

Nature Alberta

C E L E B R A T I N G O U R N A T U R A L H E R I T A G E



A MALE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TAKES FLIGHT; SEE THE STORY ON MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAILS, PAGE 36.
KIRK DAVIS

feature article

Rust Never Sleeps



RED SQUIRREL PUPS;
SEE STORY PAGE 8.
DEBBIE GODKIN

*Nature Alberta:
Celebrating our natural heritage*

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Nature Alberta 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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Editor's Page

BY DENNIS BARESCO

FIRST, AN IMPORTANT EXPLANATION

You'll notice this edition is labeled "Summer-Fall"; you might also have noticed that you didn't get a summer edition back in mid-summer. (You may also have noticed that we didn't get much of a summer in Alberta, but that's a different story entirely!) So much has been happening these past months that your Editor was unable to complete the summer edition, hence the "2 in 1" this time.

Subscribers, worry not: **everyone's subscription will be extended by one issue.** You have, however, my sincerest apologies. How right Robert Burns was when he wrote: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley."

PERSONIFICATION

Reader Andrew Slater recently wrote your Editor with a caution about the tendency to personify nature to suit our feelings. He was referring to some comments in a couple of articles in the last *Nature Alberta*.

Of course, children's stories do it all the time – think "Bambi" and "The Lion King" as two of the most famous examples – as a way of entertaining their target audience. Adult-oriented stories (in newspapers, magazines

and TV) do it for the same reason, or to excite people or instill fear and loathing in their minds by depicting animals they dislike as bloodthirsty, vicious, evil, killing machines (wolves, coyotes, wolverines, badgers or anything that has ever attacked a human or seems to have what humans perceive to be a mean look). Personifying or anthropomorphizing nature is done because it works, sometimes amazingly well; again, think the multi-generational, resounding success of "Bambi", or the ecologically-destructive Smoky the Bear.

But Andrew's point is that personification is generally not appropriate for a magazine whose aim is to educate about nature because, as he said: "Nature does not work like that." And how nature works is often one of the points of *Nature Alberta* articles. Many of us can't help but think that sometimes nature appears cruel and unforgiving, or cute and cuddly, and indeed it well might be – to our emotional sensibilities. But from nature's perspective, that's just the way it quite naturally is. This is not to say that personification does not have its place; it does, but it is highly situational. Your Editor thanks Andrew for pointing to

the potential problem of using the emotional and the romantic, in contrast to the reality.

Indirectly, Andrew's comments reminded me of something Bill Maher said a while ago on his HBO program, *Real Time with Bill Maher*:

"Devastating, worldwide climate change is happening, whether you phone in and vote for it or not. You can't vote for rain. What's real is what's real, and, like it or not, no one can change the nature of reality. Except, of course, with mushrooms."

INSIDE NATURE ALBERTA

I urge you to read the "Nature Alberta News" section. Staff changes, membership structure changes, Young Naturalists: there's excitement aplenty within the organization. Connected to that are remembrances of two great naturalists: Edgar T. Jones and Harvey Gardner, both of whom did great works with *Nature Alberta*.

All the normal columns are inside, though the topics go well beyond normal; with subjects as varied as mosquitoes, Corvids, floods and baby squirrels, you're bound to have an enjoyable read. There are some wonderful new books out, as you'll discover

On the Covers:



FRONT COVER

Those who run Mountain Bluebird Trails get a great many opportunities for photographing the splendid sights they see. Kirk Davis' photo of a male Mountain Bluebird taking flight is just one of many he's been able to capture. See the story, page 36.



INSIDE FRONT COVER

Squirrels are a lot of fun to watch; baby squirrels are even more fun! Plus, they make great photo subjects, and Debbie and Alan Godkin took great delight in watching and photographing this rambunctious family (is any squirrel family NOT rambunctious?!). See their story, page 8.



INSIDE BACK COVER

The Last Chokecherry"! Writes photographer Len Pettitt: "These two photos were taken at Big Knife Provincial Park. I get a real charge from watching these little critters with the acrobatics they perform as they go about their quest for food." As much fun as watching squirrels? Definitely!



A days-old gosling is rim-lit by the reflection of the rising sun on John and Debra Warden's storm water pond. "Kind of dramatic," says John. "No story to go with it, just an amazing image." John does have a story of a family of Canada Geese, though: see page 14.



BACK COVER

Len Pettitt captures the absolute beauty of sunset at Miquelon Lake, which is one of Alberta's Important Bird Areas – a project coordinated by Nature Alberta. Mother Nature coordinates the beauty and the serenity; Nature Alberta just works to honour Her handiwork. Enjoy it!



upon reading our reviews. Lorne Fitch's story, "Rust Never Sleeps," is so insightful and thought-provoking that it deserved to be the Feature Story of this edition. The Alberta Bird Record Committee has released its tenth report on bird rarities.

I could mention the "Alberta Issues in Brief" section, with some articles about the Federal Government's zealotry in eliminating environmental protection, but those few articles are only the tip of the not-so-proverbial and quickly-melting iceberg, and I didn't want to end this column on a negative note. As well, there is one highly positive report in the "Issues" section; read it for yourself.

So smile: All in all, some excellent and informative reading, which hopefully will make up, just a bit, for the "2 in 1" situation.

Ponderables

The reality of the world is not people and separate 'other things'. Nor is the Earth a machine whose secrets lie in its fragmented parts. It is – beyond all understanding – an integrated Ecosphere of marvelous creativity."

J. STAN ROWE

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ALBERTA ISSUES IN BRIEF

Sage Grouse Summit

In September, NA Director Marty Drut represented both Grasslands Naturalists and Nature Alberta at an Emergency Greater-Sage Grouse Summit sponsored by the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). The situation is dire, with only 13 males counted on Alberta leks (dancing grounds) during spring 2011 and only 35 males in Saskatchewan. Experts – including Marty, who has research experience with sage grouse – reviewed the population status of Greater-Sage Grouse and possible causes/impacts to the birds, and discussed what recommendations to make on how best to conserve the Canadian population. The panel met for 2 days and there was a public session on the evening of the second day.

If the current population trend continues, Greater-Sage Grouse will be extirpated (regional extinction) from Alberta within the next 2 to 5 years. Data collected by Cam Aldridge strongly indicates that fragmentation from oil and gas development (wells,

roads, pipelines, and power lines) has been the primary cause for continuous large-scale Greater-Sage Grouse declines that began in the 1990's.

The Summit Panel recommended 5 immediate actions to protect sage grouse, including designating additional and restoring existing critical habitat and initiating a “no new development in critical habitat” policy.

Naturalists are encouraged to take action now to petition both the federal and provincial governments to conserve Greater-Sage Grouse so we do not lose this magnificent species. The primary officials to contact are Prime Minister Stephen Harper and our new Premier, Alison Redford.

Marty's full report can be found on the NA website (www.naturealberta.ca). More information can be found at the AWA website (www.albertawilderness.ca).

Premier Redford Cancels “Potatogate” RFP

There is much joy in Alberta – from many different sectors – over new Alberta Premier Alison Redford's Oct 19th cancellation of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the purchase of the 16,000+ acres of grasslands in southeastern Alberta, the area that earned infamy as “Potatogate.”

Nature Alberta sends thanks and congratulations to Premier Redford for her very positive action. Feel free to do likewise.

More of the Same... Only More So!

It started soon after the federal Conservatives were elected in 2006, with big cuts to the Environment Canada and Canadian Wildlife Service budgets [see *Nature Alberta*, Winter 2008, pg 10]. It has continued ever since. Now, freed from accountability with a majority, the federal government continues the gutting of the department with hundreds more employees on the chopping block and a decidedly U.S. Republican-attitude towards wildlife and conservation.

The official excuse is the need for cost-cutting, but one would have to be seriously lobotomized to believe that. The real reason, as Chandra Pasma, Vice President of Canadians for Tax Fairness (CTF), stated in an August 5 press release, is clearly ideology, not necessity. “Let's be clear: these are political decisions which impede or dismantle public services and programs,” said Pasma.

A number of actions have been taken by the feds to increase tourism, recreation and business in our national parks, including Banff and Jasper here in Alberta – what's been called the “Disney-fication” of our National Parks. At this point, the unanswered question is: what can be done about all this? There are many folks and groups looking for the answer; if you have the solution, let everyone know!

Fed's terminate Partnership with Canadian Environmental Network

On Friday Oct 14, the Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN), one of Canada's oldest, largest, and most well-respected democratic institutions serving the environmental concerns of all Canadians, was forced to lay off its staff and is on the verge of closing its doors and those of its eleven regional offices. The reason? The federal government has eliminated its funding.

The Canadian Environmental Network received a letter from Environment Canada in May this year stating their intent to **continue** core funding in the amount of \$547,000 for the current fiscal year. Now however, neither Environment Minister Peter Kent nor his departmental officials have explained why they are not delivering on their promise of continued core funding for the Network, which comprises its key environmental constituency across Canada.

"The RCEN consists of over 640 highly diverse large and small, rural and urban organizations from coast to coast to coast. The Network forms an invaluable and irreplaceable grid of communication among environmentally concerned Canadians and the Government of Canada. A huge part of our understanding of environmental issues, and traditional indigenous, community, and scientific knowledge and experience has reached Canadians' kitchen tables largely due to the existence of the Canadian Environmental Network," said Larry McDermott,

Aboriginal Representative and Director of the RCEN, and Executive Director of Plenty Canada.

"For the past nearly 34 years, the RCEN has functioned as the formalized mechanism through which Canadians contribute to policy, legislation, and environmental management in this country. Without the RCEN, this important community-based knowledge coming from every part of Canada will be lost. The fate of our environment will be jeopardized by cutting this important voice for Canadians," said Maggie Paquet, RCEN Board member representing British Columbia.

"The RCEN is the epitome of what democracy in this country

has always strived to achieve. The Network allows small and large organizations alike the opportunity to stand side-by-side and be part of the Government of Canada's decision-making. The loss of the Network would be a tragic loss for democracy and for all Canadians," said Stephen Hazell, former Executive Director of the Sierra Club of Canada and of the Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society.

Ironically, the words of McDermott, Paquet and Hazell explaining the value of RCEN might also explain the reasons why the feds are cutting its funding. Too much knowledge, science and democracy are dangerous to unquestioned and unfettered power.

Feds Signal the End for Woodland Caribou

Simon Dyer, policy director with the Pembina Institute, made the following statement in response to the Government of Canada's release of a draft recovery strategy for woodland caribou.

"By allowing 95 per cent of Woodland Caribou habitat in northeastern Alberta to be lost, the Government of Canada is proposing that Canadians 'write off' virtually all the habitat that supports Alberta's caribou herds in order to promote irresponsible levels of oilsands development.

"The federal government is ignoring options to protect and restore caribou habitat in

northeastern Alberta, and instead proposing to rely on killing off wolves to avoid having to put a limit on oilsands development.

"This approach is unacceptable when the government could have protected caribou habitat



by establishing conservation areas and implementing higher standards for industrial activity, such as requiring faster land restoration and moderating the pace and scale of oilsands development.

“After years of delay, the federal government has abandoned caribou in Alberta’s oilsands region without even trying to protect their habitat from the cumulative impacts of oilsands development. Given the number of viable options available to protect caribou habitat, it’s astonishing to see the government setting the bar so low with its draft recovery plan.”

Contact: Simon Dyer, Policy director, 403-322-3937

A copy of the federal government’s draft recovery strategy for boreal woodland caribou is available online. Learn more about the Pembina Institute’s fight to protect Alberta’s boreal woodland caribou on its blog. The Pembina Institute is a non-partisan sustainable energy think tank.

“There is belief out there that laws protecting endangered species are arbitrary and draconian, and that they’re somehow stifling our economic growth. It’s simply not true. We can protect our natural heritage and have a robust economy.”

SIERRA CLUB CANADA

Barn Swallow Recommended as Species at Risk

At the spring meeting of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) held in Charlottetown, PEI, a Threatened status has been recommended for two more species of songbirds – Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) and Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*). The addition of these two common species draws further attention to the plights faced by grassland birds and aerial insectivores.

Jon McCracken, BSC’s Director of National Programs and co-chair of COSEWIC’s Bird Species Specialist Committee, said that, “Although the meadowlark and the Barn Swallow are still common, even common species require conservation attention when population declines are severe, persistent, and pervasive.” Still, he is optimistic. “Unlike other species at risk that are now rare, there’s still time to develop the kinds of meaningful conservation actions

that are needed for meadowlarks and Barn Swallows.”

[In Alberta, Barn Swallow, listed in 2005 as “Sensitive”, is in continuous decline; Eastern Meadowlark does not occur in this province.]

At the same meeting, COSEWIC upheld its decisions on the status of four other birds that had been assessed 10 years previously – King Rail (*Rallus elegans*) ENDANGERED; Henslow’s Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) ENDANGERED; Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) SPECIAL CONCERN; and the eastern population of Barrow’s Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) SPECIAL CONCERN.

Check out the COSEWIC website (www.cosewic.gc.ca) to learn more about all forty species of wildlife that were assessed at the Charlottetown meeting.

Taken from: Bird Studies Canada “Latest News” E-newsletter. May 27, 2011

IT TAKES A LOT OF FLYING INSECTS TO FEED BARN SWALLOW CHICKS! WIKIPEDIA COMMONS



Curtailing bat fatalities

A study led by Bat Conservation International (BCI) confirms that curtailing wind turbines – temporarily shutting them down during low-wind periods at night – could reduce bat fatalities at wind-energy facilities by up to 93 percent with minimal losses to annual power production. The research was featured on the cover of *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, a journal of the Ecological Society of America.

Turbines on wind energy facilities often take an alarming toll on wildlife, especially birds and bats that encounter the spinning blades. The latest study, conducted at the Casselman Wind Power Project in Pennsylvania, found that applying curtailment procedures to all 23 of the site's turbines during bats' 2½-month migration period would reduce total electricity output by less than one percent for the year. Lead author Ed Arnett, BCI's Director of Programs, discussed the study in a podcast for the Ecological Society. It can be heard at: www.frontiersinecology.org/beyond/

Arnett also represented BCI in Trondheim, Norway, at the first international conference on wind energy and wildlife. The session dramatically illustrated the worldwide impacts of accelerating wind-energy development on wildlife of many kinds. More than 300 participants from 30 countries shared their research and experience in managing this alternative energy source.

Arnett served on the science program committee and was part

of an expert panel on challenges and solutions. Schirmacher presented a poster on research that attempts to utilize acoustic deterrents to reduce bat kills at turbines.

