

**BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS  
NEWSLETTER, SPRING 2005  
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**OUTINGS**

**MAY SPECIES COUNT  
Saturday and Sunday, May 28 & 29**

The May Species Count, a province-wide event that records species in flower and birds seen and/or heard will be held on May 28 & 29<sup>th</sup>. We may be too late for some species such as buffaloberry and crocuses as some are already past flowering. But it is always a good time to go out and observe spring arrivals. The changes due to weather conditions can be quite drastic from one year to the other.

Last year, in the **Yamnuska**, we reported 85 species of plants in flower compared to 53 in 2003. **Banff** had 84 species, 57 in 2003. **Canmore** had 54 species, 30 species in 2003.

The bird numbers compared to the previous year:

**Yamnuska:** 67 species (57 in 2003).

**Banff:** 70 species, (68 in 2003).

**Canmore:** 25 species, (54 in 2003).

The count this year:

**Saturday, May 28 at the Yamnuska**

**Sunday, May 29 in Banff and Canmore**

For more information and to find out how to participate contact:

**Diane & Mike McIvor at 762-4160**

**EVENTS**

**Banff National Park  
2005 Research Updates Speaker Series**

**Thursday, May 19, 7 – 9 pm  
Banff Seniors Centre**

- **Older than we thought? Clovis points, House Pits and the Archaeology of the Red Deer River**  
*Gwyn Langemann*
- **Managing the Mountain Pine Beetles in National parks. What does the public think?**  
*Bonnie McFarlane*

**Thursday, May 26, 7 – 9 pm**

**Banff Seniors Centre**

- **Tracking the Patterns of Visitor Use: What to do when radio collars don't fit**  
*Frank Grigel*

PLUS! A visit to the Whyte Museum's current exhibitions

**Thursday, June 2 – 7:00 - 9 pm**

**Banff Seniors Centre**

- **Grizzly Bears and Symbols: Perspectives on Grizzly Bear Management in the Banff-Bow Valley**  
*Emily Chamberlain*
- **Mimicking Nature's Fire: Restoring Fire-Prone Forests in the West**  
*Steve Arno*

**All events are free! Call 762-1464 for more information.**

**First 'flower' of the year – in January!**

*Dwayne Lepitzki*

With signs of spring bursting through the ground and being carried on the airwaves, it's difficult to remember the long cold days of the recently passed winter. But, it was during the January thaw that we saw the first "flower" of the year. Given the technical definition of a flower - the reproductive structure of an angiosperm, a flowering plant - it might be more appropriate to use the term "fruiting body" for what we saw. And as some of the newly arrived feathered creatures get down to the business of procreation, the common name of the fruiting bodies is even more appropriate - Bird's nest fungus.



photo: Dwayne Lepitzki

These little fellows, only about 5 mm tall and wide, were found on rotting woodchips and other woody debris along the horse trail at the Cave and Basin. We identified them as *Crucibulum laeve*, noting the small size and multiple white "eggs" (which contain the spores) within the white, cup-

shaped “nest”. The eggs are dispersed, up to several metres away, when a raindrop splashes the eggs out of the nest. The eggs are also supposedly attached to the nest by a small thread. And while the mushroom bible suggests that they can occur year-round, we’re sure it didn’t mean in the dead of winter in the Canadian Rockies.

### **Grizzly Bears in the Upper Bow – A New Chapter**

*Colleen Campbell*

Are we (humans) able to provide conditions in the landscape that will enable nine known sub-adult grizzly bears in the upper Bow River watershed to grow to breeding status?

In 2004, three of five breeding female grizzly bears in the upper Bow River area were lost to the population— one was hit by a vehicle on the Trans-Canada Highway early in the season, and two more died of natural causes late in the season.

It is likely that food stresses contributed to the loss of the two bears that died of natural causes. Early season crops of buffaloberry were poor, likely due to a combination of several years of drought stress and the variations of heat, cold and moisture in 2004; late season crowberry were compromised by the same conditions, in particular the rain and cool temperatures in August. Though grouseberry crops were abundant, both bear species, black and grizzly, faced challenges to hibernate with fat layers sufficient for survival till spring, this year.

Two younger female grizzlies hibernated with their cubs, last season — their first litters. The cubs, three in total, are all three years old this season. The two families may separate or they may stay together for another year.

