area and mailouts for the Edmonton Nature Club. He continues to maintain a Mountain Bluebird trail near Tofield and Eddie Jones's Tree Swallow boxes at Wagner, but has thankfully turned over the FAN membership and mailing duties to Ted Hindmarch. Dick is now in his second "retirement" phase and looking forward to more travelling, a summer of birding and enjoying his family.

FAN sends it sincere thanks and gratitude to Dick for a job well done!

Ninth Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee

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

The past year (2008) produced not only firsts for Alberta, but also one for Canada! Indeed, the documentation of a Lucy's Warbler (*Vermivora luciae*) in a yard in Fort McMurray (of all places!) in November becomes the first confirmed report of the species in Canada. This is an incredible record considering that the species breeds in the dense lowland riparian mesquite woodlands of the hot lower Sonoran desert of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico, and winters in a narrow band along the Pacific slope of Mexico (Johnson et al. 1997). The possibility that the bird received some assistance on its travels to Alberta was ruled as highly improbable by the Committee. The bird was first identified by David Sibley after he received a series of pictures from Cathy Mountain, the sole observer of the bird (for a full account check http://sibleyguides.blogspot.com/2008/11/how-many-rare-birds-did-we-miss-before.html).

The past year also saw the addition of Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*) to the provincial list, after a few previous reports failed to meet the standard for a provincial first. The Official List of the birds of Alberta now stands at 415 species.

Since publication of the Eighth Report (Hudon et al. 2008), the Alberta Bird Record Committee (ABRC) has reviewed and reached decisions on 87 records, including multiple sightings of Iceland Gulls, Glaucous-winged Gulls, Eastern Bluebirds and Indigo Buntings from the back-log of unadjudicated records from the 1980s and 1990s.

Finally, the provincial list is amended to bring it in line with the 49th supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union's "Check-list of North American Birds" (Banks et al. 2008). This entailed altering the generic assignment and sequence of genera and species of gulls in the subfamily Larinae. The scientific names of the following species become: Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) and Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*).

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), Glenmore Reservoir, Calgary; 14 – 19 November 2007; written report (Ray Wershler), 2 digital images (Bill Walker). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), Clear Lake; 24 May 2003; written report (Gilles Turcotte fide Teresa Dolman). From the files of "The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta. A Second Look". **CODE 3 RECORD**. Weed Lake, Calgary; 7 July 2007; 3 digital images posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website (Reid Barclay). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), Muriel Lake; 30 May 2008; written report and 1 image (Roy Schmelzeisen and Velma Hudson). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*), Namaka Lake; 25 – 26 September 1995, 6 October 1995; written reports (Olga Droppo, Andrew Slater, John B. Steeves). **CODE 2 RECORD**. Trapper's Lake; 4 August 1997; written report (Fred Whiley). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), sloughs along RR284 just S of TR231 SE of Shepard; 16 August 2007; 1 digital image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website (Randy Kimura). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*), Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 12 August 1990; 1 slide (Ken Rose). Photo courtesy of "Inglewood Bird Sanctuary" (Calgary). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Therien Lake, near St. Paul; 5 November 1992; 1 photograph (Richard Klauke). Photo courtesy of "WildBird General Store" (Edmonton). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Ovans' slough, NW of Cochrane; 25 October 2006; written report (Jerry Pilny). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*), ranch along Montagneuse River, W of Hines Creek; 17 January 2008; multiple [22] digital images (Curt & Patty Hale). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*), Clover Bar landfill, Edmonton; 17 October 2000; 1 slide (Randal Hoscheit). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Cold Lake; 12 November 2005; digital images posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website (Richard Klauke [1], Ted Hindmarch [1]). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Inglewood Bird Sanctuary,