Acoustic deterrents, which broadcast ultrasonic noise designed to interfere with bats' echolocation system to such an extent that they steer clear of the turbines, were found to reduce bat fatalities by 18 to 62

percent. That is significantly less than the reductions from curtailment, however, which suggests that this technology is not yet ready for wide-scale deployment. Researchers continue modifying and testing devices in hopes of developing a bat-saving system for widespread use.

Taken from: "Curtailing bat fatalities." Bat Conservation Times, July 2011, Volume 9, Number 7

A Deadly Beauty

BY TONY BLAKE

Tall Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) is a common exotic weed that has been invading Alberta's foothills for several years and is a common sight on back country trails. This is a plant pest that follows people into the remotest places, and it's degrading some of our most productive wildlife habitat.

Whitehorse Wildland Park, near Cadomin, is a provincial protected area, intended to preserve natural landscapes and biodiversity, but the meadow is overrun with Tall Buttercup, likely introduced by contaminated horse feed. Unfortunately this spot is not unusual either in the Whitehorse Wildland or the Fiddle Valley in Jasper National Park immediately to the west. The weed is also found in numerous road ditches, campsites,

and trailheads up and down the Forestry Trunk Road.

Private landowners can reclaim their infested pastures with chemicals and range management techniques, counties might take care of the roadside ditches, but who is going to defend the rest of our west country?

This year's crop of Tall Buttercup has already gone to seed. If readers want to make a difference next year, they can learn more about recognizing, managing, and preventing Tall Buttercup from the Alberta Invasive Plants Council web site: www.invasiveplants.ab.ca/Downloads/FS-TallButtercup.pdf



**A MOUNTAIN MEADOW IN
WHITEHORSE WILDLAND
PARK, NEAR CADOMIN
(JULY 2011) TONY BLAKE**

Nature Diary: Red Squirrel Pups

BY DEBBIE AND ALAN GODKIN

Years ago, we hung a bird feeder from an old poplar tree branch and placed a bird bath nearby, both of which can be seen from our living room window.

The gregarious Chickadees and 2 White-breasted Nuthatches were the first to find the new food source. But it wasn't long before a Red Squirrel found the feeder too. The Squirrel also discovered an old woodpecker hole in the trunk of the poplar tree, which it enlarged and used to cache food.

In an attempt to keep the squirrel out of the poplar tree, we stuffed cement pieces and a brick into the hole and boarded it over. Rather foolish, considering the squirrel is a gnawing animal with chisel-like front teeth that can chew through most anything. In the end the squirrel was more determined to

get in than we were to keep it out.

Now, for eleven years, one squirrel or another has used the tree for food storage. Then in 2009, a female secured the tree and used it not just for food storage but as a den. Daily she had to defend her rights to this prime piece of property from two other squirrels who would have liked to own it.

Sept. 25/09: The female started nest building, gathering a mix of dry and fresh cut grass and strips of bark into her winter den. Once nest building was complete she moved on to the



DEBBIE GODKIN

task of gathering and storing food for the winter. There were plenty of apples, plus the old staple, spruce cones, were in good supply. Another favorite of theirs is mushrooms, but due to the dry conditions there were none in our yard, except for one Parasol Mushroom growing under the deck. The squirrel found it and packed it up into a spruce tree to dry.

Nov. 30/09: One day, she allowed a neighboring squirrel into her tree, which is something she had never done before. On occasion she went across the road to his tree for a short ten minute visit. This more sociable behavior continued throughout the winter months.

April 2/10: I noticed that she was lactating. I had read that the newborn have no fur and their eyes don't open until they are around twenty-six days old. It could be anywhere from five



DEBBIE GODKIN



DEBBIE GODKIN

to eight weeks before the young would emerge from the den. As the time drew near, I remained watchful, not wanting to miss the event.

May 30/10: It was a cold, windy day and I was stuck inside when three pups appeared at the entrance to their den. One by one they came out and climbed up the trunk and onto a large branch to look at the real world for the first time. But they didn't remain still for long. They explored every crack and cranny of that tree for two hours, and then retired to their den for the remainder of the day.

The next day when they left their den, they expanded their territory to include the spruce tree right behind their poplar, and then proceeded to chase each other up,

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 in this “NATURE DIARY” series!

down and around the tree trunk for an hour. All wound up from play, they carelessly left the safety of their tree and ventured down onto the ground, after which they returned to their nest for a short rest. The order of their day was a repetitive: sleep, explore and play.

The female had moved over to a spruce tree some 40 yards away. When she came back for a drink of water, the pups clamored around her but she wanted nothing to do with them. The pups were already

weaned when they came out of the den and were expected to fend for themselves. The next day when the female came for a drink, her youngsters followed her back to the spruce tree and that was the last I saw of them.

Having had the opportunity to observe the juveniles, I couldn't help but root for them – although I knew their chances for survival weren't good. They would make an easy meal for a hawk or coyote or barn cat.

DEBBIE GODKIN



BOOK REVIEW

Places to go, things to see!

Alberta Nature Guide

REVIEW BY: CHRISTINE BROWN

One of the latest Nature publications by Lone Pine is a compact guide of just over 200 pages that manages to describe over 400 species of animals and plants found in Alberta. This is of course not the extent of Alberta's wondrous biodiversity, but the book covers 70 mammals, 100 species of birds, 181 species of plants, 24 species of fish, and all of our reptiles and amphibians in this few number of pages. Sadly it only covers 24 species of all invertebrates.

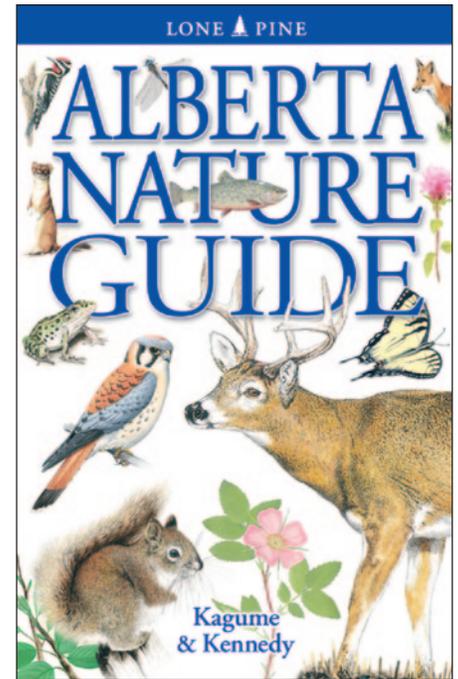
Alberta Nature Guide was written for the average Albertan that has a small, possibly growing interest in Alberta's biodiversity. Each species described is either common or interesting – or both. Except for providing the general size and scientific name, it foregoes the common components of the field guide. There is no written description of the animal or plant that describes markings or minute details to identify the organism, but rather lets the illustration speak for itself, avoiding confusion for the novice naturalist. That said, there

are also very few species that look similar to one another that are featured in the book. A paragraph is provided for each species that describes unique characteristics, habitat requirements, interesting tidbits and, sometimes, conservation issues.

The book also provides extensive information outside the plant and animal descriptions. It describes Alberta's different Ecoregions, provides a map of Alberta's Wildlife Watching hotspots, and locales that are best for viewing wildlife are further described. Has anyone been to Carson-Pegasus Provincial Park?

There is also a small section that discusses the human element of Nature in Alberta. Conservation issues and avoidance of human-wildlife conflict are touched upon.

One small detail that made me happy to see is that there was an introduction to animals as well as to each of the classes of animals. Plants are also introduced with an introduction to: trees; shrubs and vines; and forbs, ferns, and grasses.



By Krista Kagume and Gregory Kennedy.
Published by Lone Pine Publishing;
ISBN-13: 978-1-55105-868-9. Softcover;
224 pgs. \$21.95

Why would this make me happy? More than once I have had to explain to my non-naturalist friends that birds and insects are animals. Frankly once was too much!

This comment should show you how much a basic guide such as this is needed in the homes of Albertans. A quick reference guide available with little scientific jargon would be helpful to those that have little knowledge of our wildlife. It is a great guide for families spending their time outdoors in the yard, park or campsite, providing them some answers to the elusive question. "What's that?"

**PRINTS OF YOUR VERY OWN!**

Readers of *Nature Alberta* have always been thrilled by the photography of Rick Price. Now you can have some of those photos to grace a special place in your home or office.

Rick and Judy have started Adanac Photography, selling prints of various sizes – from 8x10 to 24x36 – and

including a large selection of wildlife and landscapes images. Photos are available on foamcore, canvas or a gloss or matte print. Check out Rick and Judy's website, www.adanacphoto.com and review some truly great photography. Just in time for Christmas!



Nature Alberta NEWS

It's Official: You Belong!

Nature Alberta continues to move forward to improve every aspect of the organization.

The latest advance: MEMBERSHIP.

There have always been differing interpretations over whether folks are members of Nature Alberta or just subscribers to the magazine of the same name. A June 28, 2011 motion, approved by the Board of Directors and effective immediately, officially clarifies the issue, as well as outlines a few membership benefits:

- You are members of Nature Alberta. *Nature Alberta*, the magazine, is a benefit of membership;
- All members are eligible for a 10% discount on regular-priced items in the NA Store;
- All members are eligible to vote at the Annual General Meeting (AGM);
- A new pricing structure and categories have been put in place. For those who are already members, the new structure will kick in upon their renewal;
- A new, cost-saving membership category has been initiated: "Extended Membership" – for those who are members of Nature Alberta Corporate and Affiliate Clubs NOTE: What was called "Associate" Clubs has been changed to "Affiliate" Clubs. "Associate Membership" is now a new category, as described on the right.
- Automatic renewal will now be available.

MEMBERSHIP FEE SCHEDULE (EFFECTIVE JUNE 28, 2011)

Membership Fees (these include the e-version of *Nature Alberta*):

- 1 year Individual Membership: \$20
- 2 year Individual Membership: \$35
- 1 year Family Membership: \$35¹
- 2 year Family Membership: \$65¹
- Life Membership: \$1,000
(ELIGIBLE FOR A \$450.00 TAX RECEIPT)
- 1 year Associate Membership: \$40
A new category for multi-individual groups such as Clubs, Societies, Institutions, Businesses and Organizations which support the goals of the Federation, but which are not Affiliate (formerly "Associate") Clubs of the Federation.
- Extended Membership (includes the e-version of *Nature Alberta*)
Extended Membership is available to anyone who is a current member of a Corporate or Affiliate Club of Nature Alberta. The applicant must provide the name of their Corporate or Affiliate Club.
 - 1 year Individual Extended Membership: \$15
 - 1 year Family Extended Membership: \$25

NOTE: Upon request, all members may also receive a hard copy of *Nature Alberta*; however, because of substantially increased mailing/printing costs, there will be a surcharge of \$10/yr for Individual and Associate Members, and \$15/yr for Family Members. There is no surcharge for Life Members. It should be noted that this surcharge brings the cost to the same price as membership was prior to the changes.

Subscription only: In order to be all-inclusive, Nature Alberta is offering a subscription that does not include membership. This enables those organizations or institutions, which may not be comfortable with membership, perhaps as a matter of policy, to still receive the magazine. Subscription fees are:

- 1 year: \$20 (\$30 IF HARD COPY OF MAGAZINE IS REQUESTED)
- 2 year: \$35 (\$55 IF HARD COPY OF MAGAZINE IS REQUESTED)
- 1 year Associate Subscription: \$40 (\$50 IF HARD COPY OF MAGAZINE IS REQUESTED)

¹ Family Membership includes membership in Young Naturalists and a subscription to *Nature Wild* magazine.

MAJOR STAFF CHANGES

Philip Penner, Nature Alberta's Executive Director, resigned his position, effective Aug 22; Philip and family have moved to Vernon BC in the sunny Okanagan.

Philip worked for Nature Alberta (NA) for ten years and as Executive Director since March 2009. He was very dedicated to his job and to NA. Needless to say, we will all miss him. Said Philip in his letter of resignation:

"This was not an easy decision to make as I very much enjoyed working for Nature Alberta over the past ten years. It has been a very rewarding and interesting job right from the beginning when I started doing data entry for the Bird Atlas during the summer of 2001 when I also took on the role of helping to coordinate the Bird Atlas project. . . . Please accept my thanks for all my years with our organization."

This summer, Michelle Bacon was hired to coordinate NA's Living by Water Project. Living by Water has been part of NA for a long time and, at present, is one of its three main projects. Nature Alberta was very pleased to have on staff someone of Michelle's ability and calibre. If her name rings a bell among readers, it should: Michelle wrote the Cover Feature for the Winter 2009 (Vol 38, # 4) edition of *Nature Alberta*, entitled "The Prairie Cougar." Michelle moved on to a research position with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development at the end of summer.

As mentioned in the last *Nature Alberta*, Office Manager Christine Brown left NA earlier this year. As such, NA found itself needing

to fill a number of positions. The Executive, Board and Human Resources/Personnel Committee felt this was an ideal opportunity to review all aspects of staffing and priorities. Discussions before, after and at the September 10-11 Board of Directors meeting at Dinosaur Provincial Park have led to agreement on a change of direction, focus and (potentially) structure for NA, to a greater concentration on education and outreach through projects and programs. By the time you read this, NA should have hired new staff and initiated staff responsibility changes to help move the organization toward the new vision and ever-greater success in carrying out our mandate.

BREAKING NEWS! Petra Rowell hired as Executive Director.

YOUNG NATURALISTS

Nature Alberta's youth project, the Young Naturalists Club (YNC), has received some great news: The Edmonton Community Foundation granted our full requested amount of \$20,000. Then, on Sept 23, the Club was presented with a \$10,000 cheque from TD Friends of the Environment. The funds will provide environmental education resources and opportunities for activities that promote being outdoors, observing nature, scientific investigation, environmental stewardship, and healthy living.

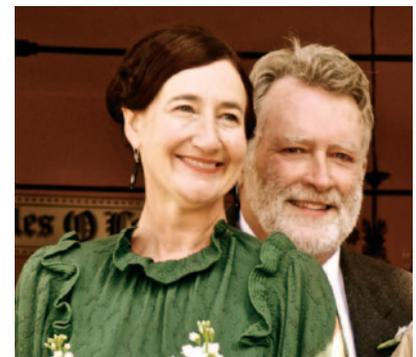
YNC Project Coordinator Kelsie Sharun

is understandably very excited by this news. All at NA would like to congratulate Kelsie on the excellent job she is doing!

HERE'S TO GEORGE & KATHY!

All of us at NA extend our heartiest congratulations to George Newton and Kathy Hunter on their marriage. George has worked for and volunteered with NA for years, in particular the Important Bird Areas project.

George and Kathy got married Sept 24 on a trip to Ontario, where George's family resides.