The deaths of the three senior females has created some interesting conditions for researchers to monitor:

- the spontaneous release of six sub-adults into the landscape, possibly before the families involved would have separated. Three of the cubs are now four years old and the other three are now three years old. Sub-adults are particularly vulnerable to human influence/interference. (The average age of known grizzly bears in the Lake Louise area dropped from >7 years to < 5 years.)
- the release of sub-adults into a landscape with very few known adult bears and the possible reduction of competition for home ranges and less need to disperse.
- the possibility of other bears dispersing into the local habitat in search of home ranges for themselves.

Consequently, we have a very interesting situation to monitor, as the sub-adults explore their independence in an area with few adult females. As with human sub-adults, young bears test what they have learned and push their own limits. For the sub-adults in the upper Bow drainage, continued existence and opportunities to develop into breeding adult grizzly bears will depend a great deal on human behaviour. Our ability to resist encroaching on any wildlife protects them, as well as ourselves.

If you see bears, in particular, please take time to note the date, time and location, and any identifying features. Weather conditions are helpful to know as well as apparent colouring, size in comparison to a known breed of dog, and any human interference are all important to researchers and wildlife monitors. This information can be shared with the relevant people by reporting your observations to Banff National Park dispatch at 762-1470.

### **Great Mollusc news**

*Brenda Lepitzki*

Just as a ripple of excitement has passed through the North American birding community at the recent sightings of the ivory billed woodpecker, thought to have been extinct for many years, there is equally exciting news for mollusc fans. The following excerpt is from an article in the Birmingham News, 3 May 2005.

"Last week The Nature Conservancy announced that two Alabama scientists have recently rediscovered three freshwater snails previously feared extinct. Jeff Garner, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' mollusk biologist, rediscovered the cobble elimia and the nodulose Coosa River snail on a stretch of the Coosa that remains free-flowing between Lake Logan Martin and Neely Henry Lake. And Stephanie Clark, a postdoctoral student from Australia, found a Cahaba pebblesnail in the Cahaba River in Bibb County.

Alabama is recognized as the globe's most densely populated home of mollusks - the snails and mussels that dot the beds of rivers, the acres of white shells that gave Muscle Shoals its name. The state also is known to be the nation's top spot for extinct and imperiled mollusks. Of 174 species of aquatic snails to occur here, 39 are presumed to be extinct.

From 1917 to 1967, dams were built along the length of the Coosa River until it became a series of reservoirs. Dozens of fish, mussels and snails that evolved to live and breed in the fast-flowing water on the shoals and riffles of the Coosa reefs lost their niche.

In recent years, scientists have discovered some species hiding in the "headwaters" of the dams, the streams between reservoirs where the Coosa still retains some of its original habitat. So Garner went diving below Lake Logan Martin and found two species that hadn't been spotted since the dams changed the river."

So why should we in Canada be excited about this? Because we still have a chance to avoid the same mistakes that have been so catastrophic elsewhere. Because some of North America's diverse aquatic life still has a chance despite overwhelming human development. Because it shows that decades of environmental laws enforcing cleaner water and protection of habitat are worth the effort. Because maybe

more people, including politicians, will realize the value of mussels and snails, which filter water, clean river bottoms and serve as food for birds, small mammals and aquatic animals. Great news indeed.

**The Naked Lady and the River:  
A Brief Hydrological Assessment.**

*Peter Duck*

Did it rain last year? Yes, but not enough to replenish the local groundwater. The Bow River record shows that in spite of a slightly wetter summer last year the extra water was not enough to recharge the underground storage and keep the Bow River level up through the winter. This last winter the river dropped to the same or a slightly lower level than occurred during the low flows of March and April last year.

Let's see how river levels do with the snow melt this year. I always watch my patch of snow that looks like a naked lady sliding down the mountain to gauge annual snow accumulation. She all but disappeared in mid-winter, then reappeared in March and now has already almost completely disappeared again well before her usual late May curtain call. By this indicator, it seems there's not much snow available this year to soak in and supply the river later in the year.

Any bets on when the river will peak? Average date is June 10<sup>th</sup>. Meet ya on the bridge that day and we can see how it's doing. Maybe I can show you the naked lady if spring storms bring her back!

**A Limber Pine in the Garden**

*Colleen Campbell*

At the last BVN meeting for the season in April, Cyndi Smiths delivered a really interesting presentation, 'Birds, Bears Beetles and Blister Rust and their relation to Whitebark Pines'. It reminded me that I have several five-needled pines in my garden in Canmore, and that they should be monitored for signs of blister rust.