RECORDS ACCEPTED...continued

Calgary; 29 March 2008; 2 digital images (Brian Elder) and written report (Brian Elder, Ray Woods and Bob Storms). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Near Crowchild Trail bridge, Calgary. 1 April 2008; written report (Hank Vanderpol). Possibly the bird seen a few days earlier. **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 2 May 2007; brief description posted on Albertabird and 8 digital images (Doug Faulder). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*), Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 9 May 1984; written reports (John B. Steeves, Doug Collister). **CODE 2 RECORD**. Carburn Park; 3 – 5 November 1984; written reports (R.W. Storms, John B. Steeves). **CODE 2 RECORD**. Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 17 – 22 April 1985; written reports (Andrew Slater, Doug Collister). **CODE 2 RECORD**. Clover Bar landfill, Edmonton; 9 November 1998; 3 slides (Randal Hoscheit). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Inglewood Bird Sanctuary; 6 – 9 May 2000; written report (M. Ross Lein and Valerie A. Haines). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Cold Lake landfill; 27 May 2002; digital image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website (Ted Hindmarch). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Inland Cement ponds along 170 Street, Edmonton; 1 – 2 May 2006; 2 digital images (Terry Thormin). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea), 8 – 9 adults and three nests with eggs within the Athabasca Dunes Ecological Reserve (in extreme NE Alberta) on 19 June 2000; there were four, possibly five, nests with eggs at the site that year (Thomas and Carroll 2001); 2 images (Bob Carroll). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Kinosoo Beach, Cold Lake; 28 August 2003; multiple [8] images captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Eagle Lake, SE of Strathmore; 18 – 19 July 2005; written report with 4 photographs (Brian Ritchie, Malcolm & Joan McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD**. At the weir on the Lesser Slave River N of town of Slave Lake; 5 – 8 September 2005; 4 images captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Chestermere Lake; 2 – 6 September 2006; several images (Bill Walker [3]; Reid Barclay [2]). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Wakamao Lake, near Clyde; 3 June 2007; 2 images (Gerald Romanchuk). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Astotin Lake, Elk Island National Park; 16 May 2008; 1 image (Terry Thormin). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*), Ogden neighbourhood, Calgary; first half of May 1999; 1 image (Bill Walker). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Lakeview district, Calgary; 31 July – 5 August 2002; 3 images (Donna & William Lentjes). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Brule (hamlet); 29 April 2007; written report (Bob and Linda Morgan) and 2 images (Beth MacCallum). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Vermilion; 4 – 16 June 2007; 2 images (Greg & Christine Smith). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), about 16 km S of Grassy Lake; 28 February 2005; written report (Lloyd Bennett). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Village of Grassy Lake; 8 June 2005; written report (Lloyd Bennett). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Fort Macleod; 19 June 2005; written report (Teresa and Douglas Dolman). From the files of "The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta. A Second Look". **CODE 3 RECORD**. Near Taber; 19 October 2005; written report (Lloyd Bennett). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Several birds, Claresholm; observed since 2005; written report (Ruth and Jason Attwell) with 4 photographs (Grace Norgard). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Several (5) birds, Taber; 17 February 2007 ("Great Backyard Bird Count"); 6 images (Sharon Solvey). **CODE 1 RECORD**. W Edmonton; 1 April 2007; written report and 1 image (Terry Thormin). **CODE 1 RECORD**. High River; first week of April 2007 to at least 17 April, 2007, also, 8 March 2008; multiple images (Robert Parker [5]; Eduardo Matoud [6] posted athttp://www.flickr.com/photos/mama_lumen/). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Acreage between Airdrie and Irricana; 17 May 2008; 1 image posted at http://talkaboutwildlife.ca/photos/d/6034-1/Eurasian+Collard+Dove.JPG (Douglas McQueen). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Pair in Ralston; 3, 4 and 9 June 2008; written report (Robin Bloom, Beverly Gingras, Brenda Dale). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary; 30 August 2008; 1 image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website, another posted on "flickr" [http://www.flickr.com/photos/mama_lumen/2814892348/] (Eduardo Matoud). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*), Strathcona Island Park and Police Point Park, Medicine Hat; from 9 April to at least 27 December 2007, 14 April 2008, then again in September 2008; written reports with images (Milt Spitzer [3], Joan & Malcolm McDonald [2]), several images (Gord Court [1], Ken Havard [1], Richard Klauke), description of song (Phil Horch). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Probably of the same bird; only the description of the song identifies the species.

Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*), atlas square PG61; 18 May 1989; 1 photograph (Ken Lange). From the files of the first "Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta". **CODE 1 RECORD**. S of Bragg Creek; 20 – 26 May 1991; written description (Ross Dickson). From the files of the first "Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta". **CODE 3 RECORD**. Windy Point, W of Turner Valley; 25 June 2006; 1 image (Bill Walker). **CODE 1 RECORD**. S of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park; 25 May 2007; video posted at http://www.webfoundations.com/webfx/RareBirds/Lewis's%20Woodpecker.wmv (Brooke Clibbon). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*), Banff, Banff National Park; 24 April 2008; 3 images (Jim Davies). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*Poecile rufescens*), near Cameron Falls, Waterton Lakes National Park; 28 September 2008; written report (Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*), Mountain View; 2 to about 10 October 2008; written report (Nancy West) and several images (Nancy West [4], Ken Havard [1]; Malcolm McDonald [1]). **CODE 1 RECORD**. First documented occurrence in the province.