PRAIRIE POLLINATION EXHIBIT

The Manitoba Museum is in the process of applying for funding from

LEFT TO RIGHT: TD CANADA TRUST PRAIRIE REGION SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT, MONIQUE BATEMAN, YNC PROJECT COORDINATOR, KELSIE SHARUN AND TD CANADA TRUST DISTRICT MANAGER TODD LINNEN.



the Virtual Museum of Canada to create a virtual exhibit on prairie pollination. If their funding application is successful, they would need to form an advisory committee to evaluate the website content. Nature Alberta has been invited to sit on this committee.

Julia Millen (Nature Calgary) and John Acorn (Edmonton Nature Club, AB Lepidopterists Guild) have kindly volunteered to be our Nature Alberta representatives. Julia is very well qualified as an artist and biologist who has worked many years on the prairies, and taught many courses about prairie flowers. John, who teaches at University of Alberta, is very well known for his books, TV shows, field trips and interpretive skills.

SEPTEMBER BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

NA’s Board of Directors met on Sept 10-11 at the new conference/retreat facilities in Alberta’s Dinosaur Provincial Park. The meeting was very fruitful, covering a wide variety of business and much valuable discussion to enable NA to meet the challenges of the future. The “Focus and Structure” workshop was facilitated by George Newton, whose



NA VICE-PRESIDENT TED HINDMARCH SCANS THE STUNNING LANDSCAPE! CLAUDIA CAMERON

involvement with NA has been substantial over the years.

The weekend was not all work! Park Visitor Services Supervisor Fred Hammer led the group on an excellent, informative tour of the badlands. The facility itself is a fine place for meetings: a large meeting hall with a deck overlooking the Red Deer River; new and modern sleeping accommodations with a common area; a store and restaurant nearby; and wonderful

food catered by Douglas Country Inn of Brooks. NA highly recommends this site!

An added treat, something one would not expect to find in southern Alberta badlands: after the Sunday morning meeting, as several Directors chatted on the deck, a cow Moose and her calf came out of the willows and into the river for a drink of water! They stayed for about five minutes before slipping back into the “woods” – a superb end to a fulfilling weekend.

PARK VISITOR SERVICES SUPERVISOR FRED HAMMER EXPLAINS SOME OF THE WONDERS OF THE BADLANDS AS NA DIRECTORS TED HINDMARCH (LEFT) AND LU CARBYN (RIGHT) LISTEN INTENTLY. CLAUDIA CAMERON

DINOSAUR’S BUSES ARE EXCELLENT FOR TOURING. LEFT: NA PRESIDENT CHUCK PRIESTLY; RIGHT: DIRECTOR SCOTT JUBINVILLE. CLAUDIA CAMERON



Close to Home: Nature Photography in Alberta



JOHN WARDEN

Moments and Opportunities

BY JOHN WARDEN

It was a very long winter. The spring migration seemed to go into a holding pattern in southern Alberta and we didn't begin to see birds in any numbers in Edmonton until the second week of April.

A pair of Canada Geese was among the first to arrive at our storm water ponds where the ice was just beginning to melt. In no time at all they had gathered twigs and grasses from the midst of the ice and snow and the female was nesting.

Spring seemed very slow to arrive. Eventually, the last remnants of snow melted and the ponds were mostly free of ice. On the 23rd of April, Mallards and a pair of Common Goldeneye arrived and on the morning of the 27th a pair of Horned Grebes. The grebes began building a floating nest in the open water close to the shoreline. Too close, it seemed to me. Sure enough, after a couple of days, they were gone, moving on perhaps, to a quieter, safer nesting site.

Horned Grebes are common in Alberta, but they were new to my wife Debra and me. We

watched them from our kitchen window with binoculars and it was exciting. Life was coming back to our pond. But then they were gone.

"If I'd known they were only going to be here for a few days, I'd have paid more attention", said Debra, voicing our disappointment. How true. Moments and opportunities. But then, nearly every morning there were new additions to our pond: Lesser Scaups, a Ruddy Duck, Buffleheads, and a pair of Canvasbacks.

The Canvasbacks made quite a display, mating time and again

for several days. We'd only see them early in the morning before they retreated into the weeds and bulrushes surrounding the shoreline. A pair of Red-necked Grebes took up residence on a nest not far from the geese and Red-winged Blackbirds filled the warming spring air with their trilling.

On the 18th of May, we had babies: nine little goslings. With the appearance of goslings, the Red-necked Grebe's nest was way too close for comfort and Father Goose took great exception. There was a barrage of goose/grebe "beaking off", aggressive posturing and outright attacks.

Suddenly, Father Goose broke off the squabble and flew over to the nest. An off-leash Golden Retriever was swimming over to see what all the excitement was about. Father Goose flew over to the dog, landing in the water about six feet



JOHN WARDEN



JOHN WARDEN

away. The dog swam away from the nest and towards Father Goose. Just as it started getting close, the goose flew a bit further away and the dog followed. Eventually, on the other side of the pond, the dog's owner appeared, called the dog out of the water and they both ran off down the pathway. High drama, life and death stakes on Cascade ponds.

The next two weeks for me were all about the goslings. Check to make sure they're okay first thing in the morning, then off to work. Rush home after work to grab

more shots in the beautiful golden hours of evening.

On the 28th, I was up with the sun and found the goose family feeding hungrily in the grasses around the shoreline of the pond. The sunrise was reflected beautifully onto the calm surface of the water. Thinking about using rim-lighting to accentuate the goslings' fine feathers, I got down to eye level with them. I had a long lens so was able to stay far enough away not to bother or threaten them. At just the right angle, I could put the reflected sun on the water as

the background for the goslings. Pretty cool, an interesting image. Then I centered the reflected sunrise behind one of the goslings. Magic! A once-in-a-lifetime shot.

And then, one morning a few days later in early June, they were gone. I checked around our community to see if anyone had seen or knew what happened. Some people thought the goose family had walked off toward another larger pond a few blocks away. Others thought that maybe someone from the County had come by and re-located them.



JOHN WARDEN

But no one knew for sure. Eleven geese: two adults, nine goslings. One moment they were there, an exciting, vibrant part of our community around the ponds, and then they were gone. Just like that.

I echoed Debra's sentiments: "Gee, if I'd known they were only going to be here for a few days, I'd have paid more attention".

Well, what can we do? How can we maximize those special moments, optimize our opportunities? Here's what I think. We can slow down, pause and breathe. We can look around and notice the light, the colors and the life around us. We can appreciate and we can be grateful for the moments and opportunities that we do get to spend with nature.

Preparing for this article, I went back and looked at my images of the goslings. I looked at the light in their eyes. Me, looking at them looking at me. Curious. We had an

energy between us, a connection. Moments...two weeks with nine baby geese. Opportunities...my life is all the richer.



JOHN WARDEN

AKAYO' KAKI A' PAWAAWAHKAA



BY RYAN HEAVY HEAD; SIKOOHKOTOKI, KAINAISSKSAAHKOYI

My Walk through Ecology, Dreams, Natural Education and Experience in Blackfoot Territory.

Mosquitoes Feed Baby Birds... A Mantra

MOSQUITOES FEED BABY BIRDS (29 JUNE 2011)

19:54. Sspopiikimi – out for a brief dusk stroll, moving sunrise along the trails lined with yellow-flowering brome. We've stopped at the north-pond Red-winged Blackbird nest, where the hatchlings are now open-eyed, nearly ready to fledge. Within the next week or so, we should find them exploring the surrounding buckbrush and currants.

20:07. Similarly, we drop into the forest main to check the Catbird nest of this end. The mosquitoes punish us for the intrusion, all too happy to exact their toll. But it's worth it for the reward of seeing mama-cat safely incubating.

20:24. The mosquitoes make life all too uncomfortable, swarming us in the long grass of the forest. We trudge on south, spotting two more eggless Catbird nests along the forest trail, and breaking briefly again at the duck blind, where there are fewer blood-suckers. Here, the red-wing fledglings have already left their nest. They are hidden in the brush somewhere near, their parents chucking at us as we sit and rest and swat.

20:44. Mosquitoes feed baby birds, Mosquitoes feed baby birds. Mosquitoes feed baby birds – my only solice tonight.

21:10. We hike, it-it-itching, around south-pond and along the shale trail. An oriole flies past us by the owl wood. A baby Cottontail zooms through the grass near the tick zone. One of the Swainson's Hawk parents is crying above, pesked by a little red-wing. When back at north-pond, we see the Four Square aapsspini family off in the wet-meadow reeds. But tonight, they are no longer living up to their name ... just the single pair of parents accompany the four goslings. I am inordinately relieved when we reach the safety of our car.

II DAMSEFLY MATING (1 JUL 2011)

13:50. Sspopiikimi - a blue sky day with just a few, light cumulous puffs of cloud and a gentle breeze. We start off counter-sunwise, beginning with the north-pond cutbank, where all of the bluets are engaged in love, chasing one another, or clinging to grass stems, locked in their heart-shaped embraces.

14:09. There are no garter snakes on the cutbank this afternoon and, despite the warmth, there's relatively few turtles basking down by the water. Mahoney and I round the north end, climb the levee, and take a seat in the Crested Wheatgrass and Yellow Sweet Clover, on the slope above the active red-wing nest.

14:27. Below us, both mom and pop red-wing are bringing food in for the hatchlings, dragonflies by the looks of it. Some of their efforts are thwarted, however, by an Eastern Kingbird who takes the good perch nearest the nest. From this stand beside the water, the kingbird watches the pond, our slope, and the air. He takes short flights to



retrieve what again appear to be dragonflies, sometimes nabbing them off the grass, other times plucking them right out of the air.

15:05. Leaving the red-wings, we cut down into the forest main to check on the Catbird nest. Here, incubation has concluded, but there is a mysterious absence. Out of the five eggs mama-cat was tending, there is only one hatchling and no sign of anything else. I check the ground all around below the nest, nothing. And given the difficulty of access, with dense branchlets surrounding the nest, we can only assume the work of a very sly predator is at play. Magpies perhaps, or possibly one of the Least Weasels we know to be here. Given that the predator knows the nest location, I will be very surprised if this newborn makes it to fledge. If so, I would have to conjecture that the predator is being purposely generous or conservationistic, allowing one to live.

15:14. From the Catbird nest, Mahoney and I split up, she heading along the main path to the south-end duck blind, me going to wade out to the bulberry patch on the wet meadows to download images from RYECAM02. Crossing the thigh-deep water, I again came across a small piece of floating log with a tight cluster of Giant Waterbug eggs attached. The defending mother I could only see by bending down to look through the water at the underside of the wood. There were images captured by the game-cam, but I've had no chance to look them over. While downloading them to my little viewer, I could hear voices

back on shore. I hurried out of the brush to find a few mountain bikers passing through the forest main right where I'd cached my backpack holding thousands of dollars worth of photography equipment. Needless to say, I moved quickly to wade back across. But I was never in need of much concern. As blind as the bikers are to the ecology of this place, they didn't even spot my large pack beside the trail. I picked it up, hiked quickly to the duck blind, and have now reunited with Mahoney, who has brought me a late asparagus shoot to snack on.

15:30. Before leaving the forest main/duck blind area, I walk over to check on one of the other Catbird nests we found. This time, the mother didn't even come around to cry at me, and again there were no eggs. Either this nest failed before we found it, or it is an old nest and the bird has been using it to direct our attention away from her current brood.

15:54. As per our usual routine, we next have a look at the big rocks around the garter snake hibernaculum. Like the north-pond cutbank, there are no snakes out today. Something must be going on in the reptile world. Mahoney and I are discussing it as we walk the levee around south pond, and just then I hear something all too familiar ... it is the buzz of hundreds, maybe even thousands of bees. I hold my arm out to block Mahoney from proceeding down the trail and ask, "Do you hear that." Both of us freeze, scanning the

sweet clover patches surrounding us, then looking up. Just above us, and at head level, in fact flying past our faces, are the bees: Honeybees. My first instinct is that we've somehow disturbed the nest, and in that kind of situation I'm accustomed to being repeatedly stung. There are too many bees in front of us to run that way, so we turn and go back about ten meters the way we've come. Out of the swarm, we turn again and can see the cloud of bees moving away from us along the trail. We hadn't disturbed a nest; the colony is moving to a new hive. The swarm had passed right through us. As quick as we can, we get our cameras out and follow after them, but we're too slow. They've already moved to the west side of the pond and up the coulee slope. Amazing experience. It's not every day you stand amidst an entire colony of bees on the move.

16:15. Continuing on, our next encounter is with the Four Square aapsspini family, who are eight together again. They are out in the pond as we approach, but then paddle up to our shore right below us, where the older mother and goslings begin to feed. The main gander watches them briefly, then darts out and bites his wife in the butt as if to say, "What are you, crazy? There's humans right there!" The goose and her goslings are startled away from their meal, and the whole family moves on.

16:26. Our walk concludes with a sighting of one of the ksisskstaki, who swims up and climbs ashore below us as we pass the lodge. She grabs a large dirt clod and slips back into the water. The dirt dissipates and, when she surfaces again it is empty-handed.



SWALLOW AND WREN HATCHLINGS (2 JUL 2011)

13:29. Sspopiikimi – We are into the hottest part of a full summer day, blue skies without a cloud, and hardly a breeze to speak of. Like yesterday, Mahoney and I are taking a sunwise route around the pond and, at least on the north end, encountering none of the garter snakes we're accustomed to seeing here, and few of the turtles. I suspect it may be the heat.

13:47. In this part of the season, when the cottonwood seeds are drifting through the air, and the absinthe spiders are wrapping their white silks around the tips of last year's tumbleweeds, there comes a peculiar growth on the recently leafed-out clematis vines. It has the shape of a gall, with swollen stems and pocked on the outside by bright orange blisters, which

could themselves easily be eggs. Cutting these growths open, I find no larvae. It is another mystery needing to be understood, and today I'm taking one of these growths home to mature or die in a jar, in the event that it is an insect related phenomenon.

14:35. The damselflies are not in anywhere near the kind of mating frenzy as we witnessed yesterday, and there are still very few dragonflies around...though enough to feed the kingbirds and growing red-wing fledglings apparently, as this is what was revealed from images we took yesterday afternoon. As we round north-pond, we see that the three Mallard ducklings who had been alone here about a week ago have reunited with their mother. Again, I suspect the brief separation to

be part of their training. Cutting down into the forest main, we note that mama-cat is still tending to her sole hatchling of two days old. Perhaps this is indication that the predators who took her other four are going to leave this last one be. Then, making our way through the forest to south-pond, I scour the trail-side brush for more Catbird nests, as well as those of Yellow Warblers and Eastern Kingbirds. With the exception of one Catbird nest that has a single egg broken on the ground beneath it, I find nothing. But we know they're here.