Though only about 15 years old, one of my Limber pines has been producing cones. A couple of years ago, I collected a few to compare them with other cones and while I handled them a few seeds dropped onto the table. I tossed them into a film canister and dropped them into the freezer for a few months and in the spring, naively arranged them in some blotting paper which I kept moist, hoping to encourage germination.

Much to my surprise and delight, one seed of a half-dozen sprouted; when potted it quickly grew to several centimetres

and grew needles in the identifying clusters of five. In the autumn, I planted the little tree in the garden, hoping that its opportunity to survive was better there than on my kitchen counter. Alas.

**ISSUES**

**Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff**

The external advisory group for this process has nearly completed its work. A report with recommendations will go forward to be followed by Parks Canada's review and subsequent public consultation. We encourage all members – after all, this is human use of national park land that is being considered – to participate when opportunities are presented.

**Municipal Planning and Development**

A review of the Community Plan for the Town of Banff is just getting underway. Town Council has made it clear there will be opportunities for public participation. In Canmore, the assault on the landscape and the community by developers with mega-projects is continuing. BVN members in each town should take advantage of every opportunity, whether speaking to elected representatives, attending open houses, or participating in public hearings, to voice support for protection of natural and human values at risk from the deluge of "progress:"

**Banff Airstrip**

It now is eight years since the Banff National Park Management Plan stated as a Key Action: "*The airstrip will be closed and returned to its natural state*". Unfortunately, Parks Canada is not yet in a position to confirm mission accomplished. Six months ago the first step was taken in the Comprehensive Study environmental assessment process. BVN submitted comments at the time but so far, the response has been silence: dead silence compared to the roar of airplane engines as local pilots continue to use the strip, and compared to the sound of Parks Canada machinery when the site is mowed or cleared of snow to facilitate its use. We'll keep members posted on this issue and will welcome your help in the next round of the process.

**Indian Days in Banff**

*Mike McIvor*

In an hastily contrived decision that brushed aside a number of concerns BVN raised in response to a deficient environmental assessment, Parks Canada approved the return of Indian Days to the Indian Grounds for a 3 day event last August. Despite the fact many of the mitigations identified in the Screening were not implemented, Parks Canada is busy paving the way for another event this year although Superintendent Roulet assures us we will have our usual token opportunities to comment on a new assessment.

BVN has been very careful in dealing with this issue to make it clear our concerns are related to the very real potential for impacts to the rare montane grasslands at the site and do not represent an objection in principle to the return of Indian Days. It has been estimated that montane grasslands account for approximately 171 hectares of the park's total area of 6600 sq. km. The maintenance or restoration of their ecological integrity should be a priority for Parks Canada but instead, at the most significant sites impacts continue at the airstrip and new impacts are contemplated for the Indian Grounds. Members are encouraged to become informed about the area and the issues and be prepared to express comments or concerns when the time comes.

### **Mountain Caribou**

*Mike McIvor*

BVN has been trying to raise the profile of the tiny, remnant herd of caribou in the park. This vulnerable group of animals, numbering about 4 individuals, has received very little attention over the years from Parks Canada. Now, with Banff's caribou on the brink of sliding into oblivion, some questions are being asked about what can be done for a small population at the margin of its range. How heroic must be the efforts? And, inevitably, is it worth it?

The relative obscurity of these caribou and their plight probably reflects the fact their presence has not achieved symbolic importance in the minds of the public or in management circles. Nor have persistent, articulate champions for them emerged. But when you think about how much care and attention grizzly bears in the park have received – care and attention we enthusiastically support – and realize that for every caribou in Banff there might be as many as 15 grizzly bears, you have to agree the caribou deserve more than a passing glance on their way to extirpation. Woodland caribou, including mountain dwellers, are facing a multitude of threats and an uncertain future throughout their range in Canada. We will continue to encourage Parks Canada to take a leadership role in working for the conservation of caribou.

### **Smart Regulation?**

*Peter Duck*

Yup, the federal government sat down with some advisors to discuss how we can run the nation's economy with regulations that make sense. They wisely asked the simple question "How can we take the national bowl of regulatory spaghetti that business has to wade through and keep it simple but effective?"

This is a reasonable objective but you have to wonder if the spaghetti was put in the bowl because the public has a hunger for basic needs like safe food, safe highways, safe workplaces, planned developments and don't forget, a healthy environment. So, put up your antenna when a government comes forward with a term like "Smart Regulation". Which package of regulation becomes the lightning rod for smartening up the regulatory process? That most basic of planning tools - environmental impact assessment (EIA)? You guessed it. Lurking in the wings is a government proposal to simplify the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. The proposal has three key points:

1/ Establishing a central agency to coordinate assessments of all projects that are proposed by industry.