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) NE of Blackfalds (Ellis Bird Farm Management Area); late June to at least 23 July 1991, when the only young fledged; written report (Ross D. Dickson) and 2 photographs (D. Murray Mackay). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Pair S of Ponoka; from 25

RECORDS ACCEPTED...continued

May to at least 2 July 1998 (raised 1 or 2 young); 4 photographs (Murray Mackay). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Pair about 10 km E of Millet; from 3 July to at least 24 July 1998; raised 3 young; 1 photograph of male (Linda Morgan). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Aitkens Acres, near Redwater; summer of 1998; 1 photograph (Bob Carroll). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Family, including 2 fledglings, near Turner Valley; 13 – 15 September 1998; written report with drawings (Lynn Vogt). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Near Lindbrook, W of Tofield; from 22 April to at least 7 June 1999; several slides (Randal Hoscheit) and image captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Pair and nest with eggs in the Cypress Hills; 6 – 7 June 2000; 5 images captured from video (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Female near Madden, NE of Cochrane; 13 and 21 June 2004; written report with 2 photographs (Rob Worona). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Near Empress; from 12 June 2004 for about three weeks; brief written report (Laura O'Connor). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Pair nesting at Stoney Mountain, near Anzac; discovered on 9 July 2006, also seen on 16 July 2006; fledged at least 2 young; written report with several [6] images (Dawn Hall and Jane Elser). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Along Eagle Butte Road, S of Medicine Hat, W of Elkwater; 29 June 2008; 1 image (Gerald Romanchuk). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Western Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*), along Hwy 541 W of the Eden Valley access Rd., near Longview; 6 and 8 March 2005; image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website (Reid Barclay), and written report with 2 images (Joan & Malcolm McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD**. W from the access to Eden Valley, near Longview; 25 – 26 May 2007; written report (Jim H Davis). **CODE 3 RECORD**.

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*), W of Rolling Hills; 21 May 2006; written report with 1 image plus 2 close-ups (Simone Marler). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Lucy's Warbler (*Vermivora luciae*), Fort McMurray; 8 – 10 November 2008; 7 images (Cathy Mountain). **CODE 1 RECORD**. First documented occurrence in the province and the country!.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*), Medicine Hat; 7 November 2008; 4 images (Pat Harding). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*), Cave and Basin, Banff National Park; 10 June 2008; brief written description posted on bcintbird Yahoo! group (Chris Charlesworth). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), Red Deer; first half of January 2009; several images (G. Murray [3], Bill Heinsen [1], Richard Klauke [1]). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) North Glenmore Park, Calgary; 15 July 1988; written report (F.J. Walker). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Beaverhill Lake; 24 May 1990; 1 slide (Edgar T. Jones). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Near Dewinton; 25 May 1994; written report (Allan Shoults). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Jasper, Jasper National Park; 23 and 24 May 1997; 2 images (Gord Ruddy). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Near Knight Lake, Waterton Lakes National Park; 8 June 1998; written report (Burke Korol). **CODE 3 RECORD**. Devon; 13 – 15 May 2003; written report with 6 photographs (Shirley Hayday). **CODE 1 RECORD**. Claresholm; 24 May 2008; written report (Jason Attwell); 3 photographs (Rob Macodrum). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*), E Drumheller; 4 – 5 May 2008; written report with several [5] photos (Lena and Dennis Braman, Jim McCabe). **CODE 1 RECORD**.

RECORDS INSUFFICIENTLY DOCUMENTED

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), Red Deer; 3 October 2003; written report (Helga Sinton). From the files of "The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta. A Second Look".

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), second Vermilion Lake, Banff National Park; 27 October 2007; written report (Jerry Pilny and Alan Fishkin).

Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*), Chestermere Lake; 23 September 2008; brief description (Terry Korolyk, transcribed by Mike Mulligan).

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), Moraine Lake, Banff National Park; 16 June 2008; written report (Pat and Jim Woodford).

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), female near Dewberry, NE of Vermilion; 30 April – 30 July 2000; paired with male Mountain Bluebird; fledged one young; written report and 3 photographs (Iris & Ralph Davies). Hybrid could not be ruled out.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*), NE Calgary; June 1989; brief description (W.T. Korolyk). Along Hwy 533, about 20 km W of Nanton; 2 December 2006; description in posting on Albertabird "Yahoo" (Bill Wilson).

ERROR IN IDENTIFICATION

Grey-headed Chickadee (*Poecile cinctus*), acreage W of Rocky Mountain House; 25 December 2008; brief description on bcbirdingvanisland Yahoo! group and written report (Neil Robins).