15:14. At the junction of the two main trails leading through the forest main, there is a small poplar snag with three cavities constructed by woodpeckers. As we pass by, I just happen to



notice, the two cavities highest up are being nested by two different species. We stop to watch and learn that the one on top is a Tree Sparrow. Both parents are attending to feeding their hatchlings within, bringing beaks full of small insects at a rate of about a minute and a half per feeding (I timed it), and carrying out their white packets of poop as needed, to drop elsewhere in the forest. The second cavity is occupied by a House Wren family. The wrens are more skittish about revealing their presence. The parents will not feed their hatchlings while both Mahoney

and I stand below watching. They wait patiently off concealed in nearby brush until one of us walks away.

15:33. The mosquitoes are not bad here this afternoon, compared to the situation a few days ago. For some reason, those that are lingering in the forest grass seem especially attracted to Mahoney, possibly because of the lotion she put on earlier. The combined effect of mosquito assaults and the heat have sapped her will to continue our study today. So after the cavity nests, we climb out of the forest, onto the levee,

and make our way back without further event to the car.

FOREST CATHEDRAL (3 JUL 2011)

14:02. We hike around the wide south pool and past the very lush owl wood to drop into the forest main. Along this route, we notice that the buckbrush is now in bloom, and that the saskatoons appear to be nearer to ripening than the currants, something that's never occurred in previous summers. Already we are feeling overheated, so we decide to seek out a shady log where we can sit and watch the trees for the

possibility that some of the birds will reveal the locations of their canopy nests.

14:21. The area where we chose to sit is the kind of place a new-ager might look at and perceive as a vortex. It is a grand forest cathedral, where all of the tree trunks around a wide central clearing angle sharply toward one another, and come together to create arches overhead. But it is nothing too mysterious. The central open area is the key. All of these trees have bent in their convergent directions to bring their leaves access to maximal sunlight. I wish those people searching for supernatural answers could one day appreciate that the greatest force of creation on this planet is and always will be the Sun. Just consider, here it has bent the largest of trees permanently with but a glance.

14:33. Though we can hear the cricket-like calls of waxwings high in the canopy above, the only nest we're able to locate in watching the trees of this cathedral place is that of a House Wren couple, using an old woodpecker cavity in a dead snag. That makes two wren nest locations we're presently aware of in the forest main. Like the wrens from yesterday, the two residing in the cathedral are hesitant to bring food to their hatchlings while we are present. In the fifteen minutes or so we sit here, they make only one quick, stealthy drop. Aside from these wrens, the scene is fairly quiet. Too much midday heat, we figure. Taking a cue from this widespread inactivity, we decide to hike back to the vehicle and call it a day, seek shade indoors.

June 12: Water bug:

On my way back to the shore after downloading the pics, I came across the king insect of the pond - a Giant Waterbug. It is huge, resembling a large cockroach. It is sitting atop a floating piece of wood, right beside and guarding a cluster of eggs. In all our years coming here, the only sign of these bugs we've seen are their backs, rising up like heavy raindrops on the pond surface. To find one exposed like this is a huge thrill.



Ryan Heavy Head and his wife Adrienne are caretakers of a Beaver Bundle for the Blood Tribe of southern Alberta. He works as the coordinator of Kainai Studies at Red Crow College, on the Blood Reserve, where he teaches field courses in phenology and traditional foods.

Advertising in Nature Alberta

Nature Alberta is now accepting a limited number of advertisements for future issues. Ad rates vary from \$35 (business card size) to \$249 (full page), X2 for colour.

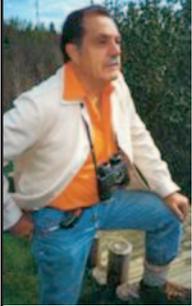
Full details, including rates and sizes, are available at:

online: www.naturealberta.ca

email: na@naturealberta.ca

phone: (780) 427 - 8124

In Memoriam



Edgar T. Jones Nov. 22, 1922 – Sept. 28, 2011

Edgar T. Jones seemed to have done it all. He was a war hero who won two Distinguished Flying Crosses. After the war, he had his own bush pilot operation out of Fort McMurray. He was one of Canada's most famous birders and naturalists. He was a superb nature photographer and filmmaker, producing more than 100 documentaries on nature. He was deeply involved with naturalist groups like the Edmonton Bird Club. He fought for protection of important natural areas like Wagner Bog and, what was named after him, the Edgar T. Jones Natural Area. He was a prodigious bird bander, banding his 100,000th bird in 2001. In short, he was one of Alberta's pioneer environmentalists. Nature Alberta recognized Edgar as such in 2001 by bestowing on him the Honourary Life Member Award.

His daughter, Dawna Jones, wrote in a blog:

“His last project is a book, *On a Birds Wing North to the Arctic*, that is with the University of Alberta Press awaiting funding. It covers his experiences with following the birds north from Beaverhill Lake to the Arctic. Unfortunately, he passed before he could see it in print.”

Dawna also wrote how best to honour her father:

“The easiest way to honour Dad is to take a pair of binos out and be one with the birds. Honour, cherish and respect their tenacity for living against the odds that nature and we present them with and to become a change agent by helping to restore balance between nature and humanity.”



Harvey Gardner Dec 2, 1937 – May 31, 2011

BY DON STILES

Harvey Gardner, who was the President of Nature Alberta (then known as Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN)) in 1994 and 1995, passed away on May 31, 2011. His involvement with FAN began in 1977 when he was selected as the representative of the Alberta Speleological Society. Over the following three-plus decades, Harvey was involved, on behalf of FAN, in countless activities. His astuteness, down-to-earth yet firm demeanour, experience as a rancher and passion for the environment made him

a forceful naturalist figure who commanded respect. He was the recipient of a FAN Volunteer Award in 2003.

Harvey grew up on the family ranch at the north end of Chain Lakes and spent his life there as a rancher, except for high school and his college education in the United States. This included high school in St. Louis MO and college at Colorado State University where he was in an agricultural program. From the *Calgary Herald* obituary:

“As a life long rancher, Harvey was a dedicated steward of the environment, particularly the Eastern Slopes of Alberta where he lived his entire life. He

was committed to supporting landowner rights and was proud of his reconciliatory efforts between landowners and conservation groups.”

Some quotes from Harvey’s first President’s Page in the Spring 1994 *Alberta Naturalist* (the former name of this magazine, *Nature Alberta*) give an insight into his life and philosophy.

“Thank you FAN and all members I have met for broadening my horizons and views of this province. Years ago I regarded Edmonton as “northern”, Calgary as “central” – until FAN gave me a legitimate reason to really look at the province as a whole.

“I was raised here on the ranch when the roads were really wagon trails and Local Improvement District meant that if you want the road fixed you fixed it yourself. I clearly remember our neighbours building corduroy roads and moving dirt with horses.

“I do not mean to claim any expertise in botany or any other field - only that “complex” is too simple a word to describe any ecosystem or issue. The only thing that seems truly simple is that thing which one knows nothing about.”

Other President’s Pages describe his involvement going to meetings of Special Places 2000 and the Eastern Slopes Energy and Environment Committee (ESEEC). At a May 12, 1995 meeting, an environmental coalition including FAN decided to “suspend ESEEC meetings and sever that contact

with industry until some positive developments occur.”

Harvey commented on Special Places 2000 in the Summer 1995 *Alberta Naturalist*:

“I ended the most recent “President’s Page” by stating that unenlightened human greed is a poor guide in long-term planning. Bear that in mind now:

“March 28, the Alberta government released its Special Places 2000 Policy, which was immediately followed by FAN, AWA, CPAWS and WWF protesting the weakness of the policy and the lack of positive action. The government’s official version of SP 2000 does not discourage industrial development in “protected” areas and indicates no commitment to legislated protection for designated sites. (Hence the boycott of the government’s SP 2000 process by these groups.)”

And from the Fall 1995 *Alberta Naturalist*:

“On August 23, 1995, FAN (along with Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - CPAWS) announced its decision to participate on the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) for Special Places 2000. We believe that the best use of our energy in the near future is in assisting the PCC to obtain changes in the legislation that will preclude industrial development in protected areas without unreasonable restrictions on activities that would not interfere with the

area’s ecological integrity (e.g., hunting, fishing, grazing). A verbal understanding was obtained from the Minister’s office that the PCC would be consulted during rationalization of existing legislation.

“All this is not to say that we do not have reservations about the Special Places 2000 process, or that we have no recollection of past disappointments. But simply it seems time to grasp the nettle and take an active part in the present effort.”

A memorial service for Harvey was held on June 11, 2011 in the Administration Building of the MD Ranchlands which is at the south end of Chain Lakes. About 200 people were present including ranching neighbours, some First Nations people from the nearby Eden Valley Reserve, and a number of people from environmental groups that had worked with Harvey.

A Eulogy was given by his son Cameron and a Tribute by his cousin Francis Gardner, also a rancher. Other shorter tributes were given by the Chairman of the Surface Rights Federation, Jim Pissot, John Donovan (a caving friend), a rancher neighbour and a grandson.

In recent years Harvey had worked with the Pekisko Group (a coalition of ranchers), and the Alberta Surface Rights Federation.

Harvey is survived by his wife Barbara, two sons, Cameron and Robert, their spouses and five grandchildren.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Rust Never Sleeps

(with apologies to Neil Young)

BY LORNE FITCH, P. BIOL.



RICK PRICE

Albertans live in, and near, some classic landscapes. If we could climb some stupendous ladder and gaze to all of the points of the compass we might see them better.

There are the remains of the native prairie, its tawny skin stretched tightly over a treeless expanse. The rolling, fescue grasslands of the foothills are rich, verdant and unmistakably feminine. Wooded islands of remnant aspen parkland are alive with the variegated colors of autumn. Cloaked in a blanket of endless greenery is the vastness of the boreal forest. The bordering jewels – the mountains – are a naked and serene backbone of twisted and tortured rock and ice. From west to east and to the north run sinuous ribbons of water, connected like veins in a leaf. Amid this, without a sense of order, are splashes of blue, the receptacles gouged out by glaciers. Yes, they are classics, the envy of others. Their elegance, scale and diversity draw us and millions of visitors, and we all stand transfixed by the view.

They are the original “oldies”, created and molded by tectonic activity and mile-high glaciers, unrelentingly aided by the forces of erosion, deposition, plant succession, fire, flood, drought and grazing. These landscapes pleased the buffalo, which sustained the first inhabitants, and the beaver, whose rich pelt lured the first immigrants from Europe. To the eventual chagrin of the first inhabitants, the European visitors didn’t leave. Once here and tasting the riches and the opportunity, we stayed. We discovered that beyond the fur and the fish there were forests waiting for the axe, soil (some so rich it was beyond belief) and water for harnessing, irrigating and manufacturing. It wasn’t just the surfeit of riches; it was also the freedom to stand tall, separate and individual on a landscape of our choosing that by coincidence

was choice. We love this place called Alberta.

Albertans also love their sheet metal, not only sculpted in the form of modern SUVs, trucks and sleek sedans, but also the oldies. These are classics too. There are the unforgettable lines of a ’57 Chevy, resplendent in acres of chrome and gleaming paint. Or, a ’65 Mustang convertible crouches, glowing in some candy apple color: uncomfortable, impractical but with an attitude of freedom and escape. Beckoning to us and to some inner-most rebel is a 1950 Indian Chief motorcycle, with valanced fenders and metal burnished to an incredible hue. These classics draw us to them, stirring our blood (sometimes our wallets) and, even for non-enthusiasts, create a sense of



KEN KILCULLEN

nostalgia for the rarity, the quality and the memory of simpler, perhaps better times.

One of the challenges in the care of those classic vehicles, in addition to the risk of an accident, is the maintenance to keep that

vintage tin from being attacked by rust. Rust is the great leveler of metal, insidious, cumulative and notoriously effective. Prevention is the keynote here; otherwise, the cost of repair or the problems of replacement are onerous. Some parts are no longer available.

We've got some rust spots on our classic Alberta landscapes. Some are pinpricks warning us of incipient problems; others are a growing blot of corrosion. Most of the prairie grasslands disappeared under the plow in the first fifty years of Alberta. Much of the transformation occurred during the homestead era when immigrants were lured to this landscape by government-sponsored visions of land ownership, freedom and self-sufficiency. Many discovered the lie too late; this wasn't farming country, especially at the quarter-section (160 acres) scale. The

TWO '65 MUSTANGS – THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CARE AND CARE NOT!





HANS MUELLER

remains of this marvelously drought-adapted world have since been continually chipped at, some by recurring delusions of cereal crop production and others by pasture “improvements”, hoping to best the last 12,000 years of plant evolution. At a smaller scale, an insidious assault on “old growth” prairie happens daily with every oil and gas well and the welter of accompanying roads, pipelines, power lines and non native plants.

Foothills largely escaped the plow but they haven’t evaded the chainsaw, the starter-castle, the drilling rigs or the piston heads. The “Green Zone”, an ironic sobriquet given the

current level of exploitation, was the original answer to the protection of Alberta’s watersheds, especially the headwaters of every major river system for the Prairie Provinces. The Forest Reserve concept was a wise and forward-looking designation, with accompanying policy, to assure downstream water users (and drinkers) of quality and quantity. Somewhere along the way, exportable products like dimensional lumber and gas dampened the enthusiasm for an emphasis on watershed. The myriad of cutlines, logging roads, pipelines and wellsite roads created an unintentional playground for the

disenfranchised landless, using all manner of petroleum fueled conveyances. Along the eastern fringe of the foothills the urban sprawl of Calgary threatens to link up with rampant rural residential development which itself is spreading from the gates of Waterton Lakes National Park northward to Edson. Landowners are mobilizing over concerns that while we’ve proven ourselves good at taking landscapes apart, we have failed in our attempts to put them back together again.

The aspen parkland was a tension zone, ecologically, between the prairie grasslands and the forest environments

and culturally, between the tribes of plains and forest natives. Like the prairie, little of the original quality and quantity has survived our tenure. Both of my sets of grandparents homesteaded in the aspen parkland, about 1900. My mother recalled the walks to the country school a little less than a kilometer away, taking, in 1912, sometimes over an hour to dodge the wetlands, willow jungles and aspen thickets. I walked the route a few years ago; it took me 20 minutes and all that impeded me were two barbed wire fences. In living history the landscape produced a cornucopia of wild fruit, game birds and fish from nearby Sylvan Lake. In the blank perfection of today's fields, interrupted occasionally by a one-tree-width fence line, there are few opportunities for hunting or gathering. Even Sylvan Lake has felt the effects of these changes; now there is only the promise of opportunity to catch a fish instead of an assured catch. Other lakes have seen declines in fish populations, perhaps coincident with dropping water levels that exacerbate the naturally high nutrient regimes added to by shoreline developments. The recurring droughts of the last decade, instead of sending a message on the value of wetlands, has ironically allowed the cultivation and loss of more of them. Many of the remaining intact pieces of the aspen parkland are under attack, both from non-native plant invasions and, from coal bed methane extraction, the next indignity if wellsite spacing will be as close as suspected.

The boreal forest covers an area larger than the combined area of Alberta's other landscapes, yet it is more out-of-sight and regrettably more out-of-mind than the others. At the global level, the boreal forest represents the Earth's most extensive terrestrial system and Alberta has a large share of it. Boreal forests are said to be the "lungs" of our land because they produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide. They actively store carbon and serve as a partial break on global warming. How does Alberta treat this treasure?

Unfortunately, we have auctioned it off as a resource ripe for liquidation. The boreal forest is largely controlled by a series of multinational corporations, answerable to their stockholders and not to Albertans. We have put the forest's future in the hands of the marketplace, a notoriously fickle entity for resource conservation and protection over the long haul. A large hole is being dug in the boreal forest, near Ft. McMurray, to assuage the insatiable appetite

of the American (and perhaps the Chinese) markets for oil. To give a sense of magnitude to the hole being dug in the oil sands, very soon the disturbed area will be as large as Lac La Biche, one of the few Alberta lakes big enough to identify on a road map. In 15 years the area will exceed that of Lesser Slave Lake. More to the point, every barrel of oil produced by wringing the bitumen clean with steam takes about five barrels of water. The mighty Athabasca River may be transformed into a creek downstream of Ft. McMurray.

Mountain landscapes are the flagship of Alberta's tourism effort, the images luring people, presumably with deep pockets, to spend time and money in the midst of the provinces best. As one watches the incredible vistas in tourism videos, there isn't a single oil derrick, feedlot (or "confined feeding operation"), clear-cut or lake stained with a toxic algae bloom in sight. Perhaps most of the footage is shot in our mountain national



RICK PRICE

parcs, which are not free of issues either, mostly related to the industry of recreation and transportation networks. Outside of the national parks and often right on the borders of them are found coalmine developments and a suite of resorts and ski hills.

“Sooner or later, everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences”, said Robert Louis Stevenson, the 19th century author of *Treasure Island*. He would not have known of the place later to be called Alberta but there are some parallels to the fantasy world he created in his fiction about a place with buried riches. What isn't a fantasy is we can't drink water safely anymore from surface sources in this province of treasure. A history of land use choices and decisions translates into a haunting legacy for something as common and as irreplaceable as water. Alberta Environment has examined 535 water treatment systems and has recommended the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade them, boost monitoring and build new distribution networks. Perhaps we should also look upstream from the water intakes and deal with water quality issues at their source. Through a series of unconscious decisions we have turned our backs on our watercourses, wetlands and shorelines. The penalty for lack of care and attention to riparian areas is the loss of critical ecological function, especially the filtering and buffering action the thin green line of vegetation performs.

Rust never sleeps. It spreads and as the spots join, the underlying integrity of the structure is compromised and threatened. Ask a bridge engineer or the owner of a classic car about that truism. If the province of Alberta were, in the parlance of car sales, a previously-owned unit, it might behoove the current owners to take a second look at not only the external surface but also the structural framework. A picture emerges of a car hurtling down an icy country road at night at twice the speed of sense. The tires are bald, the brakes poor and the steering is worse. There are holes in the fenders and floorboards; the frame is bent. The oil is low and the gas gauge is on “E”. Inside the occupants are laughing, joking and seemingly oblivious to the “T” intersection rushing up ahead, dimly visible in the faint glow of one badly focused headlight.

We've hit the “T” before, arguably several times; it is uncertain what, if anything, was learned. The original treasure, beaver, was unsustainably trapped through excess competition between the first distant corporate entities, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. Populations crashed by the early- to mid-1800's. Shortly after provincehood, in 1907, a five-year moratorium was placed on trapping beaver, again because of over-harvest. Buffalo, those easy keepers that didn't need baled hay, just space, winked out by the 1870's. There was no second chance with them. Early Finn and Swede homesteaders made short work of the old-growth conifer

forests around Sylvan, Gull and Pigeon Lakes. Some of their fine axe-work still remains on remnant buildings, but the forests exist only in old photographs. Coal mining in the Crowsnest Pass required a forest of mine props, and when the heavy rains of 1923 and then 1942 hit the denuded forest, floods washed through Coleman and Blairmore. Floods in the Oldman basin in 1975, 1995, 2002 and 2005 need examination to chart the possible connection to land use and watershed condition.

The hard lessons of soil erosion of the drought prone years of the 1930's needed to be relearned when dry conditions lingered in southern Alberta in the late 1970's and early 1980's. There are sections of rivers in southern Alberta that exist in name but hardly in biological reality at some times during the irrigation season. This condition has persisted for decades, despite the addition of many new storage reservoirs. Reservoir capacity and increased irrigation efficiency have allowed more land to be irrigated but unfortunately have not contributed to the restoration of riverine function.

Even in the faint glow of one dim headlight we should be able to read the signs warning of the possibility of a potential wreck ahead. In some cases we've been on that road before. If the rust spots are pointed out, the status of the corrosion established and the consequences of inaction apparent, the reasonable thing to do is stop and repair the damage. That's what owners of classic vehicles do, for a variety



IAN GARDINER

of reasons. The motives are many for restoration and maintenance. Nostalgia, for a simpler time when products had a sense of craftsmanship, springs to mind. It could be economic pragmatism; scarcity and quality increase value. Judging by the looks on some vehicle owners' faces, it is a deep-seated sense of pride in bringing back and keeping a classic on the road. Some might say it is about maintaining a piece of our history, culture or technology as an artifact to show us from where we've come.

Our classic Alberta landscapes deserve the same treatment, for many of the same reasons. The major difference is: classic cars

don't sustain us, while classic landscapes do. In the Neverland of billion-dollar surpluses, there is a tendency to think we can buy our way out of those nagging environmental problems. While it is true the world market lubricates and fuels itself on oil, the reality is that it still runs on water. About 65% of each of us is water, not oil (well, perhaps just a touch of gas). We could, if we choose to, live a long time without oil but we'll only survive a few days without water. Water is the original and universal lubricant, the stuff and substance of life and a vital part of the economy. We may import bananas from Ecuador, avocados from California and oranges from

Florida (all at great energy costs) but we cannot import water.

Our soil is the sum of glacial grinding of essential minerals combined with the successive layering and working by plants for millennia. Although underrated in an oil-saturated economy, Alberta's fertile soils jump-started much of the wealth we enjoy today. Soil is, however, a thin veneer and if we mine it instead of tending to it, our wealth and our future diminishes.

Biodiversity at the three scales (gene, species and ecosystems) is the biological bank account – the real bank account and not the illusionary one currently filled

with petro-dollars. It is our hedge against an unseen future, to give us choices, options and flexibility to help us cope with variability. In a world that accords position with wealth, biodiversity is a more accurate measuring stick of either solvency or bankruptcy.

The ecosystem level of biodiversity describes our classic landscapes. At that level, landscapes work for us, everyday, without remuneration, acknowledgement or thanks. They perform ecological processes and functions vital to our well being as individuals and to Alberta's economy. At least they do when they are healthy, without a layer of rust covering the parts. "Healthy" landscapes (like healthy bodies) work together to perform key functions, some of which include creating primary productivity, capturing and storing water, cycling nutrients, filtering and buffering water, and creating conditions for stability and resilience to perturbations. Most of these functions can't be duplicated or replaced with technology. Even if we could figure out the intricate mechanisms, we'd find the cost of duplication prohibitive. These ecological services are the real treasure, the dividends of which could pay out endlessly on Alberta's classic landscapes, if we quit treating our classics like disposable income and if we start to reinvest in some repairs and preventative maintenance.

Rusty cars soon lose their resale value, and as the rot permeates the metal, safety and roadworthiness deteriorates. Inevitably, pieces fall off and

seize; the car becomes a lump of brown, orphaned in the back yard or put at curbside for disposal. Rusty landscapes lose their regenerative abilities, many of the ecological services become impaired or go missing, and they become less attractive as places to live, work or recreate. In cars, maintenance is a function of regular inspections, an investment in repairs, and attention to detail, including putting the brakes on rust early. In the case of both cars and landscapes, maintenance is also about care, appreciation and awareness about the costs and consequences of inaction. Failure leads to the loss of either mechanical or ecological services, and in both cases we end up stranded.

A few kilometers south of Black Diamond in the heart of Alberta's first oil boom, the Turner Valley field, is an enigmatic sign beside a small clump of houses. It reads, "Naptha – No Services". Naptha is now a ghost town of that early boom; it has no post office, no stores, no gas station (an irony given its start), no restaurants, no school, no church, no fire or police station and, in fact, nothing much but a sign advising of no services. It's a powerful metaphor, on several levels. The name, Naptha, refers to a volatile hydrocarbon fraction and is perhaps a message on the volatility of an economy

reliant on the extraction of nonrenewable resources. The unregulated, chaotic early drilling resulted in a significant loss of much of the stored wealth of the Turner Valley field. So much natural gas was flared it is said you could read a newspaper at midnight in the region. The Oil and Gas Conservation Board, the early precursor to the Energy and Utilities Board, was formed, probably in response to the waste, to regulate the "orderly" development of petroleum resources. Is it orderly development or is it liquidation, in a fire-sale mentality, of these and other resources? The rust developing on Alberta's classic landscapes and the impairment of vital ecological functions should make us pause and consider the answer. The consequence of inaction might be a sign sometime in the future that reads: "Alberta – No Services".

Carl Sagan, the astrophysicist whose interests were galactic in scale, provided this worldly advice: "Anything else you're interested in is not going to happen if you can't breathe the air or drink the water. Don't sit this one out. Do something. You are by accident of fate alive at an absolutely critical moment in the history of our planet". We are at that critical point in Alberta. Cumulative effects analysis shows us rushing up to

"The first rule of holes is: when you are in one, quit digging."

a pit of landscape fragmentation, increased competition for land and resources and a loss of ecological integrity. We may, in some cases, be into the black hole of critical thresholds and tipping points. The first rule of holes is: when you are in one, quit digging.

One of ecology's lessons is that it is never one thing, nor will the solutions to the rust on our landscapes be so either. A start would be rethinking the dogma of doing everything, everywhere, anytime and all the time. As Albertans, we need to get over this perverse sense of entitlement to all of the province's wealth now. Some real cost accounting would be eye opening, so we would all know not only how prosperous we are, but what the price of prosperity is, in terms of externalizing costs to the environment. A better valuation of the ecological services of Alberta's classic landscapes might provide another perspective on where the province's wealth resides. That most of the current wealth, measured in cash, is based on geological luck overlain by a fortuitous administrative boundary seems lost on most. The perspective that we are in the black economically is touted, but the reality is we are awash in red ink, ecologically.



The challenge to us, in the field of biology, is to chart the ecological costs of doing business and to help people understand the value of Alberta's classic landscapes. Steward Udall, a past Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior captured it best; "Over the long haul of life on this planet, it is the ecologists and not the bookkeepers of business, who are the ultimate accountants".

Imagine a place where people are happier about clean water than about "prosperity" cheques, where people are as concerned about the state of biodiversity as they are about the price of gas at the pumps,

and where people demonstrate for healthy landscapes with the same enthusiasm as they do for publicly-funded health care. It could be Alberta. If we don't help people focus on a future that revolves around environmental quality (instead of economic excess) we'll end up where we're headed. That destination doesn't appeal to me.

As Neil Young intones, "you pay for this, they give you that; and once you're gone, you can't come back..." "Cause rust never sleeps".

Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary and a retired Alberta Fish and Wildlife Biologist. He is a well-known speaker, writer and photographer, living in Lethbridge AB. "Rust Never Sleeps", besides being this edition's Feature Story, is the third in a series of articles by Lorne.



Up Close Naturally: Water, Water, Everywhere...

BY MARGOT HERVIEUX

For anyone watching a flooding river rush under a bridge or over its banks, it is hard to imagine that the raging water is actually benefiting plants and animals that live in and along the waterway.

Floods replenish soil moisture and refill wetlands. This keeps water on the land and helps reduce the effects of flooding further downstream. In smaller waterways and beaver ponds, the flush of fresh water also cleans out stagnant pools.

Fast moving water also removes silt from gravel bars. Silt suffocates fish eggs and rushing water removes those sediments from spawning beds. Depending on the timing of spawning, severe flooding may affect this year's eggs or fry but next year's fish will have a better chance of survival.

High water also carries deadfall and snags which then lodge along the shore. This tangle of vegetation provides shade and shelter for fish and their food. It also offers perches and resting spots for fish eaters like kingfishers, mergansers, otters and mink.

habitat may be damaged in the short term but the floodwaters also bring benefits. Silt and debris left behind by the high water are an important source of nutrients that will feed the riverside forests for years to come.

Flooding also washes upland vegetation and invertebrates into the water. This provides immediate food sources for fish in the river but important nutrients are also carried into wetlands and lakes downstream.

Flooding is actually critical for the long term survival of some plants, including cottonwoods and balsam poplar. The seeds of these trees won't germinate anywhere except on exposed silt bars. When flooding is prevented,

seedlings have nowhere to sprout. The result is that many of these trees are not being replaced as they die and valuable riverside habitat is disappearing.

In order to reduce flooding, people build dams and other control structures. This does prevent some erosion and property damage but many of the natural benefits are lost. We also increase the chances of flooding by draining wetlands and removing beaver dams. These wetlands actually act to hold water and reduce run-off and erosion.

There is no question that flooding greatly affects the surrounding landscape. While we do see negative effects on our property and structures, that raging water also plays an important role recharging natural shoreline communities.

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When a river floods over its banks, shoreline

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



BOOK REVIEW

Your Spider Senses will be Tingling!

The Private Life of Spiders

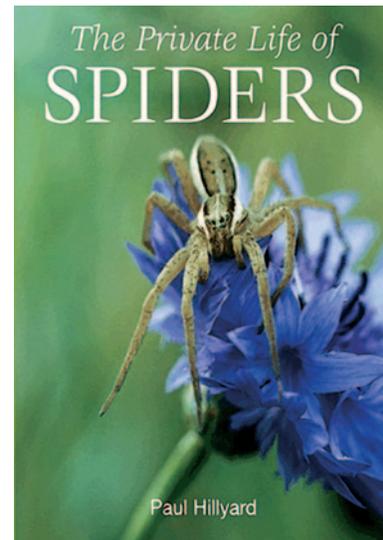
REVIEW BY: SARAH MCPIKE, BSC, BIOLOGIST AND ENTOMOPHILE

Everyone has an interest in spiders. Some people are fearfully fascinated, and others awed, or at least curious. *The Private Life of Spiders* takes this interest and expands on it by introducing the reader to the amazing variety of lifestyles spiders have evolved. With an obvious passion for the subject, the author helps you get better acquainted with the eight-legged wonders you thought you knew.