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

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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.

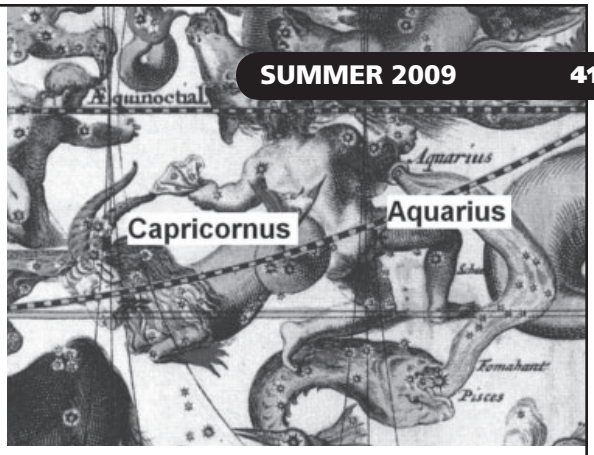
INSUFFICIENTLY DOCUMENTED. Records supported by material evidence or written descriptions that are not detailed enough to eliminate all other possibilities, or to support conclusively the identification of the species as presented. Placement in this category should in no way be interpreted as a reflection 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.

Turkey Vultures: A Photographic Guide for Aging Nestlings. R. W. Nelson, D. Moore, F. Kunnas, and R. Morse. 2009. Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Species at Risk Report No. 124. Edmonton, AB. 44 pp.

Descriptions and 80+ color photos of known-age nestlings, "… are intended to allow users…to estimate the age of nestling Turkey Vultures, from their own photographs, to within +- two days, without handling the young birds." Part of an ongoing study at the northern edge of the breeding range. Available as a pdf download at: http://srd.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/speciesatrisk/projectreports.aspx



Starry Nights

Summer/Fall: August to October

BY JOHN MCFAUL

FEATURED CONSTELLATIONS – AQUARIUS AND CAPRICORNUS

During late summer and early fall, the zodiacal constellations Aquarius and Capricornus can be viewed low in the southern sky after sunset. Both constellations are relatively faint, having no bright stars to guide you. However, the planet Jupiter is now located near the border between these two constellations, with Aquarius to the left and Capricornus to the right of the planet. Capricornus does have an outline of faint stars that resembles a bikini bottom. Aquarius is marked by a faint grouping of stars that look like the letter Y lying on its side. This asterism is located about a hand width away from Jupiter in the 10 o'clock direction.

The Y grouping of stars represents the water jug of the water bearer Aquarius. It is tipped on its side to allow the water to spill out. This act represented the rainy season to the ancient civilizations of the Middle East. Some mythologies state that Aquarius was the source of the water of the Great Flood of Noah's Ark fame. In about 600 years, the vernal equinox will take place with the Sun in this constellation. At that time, the "Age of Aquarius" will begin.

Capricornus, the sea-goat, is often depicted as a creature whose front half is the front part of a goat and whose back half is the tail of a fish. It is thought to represent the god Pan who was scared into the water by the demon Typhon. Only his bottom was immersed in the river and that is why it became the tail of a fish. The goat part represents the fact that thousands of years ago the winter solstice took place with the Sun located in Capricornus. Thus we have the Tropic of Capricorn 23 ½ degrees south of the equator. Only a great climber like a goat could carry the Sun higher into the heavens from its lowest winter point for northern hemisphere observers.

CELESTIAL HAPPENINGS

Sun: **Rise** - Aug. 1 (05:50 MDT), Sept. 1 (06:43 MDT), Oct. 1 (07:36 MDT)
Set - Aug. 1 (21:29 MDT), Sept. 1 (20:23 MDT), Oct. 1 (19:09 MDT)
Times are for Edmonton. Autumnal Equinox Sept. 22nd

Moon: **Full** – Aug. 6th, Sept. 4th, Oct. 4th
New - Aug. 20th , Sept. 18th, Oct. 18th

Planets: **Mercury** on and around August 24th may be seen low in the western sky just after sunset. In September it will be too close to the Sun to be seen. By October 6 it will be visible low in the east just before sunrise.

Venus will be a bright morning "star". It will be very close to Saturn on October 13th.

Mars is a morning object in the constellation Gemini. It will be highest in the southern sky in October.

Jupiter in August, rises in the east just after sunset. By mid-October it can be seen low in the southern sky during the evening hours. It lies close to Neptune.

Saturn in mid to late August, may be seen low in the southwest just before sunset. By October it is in the eastern morning sky. It will be quite close to Venus on October 12th.