The book's first chapter introduces you to the general characteristics of spiders, their place in evolutionary history, and their natural roles as predators and prey. Following this are chapters outlining the major groups of spiders, and examples of each. Web production and use, mating and producing young, the use of venom, and the extraordinary phenomenon of social spiders are each then explored. Finally, a consideration of human and spider interaction is shared.

The author's emphasis on the diversity of spider lifestyles is very engaging. Even as a person who considers herself fairly well-versed in spiderly ways, I was continually surprised to learn of behaviours I'd not heard of before. For instance, there are orb-weavers that build a "ladder"-shaped web which is particularly effective for catching moths, which are typically tricky for spiders to capture. As well, I was enlightened about some tarantulas using sound as a defense mechanism, via a "file and tooth system" located on their jaws.

The many large photos bring you face to face with spider-lives at a scale not achievable with the naked eye. The image of a mother wolf spider with her dozens of babies on her back is especially endearing. The photos further illustrate the diversity of spiders, and the kinds of lives they lead. You see everything from a Triangle Web Spider poised



By Paul Hillyard. Princeton University Press. Paper (2011). ISBN: 9780691150031. Cloth (2008). ISBN: 9780691135526. 160 pp. 200 color illus.

to grab prey with its net-like web, to a tarantula falling prey to a Giant Desert Centipede.

This book is ideal for naturalists with a desire to better get to know our arachnid neighbors, or for young adults, hungry for knowledge of the natural world. For those who already like spiders, this book can help solidify their admiration. For those who don't already like them, *The Private Life of Spiders* should help at least inspire respect for these valuable, amazingly diverse, often misunderstood animals.

WNS Cause Found

Good news! Researchers have reached a major milestone in understanding the disease that is killing North America's bats.

New research by the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center and its partners confirms that the fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, is the cause of White-nose Syndrome (WNS). Although the syndrome was named after the telltale white fungus that grows on the faces of many infected bats, scientists were not sure if the fungus was the cause or a symptom of the disease.

This is a critical accomplishment, but it is only one step toward resolving this crisis. There is still a long road ahead, with time-consuming and costly research required.

First Hand: Coffee and Corvids

BY RYAN HEAVY HEAD (FROM HIS JUNE 26TH BLOG)

June 26, 2011. I observed three very different strategies being utilized yesterday by parent Corvids [Jays, Crows, Magpies] when dealing with humans (myself) who pass near to their fledgling young, and an extension of one of these behaviors this morning in an entirely different scenario.

Magpie parents yesterday gave alarm calls that let the fledglings know there was potential danger when I approached. But given my Magpie fluency, I was able to speak back and forth with them a bit, and soon they had fledglings down on the ground with them at a careful but close distance from me, and one of the parents even flew away from the scene to gather food elsewhere and bring it back for the young birds, leaving them in my presence all the while.

With **Blue Jays**, it was a different story. There were no alarm calls at all. The fledglings were a bit younger, and the parents had to go out and search for food alone because the young birds would never be able to keep up. Though I stood even closer to the Blue Jay fledglings than I had with the Magpies, the parents continued to come and go with no sign of trouble, save perhaps for their attempts to stay out of sight themselves. When they'd arrive with food, it would be with a swift and silent fly-in, concealed as much as possible by brush. The same went for their fly-out.

Crows were by far the most upset with human presence. Mahoney and I had only to walk past the

lot where the Crows' nest was set, hidden in a large evergreen, and the parents immediately came to meet us, perching in branches above our heads and cawing in alarm. We wouldn't have even known the fledglings were near if not for the parents' anxiety. Their young were about in the same stage of development as the Blue Jay fledglings, able to fly short distances, but sticking close to the nest (in fact they never left the natal tree). Our proximity to the young Crows was about twice as distant as with the Magpies, and four or five times as distant as I had been with the Blue Jays. The fledglings watched quietly as their parents scolded us, never once even making begging calls, as both the Magpie and Blue Jay young did constantly.

What to make of this? My initial hypothesis is that the behavioral difference between these otherwise very similar birds has to do with their differential history of treatment by humans. Of these three Corvids, certainly the Blue Jay is least despised by people. Farmers might not like them much, but in urban and suburban settings, humans tend to have some affection for them simply because of their blue

color (silly monkeys), and so have not consistently sought to harass or harm them. Perhaps for this reason, the Blue Jay parents don't find much to be alarmed about when there are humans near their fledglings.

Magpies, on the other hand, while also somewhat attractive to people because of their distinct coloration and long, fancy tails, are considered to be too loud. They also have a history of being thought of as magical (hence the "mag" in Magpie), and so evoke a bit of residual superstition not aided by their reputation for thievery. The English and their relatives in outlying colonies have made serious attempts to eradicate Magpies altogether, and in some locales on their home island are still trying to do so. But here in North America, this English disdain for the birds has been put in check for the last few decades, and Magpies - though still often despised - are tolerated. For all of this, the Magpie has every reason to give alarm when humans come near their fledglings, but is aware that the chance of a purposeful attack is, for the time being, relatively slim. Best option is to simply keep a safe distance and carry on with life as normal.

And then there are the Crows ... who have had the misfortune of being black of plumage. The English and their colony relatives do not like the

color black. It is associated with bad and dangerous things in their culture. Crows have therefore been framed as the evil bird – magically evil, given their intelligence. And Crows are loud, all the more call for hatred. As with Magpies, there have been serious efforts made to eradicate Crows, and all kinds of scare tactics utilized, including the regular construction and placement of life-sized human dolls to ward them off. Because the Crow's call is easy to imitate, it is not rare that, even with the relative tolerance shown toward them in the last few decades, humans continue to actively harass them through mocking imitation. Of all the Corvids, who are a class generally despised in the dominant European tradition, Crows have got the worst rap and no doubt have the most trauma to remember. I would conjecture that this history is what evokes their seeming over-concern with human passers-by in the presence of fledglings.

Interestingly, we had an opportunity to witness some Crow behavior this morning, in an entirely different but related scenario. Like every morning, Derrick and I went to spend some time in the back yard with the neighborhood Crows and Magpies, which I feed daily. All was going as usual, with both types of Corvids coming in to get food, taking it from a rail that is no more than a meter from where I'm seated (the Magpies have even come to eat from my hand when I've offered). Then Mahoney woke up and she came out holding Keira. The first Crow to arrive after Mahoney came out flew in and stood on top of our neighbor's house, studied the scene intently for about three

minutes, then gave a croaking call and flew away. Its mate came by about five minutes later, landed on the porch rail, and proceeded to eat, then suddenly realized that Mahoney was holding something that looked very much like another Crow. It froze in place and looked carefully. Yes, she was holding a Crow. Then it flew down to the fence rail and paced back and forth looking hard at the scene. Eventually, it gave a loud triple call – *Aw! Aw! Aw!* – and a few seconds later flew away.

When neither Crow returned after about five minutes, we went in.

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.



No sooner did we close the back door than one of the Crows swooped in to feed. They had been watching us from a concealed position. Keira, for her part, went to sit by the window and watch them make visit after visit to collect all the kibble from the rail. They knew she was there, and made purposeful close passes at the window to look at her as they came and went, until all the food was gone



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Wildlife! Starring... Mountain Bluebird Trails

BY KIRK DAVIS

After retirement we were looking for something to do when we heard from a friend, Greg Wagner, about an opportunity to take over a Mountain Bluebird Trail (MBT) from Brian Keeling, a long time MBT volunteer who was retiring.

We thought this would be a great opportunity for us; we both love the outdoors and viewing wildlife. We had managed a corporation together for 15 years so we knew how work together, the administration and data recording that would be needed. The trail is in the Foothills west of Stavely and on our first trip out we were in awe of the beautiful uncultivated land and the number of wildflowers. Each time out there is a different display of colors from the ever-changing wildflowers.

Brian mentored us for the first 3 months on how to monitor and maintain the bird boxes, showed us the proper way to band the bluebirds and showed us how to keep the records. He did a great job; his patience, his many years experience, his love for the bluebirds and the many stories he told about his time on the MBT

made the learning an enjoyable experience for us.

The job involves checking on 116 bird houses, recording your findings in log books, tracking the band numbers used at each box and recording any bluebirds you find that are already banded. Many

of the boxes have tree swallows or sparrows; if that is the case the box is not checked again as the bluebird will not use that box for the remainder of the season. When you find boxes with a bluebird (BB) nest, you continue to check the box until any nestlings have fledged; once they have fledged the box is cleaned out and repaired or



replaced so it is ready for the next brood.

Banding the birds is quite a task, especially the nestlings. With the adult birds you have to hold them gently in just the right way to get a band on their tiny legs. It can be done alone but is much easier with 2 people, one holding the bird, the other putting on the band. The nestlings however are a lot different as they are so tiny at a banding age of 3 to 14 days. It is still easier with 2 people to do it but one person puts the band on the pliers then hands those to the one holding the bird who then puts on the band.

When we find a nest with eggs and the female brooding, this is usually a great opportunity to band the female as they are usually very docile at this time. But sometimes the females are aggressive; if that is the case we do not try to band them as we don't want to cause them any extra stress, a lesson learned from Brian. There was one particular box where we were unable to band an aggressive female and it was this same box that was one of our first bandings of nestlings. It was a very exciting experience. We had 8 nestlings; normally we average 5 nestlings to band. An aggressive diving female and hundreds of hungry mosquitoes buzzing at us to add more to our stress! But, we were able to get it done. Once we returned to our vehicle, we waited to see if the female was going to go back into the bird house as she was very upset about the whole procedure. She would fly to the entrance then leave, do it again, sit on the fence so we left thinking that we were still upsetting her. We were very happy to see when we returned to the nest about a week later that the nestlings were okay. Next visit we were even more delighted to find that they all had fledged.

In our first year on the trail we had 30 successful bluebird nests, recovered 4 previously banded females and banded 86 Bluebirds in total, 11 females and 75 nestlings.



THE MALE BRINGS A GRASSHOPPER TO THE NEST. KIRK DAVIS

TENDING A BLUEBIRD TRAIL GIVES ONE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE IN THE SPLENDOR OF THE LANDSCAPE AND THE WONDERFUL SHOW PUT ON BY FOOTHILLS FLOWERS. KIRK DAVIS



BOOK REVIEW

The World's Best Engineers and Architects!

Avian Architecture: How Birds Design, Engineer, and Build

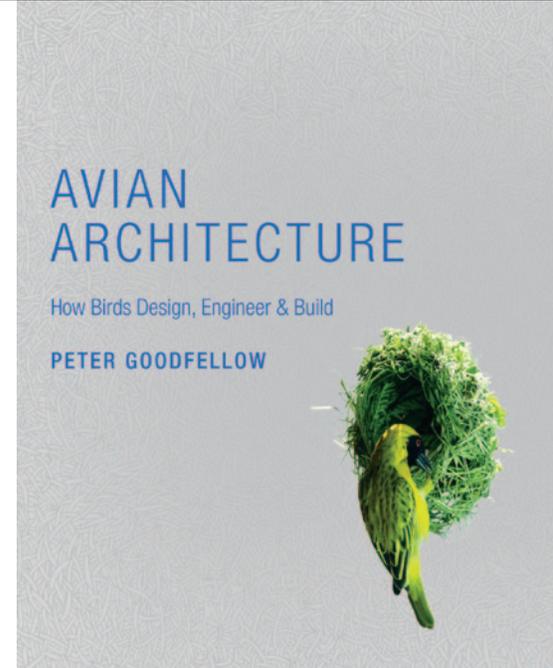
REVIEW BY: MICHELLE BACON

I've had the good fortune of traveling the world and seeing numerous wildlife species in their native habitat. I don't call myself a "birder", so I think it speaks quite strongly that one of the most memorable wildlife observations I've had is the Social Weavers (*Philetairus socius*) in southern Africa. I was fascinated by the hundreds of small birds cooperatively building their massive nest that hung perilously from tree branches, seemingly on the edge of collapse from the weight of the nest. The innate engineering brilliance behind this nest and others is the topic of *Avian Architecture: How Birds Design, Engineer, and Build* by Peter Goodfellow.

As a non-birder, I wasn't sure if I was the right person to review a book about bird nests. I didn't think I could accurately review the scientific information, or compare it to other books about birds and their nests. It didn't take me many pages to realize that those concerns didn't matter. This book's appeal is not because of the extensive research that certainly went into writing it, nor does it matter how it compares to other books of the same topic. *Avian Architecture* is full of photos and information that had me hooked from the first chapter, and is definitely worth a read!

The book is split into 12 chapters, each featuring a different type of nest or construction (e.g. scrape nests, platform nests, mud nests, food stores, etc). Starting with some background information on the nest type, each chapter gives "blueprints" (engineering and design characteristics) of the structure, describes the types of materials used to build it, and then gives examples of specific birds that build and use these structures. The author's choice of formatting the chapters in this manner results in a unique and very readable book; each chapter provides a lot of information without being too technical. The blueprint section of the chapter, complete with architectural drawings, provides a lot of insight and helped me appreciate the difficulty in building the nests.

Avian Architecture uses examples of nests and other constructions from around the world. Some, such as the scrape nest of Killdeer, the platform nest of Bald Eagles, and the aquatic nests of grebes, are ones we naturalists in Alberta are quite familiar with. Others are more exotic. Did you know the Hamerkop of southern Africa uses snakeskin, dung and carrion to ensure their domed nests – the largest in the world – are predator and water-proof? I was equally impressed with the bowers (shelters



By Peter Goodfellow. Published by Princeton University 2011. Cloth: 160 pp., 300 colour illus. \$27.95; ISBN: 9780691148496. e-Book: \$27.95; ISBN: 9781400838318



or avenues in tall grass) built by the tiny Western Bowerbirds of Australia. Rather than using the traditional song and dance routine to attract their mates, the Bowerbirds construct and decorate small shelters with flowers, bones, berries, and shiny objects ... often in coordinated colours! Once these lavish designs have thoroughly impressed a female, the birds mate, the female uses a nest elsewhere, and the décor is left for the next guy to collect.

I would highly recommend this book. It has fantastic information and beautiful photographs. It would make an excellent coffee-table book, but beware...you risk losing the attention of guests once they start flipping through this captivating book!

May Species Counts

BY BOB PARSONS

BROOKS/LAKE NEWELL (MAY 21-22, 2011)

Anticipation was high as 35 participants from Alberta and B.C. checked into Tillebrook Provincial Park, the traditional headquarters for the Brooks/Lake Newell May Species Count. The Count is a joint Calgary-Edmonton initiative, now in its 13th year, and again sponsored by Cenovus Energy, TransCanada Pipelines and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DU). Linda Hajash, our liaison in Brooks, did another fine job putting up flyers and posters and talking to the local media.

As usual, we had the customary eight zones, each zone having a captain and a willing band of spotters. This year, we all missed Milt Spitzer, who was birding in China with his charming wife, but his Zone 8 was well represented.

Early scouting reports from Ben Verner, and Gerry and James Fox, indicated very wet conditions in the fields and some impassable roads that criss-cross the native grasslands. Ponds and sloughs were overflowing and most reservoirs were topped up resulting in a lack of gravel bars and sand spits. Late spring migration was discussed at the Friday night meeting and some thought strong south-east winds might result in some migratory species overflying the area altogether. The weather was acceptable over the long weekend, mainly cloudy conditions and some light drizzle. Some gale-

force winds have been experienced in the past, but winds were not too strong this year.

The final tally was 159 species, a tad below the yearly average of 165 species. As one will read later in this report, some species we normally count were missing this year but overall it was a good count in unstable conditions.

A pair of Burrowing Owls was spotted west of Rolling Hills but, in the same area, Whimbrel were hard to find this year (only 20 or so). Hawks were seen in very good numbers and the few woodlots in the count circle produced the usual suspects...Least Flycatchers, a few warblers, and again this year many Swainson's Thrush. White-faced Ibis were hard to find due to lack of suitable habitat but Baird's Sparrow seemed to be everywhere; the song was instantly recognised by all taking part. Gray-cheeked Thrush were observed in the

campsite, but no Wood Thrush this year, even though I was up early every morning – I missed last year's sighting because I slept in! I passed on counting in the DU Medicine Wheel project, instead spending some time in the Tide Lake area east of Brooks. Numbers were also low in the DU Circle E Project, and the Contra Costa Project numbers were also average. Curtis and Michelle Manly know the Medicine Wheel area very well, but they experienced the lowest number of birds since the count started (see their report below). Michelle was again doing her "Birdathon" and we all wished her well. As it turned out her final number was down this year, indicative of the general situation that weekend.

Saturday evening, we held our traditional beer, wine and food social and all participants were keen to talk about their birding and plant study day. Various door-prizes were handed out including a small garden shovel to the team who counted the

**AND NOW
WE KNOW
WHY BIRDERS
NEED
A 4 X 4.**
CURTIS MANLY





most Shovelers...congrats Arthur! I displayed my new "Coming to Brooks to count ducks" T-shirt but no-one took a photo!

New species this year include Black-headed Grosbeak, Magnolia Warbler and a Saw-whet Owl seen the Monday after the count. Low numbers include Horned Grebe (22), Whimbrel (20), Lark Bunting (2), McCown's Longspur (4) and American White Pelican (153) – quite amazing as it was the lowest number ever. Missing species this year include both Phoebe species, Hooded Merganser, Wilson's Warbler, Brewer's Sparrow, Turkey Vulture, Peregrine Falcon and four "Peeps" species. Some Brooks species' records were broken; notables include Wilson's Snipe (222), Marsh Wren (380), Robin (799), Catbird (23), Brown Thrasher (31), Baird's Sparrow (170), Song Sparrow (61), and Tennessee Warbler (34).

MILK RIVER/WRITING-ON-STONE (MAY 28-29, 2011)

Torrential rain accompanied me most of the way from Edmonton to Milk River; in fact an overnight stop in Lethbridge was a welcome relief after almost aqua-planing through Nanton and Fort Macleod. A very wet Manly family greeted me at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park,

NORTHERN PARULA. ARTHUR WIECKOWSKI

BIRD COUNTS: SOMETIMES, NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART! CURTIS MANLY

our traditional count headquarters, but we were soon ready for our first park walk. I should add here that through their relative companies, Curtis and Michelle took care of the group camping site charge. A very social stay at Site 1

indeed; in fact some of us die-hard tenters slept in the enclosed camp kitchen throughout the weekend!!

A special thanks to Ken and Annette Orich from Lethbridge, and Donna and Arthur Wieckowski from Calgary, who looked after the pre-weekend scouting. As I expected, all spoke of high water levels, roadside swamp conditions and impassable dirt and gravel roads.

There was a good turnout of 12 participants this year and a total of 147 bird species were counted, the second-highest total ever over the twelve-year period of the count's history. The area covered included coulees, woodlots (few), natural area, ponds, sloughs and reservoirs. Scattered showers were present most of the time, with light winds, and some sun, but as mentioned, there were many impassable roads, and creeks up to the bridges. I have never seen Pakowki Lake so high:

water was pouring over the dike by the Hutterite colony. The most amazing sight was 12,000 Franklin gulls building nests on the flattened reed beds after the heavy winter snowfall. White-faced Ibis were also building their summer quarters, along with some muskrats!

Without a doubt, the weekend highlight was the Northern Parula spotted and photographed at the Gilcrist Ranch. Talk about being in the right place at the right time, I believe this sighting is only the fifth for Alberta. A Tundra Swan was also spotted, plus Belted Kingfisher, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush and a lone Broad-winged Hawk. A Common Nighthawk was heard on the Sunday evening as we consumed our third bottle of wine! A pair of Bullock's Orioles was also observed at a feeder in Milk River!

Missing species include Clark's Grebe, all the "Peeps", Burrowing Owl, Turkey Vulture. Low bird observations include Western Grebe, Marsh Wren, McCown's Longspur, American Pelican, Bittern and Sharp-tailed Grouse.

The count has 16 species of the highest number ever: Loggerhead Shrike (18), Lazuli Bunting (3), Ferruginous Hawk (13), Pintail (748), and Red-necked Grebe (21) were all of special note.

A special thank you must go to our sponsors: Cenovus Energy, TransCanada Pipelines, DU Canada,





"OH SURE - THERE'S PROBABLY A REALLY RARE BIRD BEHIND THAT GRANARY!"CURTIS MANLY

the Wildbird General Store (Edmonton), Mosquito Creek Mechanical Ltd, The House Salon and Day Spa. We will do it all again next year!

REPORT BY CURTIS AND MICHELLE MANLY

It is hard to characterize the count this year. Obviously, the abnormally high water levels have altered much of the habitat in the area. Particularly noticeable is the lack of marshy cover available due to the inundation of cattail/bulrush marshes throughout the reservoir system. Vernon Flats, Pakowki Lake, etc., had almost no Yellowthroat or Marsh Wren where concentrations have been very high in past years. Also, the increased standing water had Eared Grebe forming colonies in locations which would seem completely unsuitable, like flooded roadways!

The big difference comes in the expected numbers within species. Many species seemed to exhibit lower than usual numbers on the ground. The Writing-On-Stone count circle is very large, and typically covered by a small number of people. Most years we find large concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds in a restricted amount of habitat. This

year we had, for the most part, a reverse of this situation with small concentrations spread out over a much larger area due to the amount of water available. Exceptions to this were high numbers of Northern Pintail and Franklin's Gull. Both these

species seemed to be arriving late in the area based on the large and growing numbers we encountered.

Species which are well known for the area (eg, Bullock's Oriole, Lazuli Bunting) appeared, though they have not been much in evidence during the last few counts. This variance may indicate early arrivals. Many species were recorded in low numbers (we saw lots of one's and two's this year). A couple of possible reasons may be that, for species like waterfowl, the low concentration can be attributed

to the vast increase in available habitat. Lower concentrations of passerines on the count might indicate high mortality rates or simply hindered progress during migration as a result of the exceptional storm conditions in the southeast United States this year.

Prior to the count, we had approximately ten days of strong wind out of the southeast. This may have simply moved many species through the area more quickly than usual, although follow up trips in Alberta's boreal forest also produced low numbers of individuals, belying this notion. The strong winds may have moved some individuals along very quickly, such as the aforementioned Bullock's Oriole and Lazuli Bunting. The wind may also account for the appearance of extra-limits (eg. Northern Parula were seen during the count, and a Scarlet Tanager was seen in Cypress Hills). The appearance of these species helped with diversity of species, despite being present in low numbers.



HOLLE HAHN

Let's try again!

Nature Alberta did not receive any answers to last edition's identification question, so let's try again. This photo was taken in mid-April on the road to the photographer's house in Westrose AB. **Can you guess what it is?**

Send your answers to:

wildhavn@memlane.com

Answer and winner(s) will be announced in the next *Nature Alberta*. The prize? Naturalist bragging rights and a pat on the back from *Nature Alberta*!

Tenth Report of the Alberta Bird Record Committee

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

Since publication of the Ninth Report of the ABRC (Hudon et al. 2009), the Alberta Bird Record Committee (hereafter the Committee) considered 44 records of bird rarities for the province. The records consist almost entirely of recent sightings, the Committee having dealt with the back-log of unadjudicated records from the 1980s and 1990s on file.

In addition, the Committee re-examined a previously accepted species (Spoon-billed Sandpiper, *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*), in light of better knowledge of the species' vagrancy and abundance in the wild, as well as another (Whip-poor-will), necessitated

by its recent split into Eastern (*Caprimulgus vociferus*) and Mexican Whip-poor-will (*C. arizonae*) by the American Ornithologists' Union's (AOU) Check-list Committee (Chesser et al. 2010). As result of these reviews (see below), both species are removed from the list.

In spite of these losses, the addition of Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*) to the provincial list in this report, as well as of Pacific Wren as a result of the split of the former Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) into Winter Wren (*T. hiemalis*) and Pacific Wren (*T. pacificus*) in North America by the AOU keeps

the provincial list total at 415 species.

Finally, the provincial list is amended to bring it in line with the 50th, 51st and 52nd supplements to the AOU's "Check-list of North American Birds" (Chesser et al. 2009, 2010 and 2011) which have appeared since the Ninth Report of the ABRC was published. Proposed changes include sweeping changes to genera and linear sequence of taxa in the wood-warbler family (Parulidae) (Lovette et al. 2010), as well as splits of genera and species and generic reassignments of several taxa.

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*): female at French Bay, Cold Lake; 31 October 2009; 2 images (Richard Klauke) **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*): juvenile on Bow River upstream of [Hwy 1X] bridge at Seebe; 25 October 2009; brief description on post to Yahoo! Albertabird discussion group and 4 images (Malcolm and Joan McDonald). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*): slough in Quarter Section NW, Section 1, Township 43, Range 25, W4 Meridian; 16 October 2009; 4 images (D. Murray Mackay) **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*): along Hwy 23 in a small pond between Hwy 799 and 804; 11 July 2010; written report (Gary Edelman). **CODE 3 RECORD.** First documented occurrence in the province.

Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*): Cooking Lake; 2 June 2009; written report and 1 image (Gerald Romanchuk). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*): juvenile on slough in NW corner of SR 582 and Range Road 34 W of Didsbury; 6 September 2009; description of bird and 4 images (Ray Woods). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*): Glenmore Reservoir, SW Calgary; 18 and 25 October 2009; written reports (Hank Vanderpol, H.D. Sandy Ayer), 1 image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website (Ken Havard). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*): Cassils Reservoir, W of Brooks; 16 May 2009; written report with 3 images (Gerald Romanchuk). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Glenmore Reservoir, SW Calgary; 24 May 2010; brief description (Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*): Waiparous, NW of Cochrane; since about 2 October 2010, was still seen daily in the spring of 2011; several images (Jim H Davis [1], Dan Kingston [2]) **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*): one found dead by Michael O'Shea on road at top of Reesor Hill in the Cypress Hills; 30 May 2009; Royal Alberta Museum specimen (accession number Z09.14.1) **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*): juvenile female in Jasper, Jasper National Park; 5 to at least 15 October 2009; 3 pictures (Anne L. Williams) **CODE 1 RECORD.** Sub-adult male coming to a feeder in Casa Vista Estates, about 8 km SE of Gibbons (NE of Edmonton); 26 September to 31 October 2009; 10 images (John and Wendy Farquhar). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Yard in Braeside, SW Calgary; 23 and 25 – 26 October 2010; written report with 2 images (Katrina Lybbert). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

RECORDS ACCEPTED...continued



**NORTHERN
WHEATEAR
NEAR ANDREW
AB, 2007.**
DEBBIE FONTAINE

Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*): along Sibbald Trail (Hwy 68) W of Calgary; 30 May 2009; written report (Phil Cram, Simone Marler, Jerry Pilny and Hank Vanderpol). **CODE 3 RECORD.** Lake Louise, Banff National Park; 25 August 2010; written description (Jason Rogers). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*). The species is added on the basis of specimens in the collections at the Royal Alberta Museum and the Canadian Museum of Nature (Ottawa), as well as song recordings of this form from Alberta (Barb Beck, David Toews and Darren Irwin, Ross Lein).

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*): two along Range Road 172 W of Andrew; 16 September 2007; 2 images (Debbie Fontaine). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*): female SW of Red Deer (one mile W of Red Deer Regional Airport along C & E Trail); 9 – 13 October 2009; 2 images (Terry Krause). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Along RR281, N of Cochrane; 23 May 2010; 1 image posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website, 3 more on Flickr (Eduardo Matoud). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Pair breeding at

Beaverhill Lake Natural Area; Summer 2010; image of female and one of four chicks published in "Beaverhill Bird Observatory Update June 20-20, 2010" (Lisa Priestley). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*): Tillebrook Provincial Park; 17 May 2009; written report and 1 image (Gerald Romanchuk). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*): Cornflower Ranch S of Turner Valley; 18 June 2009; written report (Bill Cutfield). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Hooded Warbler (*Setophaga citrina*): along Bow River about 3 km E of Exshaw; 7 and 11 July 2010; written report with 2 images (Cliff Hansen). **CODE 1 RECORD.** Inglewood Bird Sanctuary; 27 August 2010; written report (John Riddell and Ray Wershler). **CODE 3 RECORD.**

Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*): Jasper, Jasper National Park; From 3 December 2009 to at least early March 2010; detailed description (Gord Ruddy, transcribed by Jason Rogers), written report with 2 pictures (Anne L. Williams), 2 images (Richard Klauke). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*): Medicine Hat; 18 – 20 May 2009; written report and 4 images (Robert Wapple). **CODE 1 RECORD.** At feeder near Busby, N of Edmonton; photographed on 20 November 2010; 2 images (Gerald Romanchuk). **CODE 1 RECORD.**



GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE. RICHARD KLAUKE

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*): first spring male at Cypress Hills Provincial Park (by the Elkwater campground); 19 May 2009; written report and 3 images (Michelle and Curtis Manly). **CODE 1 RECORD.** NE Calgary S of the airport; 11 – 12 June 2010; written report with 3 images (Dale Poloway). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*): Calgary; 7 July 2009; written report and 1 image (Bernard Burke) **CODE 1 RECORD.**

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*): family with one young near Sherwood Park; male has been coming to feeder since about 2006; a female showed up in the fall of 2008; young first seen on 24 September 2009; pair also bred in 2010 and fledged three young that year; video of male (spanning several years), female and young (Maxine and Ernie Zutz). **CODE 1 RECORD.** First documented breeding in the province.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*): backyard in Lacombe; late May 2009 (probably 27 May 2009); 1 image (Lynn Millar). **CODE 1 RECORD.**

IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*): Stobart Lake on the Siksika reserve near Gleichen, E of Calgary; 28 July 2009; written report (Christine McDonald).