Meteor Shower: The Perseid Meteor Shower peaks in the early mornings of August 13th & 14th. 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.

"Deep summer is when laziness finds respectability."
SAM KEEN

It's Summer!

RICK PRICE

BY DENNIS BARESCO

Summer '09 began with the June 20 Summer Solstice and ends with the Fall Equinox on September 22.

Here at last!

There were a great many complaints about the length of winter 2008-2009 and the cold spring of 2009. But summer is here – and so are fresh veggies from farmers' markets, warm nature walks, river canoe trips, long days – and an astounding variety of insects and spiders!

Bee sting be gone!

It might be wise to carry a penny in your pocket while working in the yard as a simple remedy to "take the sting out" of a summer nuisance. If you are stung by a bee, wasp or hornet, tape a penny on the site for 15 minutes. It definitely works; apparently, the copper counteracts the poison. However, it does have to be a real penny: i.e., one made of copper.

Summer sayings:

"Summer is the time when one sheds one's tensions with one's clothes, and the right kind of day is jeweled balm for the battered spirit. A few of those days and you can become drunk with the belief that all's right with the world."
ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

"Summer afternoon - summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language."
HENRY JAMES

"I perhaps owe having become a painter to flowers."
CLAUDE MONET

FAN CLUB PAGE

NATURE ALBERTA

Cochrane Environmental Action Committee

BY TIM GIESE

For 20 years, the Cochrane Environmental Action Committee (CEAC) has been involved in local and regional environmental issues.

CEAC has approached environmental concerns as opportunities to seek solutions by engaging stakeholders, other organizations and citizens. This approach has garnered CEAC much respect and an esteemed position in the Cochrane community.

CEAC was formed by a group of citizens concerned about a variety of issues. Their first focus was to establish recycling facilities in Cochrane. Funds were secured for recycling bins and the facility was operated successfully by volunteers for four years, after which the responsibility was passed on to the town. The success came at a high price to CEAC though, resulting in significant volunteer burnout and the near demise of the group. But a small group of dedicated individuals persevered, helping CEAC achieve many more significant accomplishments.

CEAC is an apolitical organization with a mission to make Cochrane and area a more environmentally aware and active community. To this day, CEAC's many successes are a testament to the passion, knowledge and skills of a relatively small core of members. CEAC's philosophy has been to leverage its small resources through a wide variety of projects and organizations to find workable solutions.

This approach is highlighted by a host of projects and initiatives over the last 20 years. CEAC helped form and co-chair one of the first Canadian non-governmental brownfield development committees in the late 1990s. Twenty different stakeholders addressed health and environmental concerns related to the proposed remediation of a creosote contaminated site within Cochrane's core. During its tenure, the committee met bi-monthly for 16 months, resulting in a significantly enhanced remedial action plan.

CEAC's collaborative approach has also resulted in two highly successful conferences in Cochrane. In 2006, over 150 participants attended the Low Impact Development Conference to learn about and work on real-life applications of this ecosystem-based approach to stormwater and land development issues. Very recently, in May 2009, CEAC hosted the Pathways 2 Sustainability Conference which utilised a unique and highly interactive conference format to introduce the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) model of sustainability planning and implementation to many Alberta municipalities.

FAN CLUB PAGE

Over the years, CEAC has found many ways to educate and enhance awareness of our inter-relationships with the natural world and the impact of our lifestyle choices on the health of the community and the Earth's ecosystems. CEAC worked with Cochrane Coffee Traders to introduce bird-friendly coffee to the many patrons of this popular coffee establishment. The Naturescape Cochrane Initiative promoted alternative gardening strategies and water conservation in landscaping practices. Over the span of four years, seven well-attended workshops were held featuring a wide variety of guest speakers, displays and interactive forums. CEAC has directed efforts and provided funding for invasive species removal, school yard naturalization, conference sponsorships, and the highly acclaimed Cochrane High School Alternative Energy Project.

Virtually all of CEAC's funding is derived from the operation of the local Farmers' Market. The market also helps fulfill another core belief of undertaking projects that encourage local environmental responsibility and a sense of community. The busy summer market is very popular with locals who enjoy the social aspect as much as supporting regional producers and artisans.

CEAC, through its many endeavours and efforts, is focused on encouraging participation and fostering hope in the challenge of ensuring an environmentally sustainable future, not only locally, but well beyond Cochrane.

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BONNIE MULLIN

AMERICAN AVOCETS.
JIM UFFELMANN

HOARY MARMOT.
KEN KILCULLEN

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NATURE ALBERTA

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