Two Spoon-billed Sandpipers (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*) about 3 km NW of Bruce Lake E of Keoma; 19 May 1984; written report with sketches (John B. Steeves). Another on the same slough; 9 May 1992; written report with sketches (Peter Sherrington). Reviewed previously with decisions in Second Report of ABRC (Slater 1999). The Committee reevaluated

these records in light of better knowledge of vagrancy in North America – limited to four confirmed records for Alaska (May to August) and one early fall record for British Columbia (Will Russell, pers. comm.), and its ranking as "critically endangered" by Birdlife International. Because the above two accounts are of brief, distant views which at best suggest the possibility of this species, the Committee felt the documentation as submitted did not meet the threshold for acceptance, and the species is removed from the Official List of the Birds of Alberta.

Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*). Identity of the species picked up in downtown Calgary on 6 October 2006 (see Eighth Report of the ABRC [Hudon et al. 2008]) cannot be established from the evidence at hand, also nagging doubts as to it having reached the province on its own, compel us to remove the species from the List.

Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*): Waterton Lakes National Park; 2009; audio recording of call notes purported to be of this species acquired on 10-minute point count part

IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED...continued

of a long-term monitoring program at the park. Unfortunately, call notes do not conclusively rule out all other possibilities.

White-headed Woodpecker (*Picoides albolarvatus*): along Hwy 3 just E of Bellevue; 11 May 2010; written report (Ian Gardiner).

Gray Vireo (*Vireo vicinior*): About 10 km W of Millarville; 23 April 2009; written report (Peter and Anne Barr).

QUESTIONABLE ORIGIN

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*): Glenmore reservoir, SW Calgary; 30 March – 11 April 2010; written report (Andrew Slater), several images (Jim Davis [12], Ron Kube [3] posted on Albertabird Yahoo! website).

Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*): Irricana area (Range Road 264, 1.7 km N of Twp Road 262), NE of Calgary; 30 April – 1 May 2009; 2 written reports (Thomas J. Simonsen; Eric Tull, Phil Cram and Mike Mulligan), 6 images (Malcolm McDonald).



MUTE SWAN THAT SHOWED UP AT GLENMORE RESERVOIR (CALGARY) IN SPRING 2010; LISTED UNDER BIRDS OF "QUESTIONABLE ORIGIN". RON KUBE

ADDITIONAL TAXA

Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*): Irricana area, NE of Calgary; 10 April 2010; brief description, with two images (Ray Woods). Although the images are of this taxon, at present the AOU considers Bewick's Swan a subspecies of *Cygnus columbianus*.

Common Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*): Shepard Slough in SE Calgary; 24 March – 15 April 2010; 2 images (Dave Breckon, Tim Allison). Although the images are of this taxon, at present the AOU considers Common Teal a subspecies of *Anas crecca*.

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 independent 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.

IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED. 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 where the documentation available to the committee runs counter to the stated identification, whether it identifies another species or not.

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

BOOK REVIEW

Twenty Different Bird Essays Add Up To High-flying Reading

Flights of Imagination: Extraordinary Writing about Birds

REVIEW BY: PHIL HORCH

“Birds are irresistible.” So says Richard (Dick) Cannings the editor of a new compilation of twenty bird essays by some of the finest nature writers in North America. The book is titled *Flights of Imagination: Extraordinary Writing About Birds*, published by Greystone Books.

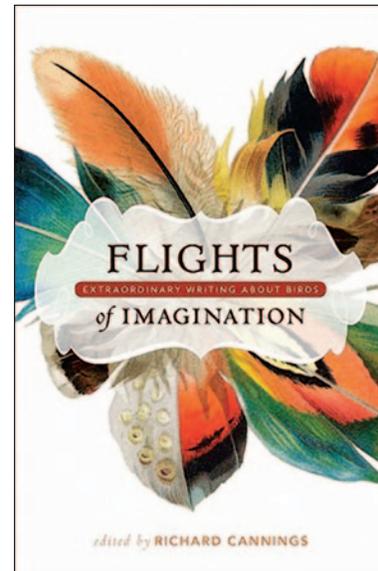
Many of the essays have been excerpted from previous publications or were formerly published as magazine or journal articles. The authors read like a who’s who of current popular nature writers. Included are names like Kenn Kaufman, often touted as today’s Roger Tory Peterson, Dan Koeppel, Susan Cerulean (what a great name for a bird writer!), Trevor Herriot, Susan Brownmiller and 15 others. One essay is by Richard Cannings himself.

Concern for the plight of birds, and indeed of the planet as a whole, is a recurring theme in most of

the essays in this collection. Some essays focus on a single species and draw out the character of a particular bird. Others document exciting birding adventures, in some of the farthest reaches of the globe.

One essay by Trevor Herriot is hilarious as he describes attempting to cycle to his favorite birding field in Saskatchewan. Sandra Steingraber’s essay titled “The Fall of a Sparrow” focuses on the lowly House Sparrow and will give readers a new-found respect and sympathy for this much-maligned species. Whether it is cranes in Vietnam or macaws in Costa Rica, this entertaining and informative book will give readers a fascinating glimpse into the world of birds, even if they have no prior interest in the subject.

Richard Cannings, the editor, is a consulting biologist and teacher of field ecology at the University



Edited by Richard J. Cannings. Greystone Books. March 2010; ISBN 978-1-55365-535-0; Paperback; 5" x 8"; 288 pages; \$22.95 CAD

of British Columbia and one of North America’s foremost birders and natural historians. His choice of essays draws the reader into the allure of birds, the excitement of birding, into the incredible variety of birding experiences and creates awareness of the perils that face not only the fate of birds, but of all life on our planet. A common thread that weaves through all of these essays is a clear love for birds and their world as well as a standard of nature writing excellence that the editor took great pains to bring together in one publication.



FISHER EXPANDS SPEAKING BUSINESS

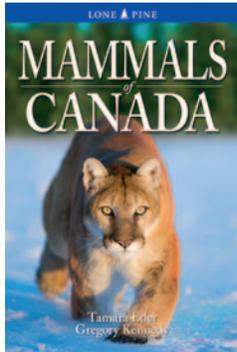
Chris Fisher is expanding his speaking business as a follow-up to the series of best-selling Nature guides. Chris is a dynamic Keynote speaker who can engage and entertain a wide range of audiences.

After traveling around the world for the last five years, Chris has a lot to share. As a keynote speaker and best-selling author, he has been fusing his experiences into compelling and original presentations on success. Through his engaging and inspiring speaking style, Chris relates classic life, leadership and business successes with experiences seen in the natural world.

Chris’s Presentation Titles: What Birds Know & You Don’t; Antarctic’s Extreme Reality; Destination You and his newest topic, The ‘Biology of Success’. For booking inquiries or questions please contact: Chris@chrisfisher.ca. www.chrisfisher.ca

BOOK REVIEW

Other Books of Interest to Naturalists



By Tamara Eder and Gregory Kennedy. ISBN-13: 978-1-55105-857-3. Hard cover; 448 pgs. \$39.95

Mammals of Canada

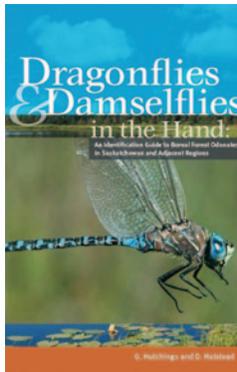
REVIEW BY: WWW.LONEPINEPUBLISHING.COM

The mighty polar bear. The plucky beaver. The majestic caribou. These iconic animals are etched in our national consciousness (and on our coins), but they represent only a small fraction of the amazing variety of mammals found in Canada's wild. Lone Pine Publishing, Canada's leading publisher of nature guides, celebrates this diversity with *Mammals of Canada*. Features include:

- 188 species accounts with information about habitat, food, young, den, range and similar species

- Beautiful illustrations and photographs, plus Range maps
- "Did you know" facts
- Detailed descriptions of our natural regions
- Tips on watching mammals and Canada's top mammal-watching sites.

Whether you are a naturalist, a photographer, a wildlife enthusiast or simply appreciate the great outdoors, this book will be an interesting reference in your natural history library.



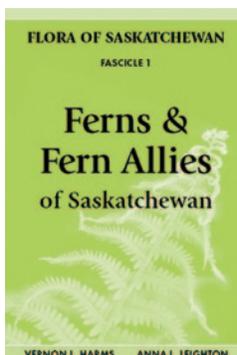
By G. Hutchings and D. Halstead. ISBN:978-0-921104-25-4; Softcover;158 pages. \$24.95

Dragonflies and Damselflies in the Hand

Dragonflies and Damselflies in the Hand is an identification guide intended for field use with diagnostic keys, illustrations and detailed photos. Focusing on the western boreal forest, this book attempts to link dragonfly

and damselfly diversity to various wetland habitat types in northern reaches of the prairie provinces.

Available from the Nature Saskatchewan bookstore: www.naturesask.ca



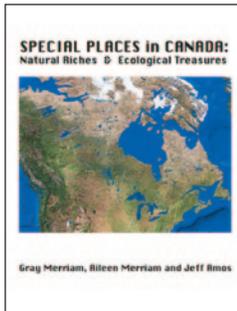
By Vernon L. Harms and Anna L. Leighton. ISBN:978-0-921104-27-8; Softcover; 192 pages. \$19.95

The Ferns and Fern Allies of Saskatchewan

The Ferns and Fern Allies of Saskatchewan are vascular plants that produce spores as the dispersal unit. The 58 species of ferns and fern allies in Saskatchewan are described and illustrated in this book. It provides a distribution map and taxonomic

keys to assist with their identification. This wonderful new publication is designed to be taken into the field and will surely become a great resource to have on hand.

Available from the Nature Saskatchewan bookstore: www.naturesask.ca



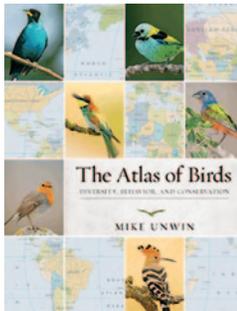
By Gray Merriam,
Aileen Merriam and
Jeff Amos

Special Places in Canada: Natural Riches and Ecological Treasures

Selecting “Special Places” in Canada is not easy. The authors selected only a few based on two criteria: “Special Places” needed to be photogenic; and the ecological functioning of the place had to be explainable in ways that are understandable regardless of the reader’s background and experiences. They wanted to be able to unite the

major natural processes that were explored in their previous book, *Discovering Natural Processes 2*, to show how the integrated assembly of all those processes makes each “Special Place” function as a whole environment.

Download a pdf of the book at: www.specialplaces.ca/spc/spc.zip



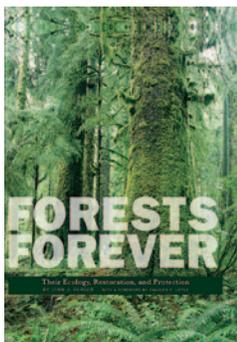
By Mike Unwin.
Princeton University
Press. 144 pp. ISBN:
9780691149493

The Atlas of Birds: Diversity, Behavior, and Conservation

Touted as the “best full-colour atlas of the world’s birds”, *The Atlas of Birds* captures the breathtaking diversity of birds, and illuminates their conservation status around the world. Full-color maps show where birds are found, both by country and terrain, and reveal how an astounding variety of behavioral adaptations – from flight and feeding to nest building and song – have enabled them to thrive in virtually every habitat on Earth. Maps of individual journeys

and global flyways chart the amazing phenomenon of bird migration, while bird classification is explained using maps for each order and many key families.

A fascinating chapter explores the complex historical relationship between birds and humans, with maps and data for everything from poultry farming to birdwatching. This book is a stunning and timely insight into perhaps the most colorful and intriguing group of organisms on our planet.



By John J. Berger, Ph.D.
ISBN-13: 978-1930066526;
418 pages. Publisher: Forest
Forever Foundation, and
Center for American Places,
Columbia College, Chicago.
2008.

FORESTS FOREVER: Their Ecology, Restoration and Protection

Forests Forever shines a fresh light on current forestry practices and the values underlying them, bringing together ideas from disciplines including ecology, politics, sociology, economics and anthropology. In concise, clear prose *Forests Forever* discusses how we might learn to live with forests without destroying them. It covers principles of sustainable forestry and talks about how the damage done to forests by decades of mismanagement can be reversed.

Berger has updated the book with an examination of recent, mostly destructive, developments in the nation’s forest policies. And he takes a look at more-positive developments such as the Canadian Boreal Initiative, which has proposed the preservation of 50 percent of the vast Canadian subarctic forest zone and the sustainable management of the rest. The book boasts three 32-page galleries of color photographs by some of the most respected names in nature photography.

New Canadian Big Day Record

Tom Hince and Paul Pratt of Calgary are two of Canada's top birders.

The American Birding Association (ABA) reported that, on June 2, 2010, they smashed Alberta's big day birding record by observing 213 species in a 24-hour period. They started at midnight in the Cold Lake area and then worked their way down the eastern side of Alberta to the Dinosaur Park area, Lake Newell, and then over to Waterton where they finished at 10 p.m. in high winds. This broke their own record of 207 species and demonstrated that Alberta can rival champion Manitoba in the drive for the biggest big day

in Canada. Manitoba held that record for the month of June at 214 species.

Manitoba has one advantage in that they don't have to do quite as much driving as we do in Alberta to see that many species in a 24-hour period. But, as Tom Hince wrote in his blog (tomhince.blogspot.com): "In 2009 we tallied 207 species and in 2010 we tallied 213. After the success of these days we firmly believed it was possible that a new Canadian big day record might be achievable in Alberta."



So in 2011, Paul and Tom made their third attempt at a big day in Alberta. Writes Tom:

"We are happy to report that on June 1st we tallied 218 species wholly within the province of Alberta to establish a new Canadian big day record. Our route took us from the boreal forest in the Cold Lake area to Waterton National Park in the southwest. Full details of the big day will appear in the 2011 ABA list and big day report."

A tip o' the Tilley hat to Paul and Tom from Nature Alberta!

Nature Alberta

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**CANADA GOOSE GOSLING; SEE
STORY, PAGE 14. JOHN WARDEN**

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