2/ An end to assessing all projects likely to have environmental effects, big or small, and establishing a list of only specific project types that are predetermined to require assessment. The unwritten corollary is that by default we predetermine that a huge proportion of projects currently assessed do not need environmental planning.

3/ While the private sector would submit their proposals to a central independent agency, individual federal departments would continue with the luxury of assessing the effects of their own projects.

The over all result is that the industry sector gets process efficiency (not necessarily environmental diligence), government keeps the opportunity to pull the strings on its own projects behind its own doors and the public gets...let me think, I'll get back to you on that one. Aha! The public gets less planning to protect their environment! Even more ridiculous is the fact that prior to this smart (de)regulation boondoggle the feds had just finished an exhausting cross Canada multi-stakeholder review of the Act. This resulted in the federal government proposing a number of changes to address the very same issues that smart (de)regulation is now supposed to address. Why would a government immediately sit down and make a set of major changes when they are in the midst of implementing major changes to solve the same problems? The only bright light in the current federal government scandal is that one can hope it has completely side-tracked this (de)regulation initiative that is supposed to be rolled out in the fall. Or is this just the sort of superficial solution selling that can look good in an election campaign?

Humans are talking animals: we use words to express ourselves and to communicate with each other. Some people believe it is this cultivated gift for language more than anything else that has brought us to our current – undoubtedly temporary – position of influence as the dominant species on Earth. Language has given us the capacity to build and to destroy. We are good at both of these.

Words, and the way we organize them, colour the way we think. And the way we think affects our choice of words. Words can be used to illuminate or obfuscate, to praise or damn, to clarify or muddle, to question or answer, to advance and celebrate or to inhibit our understanding of the world and our place in it. We are complex creatures in a mysterious, complex universe. Language is the tool we share in our search for meaning.

Language can be manipulated and can be used to manipulate. Everyone does this: sometimes deliberately, sometimes carelessly. But effects vary widely. Misplaced emphasis or false messages we call propaganda. At its worst it has the power to injure people, groups of people, or other forms of life. It may assume common acceptance of a particular view of existence best left unquestioned and unchallenged. On a lesser scale, the misuse of language might merely foster misunderstanding with unforeseen consequences. But our role as individual humans fully engaged in contemporary life is to think for ourselves, to question assumptions, and to demand care and precision in the use of language by others and by ourselves.

I want to present several examples I have noticed recently of the way words have been burdened with the weight of ideology that reduces the natural world to a size manageable for exploitation. It doesn't matter whether intention is benign or malicious, if language serves to introduce or reinforce exploitative attitudes, damage is done. Each example represents a different approach to conveying ideas.

### 1/ Name Calling.

Anyone wandering in the lodgepole pine forests near Johnson Lake this past winter will have come across some of the larger trees marked for removal as part of the program attempting to control the Mountain Pine Beetle. The method used for marking the trees was to wrap the trunk with a piece of flagging tape stamped with the words "Pest Management". The "pests" presumably were not the trees but the beetles.

The beetles however, are a native species in Banff National Park. How can they be considered pests in the national park context? The answer, of course, is that they can't be. But they are considered pests in the industrial forestry regime

that prevails on much of the land managed by the government of Alberta outside the park.

Somehow, perhaps in an effort to work cooperatively with the province on regional landscape management issues Parks Canada officials adopted the industrial lingo. So in the environmental assessment titled: Regional Forest Management Strategy: Banff National Park sent out by Parks Canada for public review, instead of a discussion of the ecological role of the Mountain Pine Beetle, we found it described as "the most destructive insect pest of pine forest in North America". Its activity in the forest was labeled an "attack". But you must remember, it wasn't attacking trees it was attacking "stems" which is what a forester calls trees. These stems therefore needed to be removed to slow or halt the "epidemic". But since some irresponsible practices have given logging a bad name, these stems will not be logged or even cut down, they will be "harvested". And the forest will be subject to "treatment". Language had been chosen that is completely inappropriate in some instances and carefully sanitized in others, to obscure the perception of real effects on real places.



People, residents and visitors, wandering through those woods, seeing the Pest Management flagging tape will have received a message from Parks Canada that has nothing to do with national park values and everything to do with an industrial paradigm where a tiny, native insect is condemned for impeding economic growth. It's too bad, because the issues forced into public consciousness by the beetle are complicated and interesting. They deserve more sympathetic, more sophisticated communicating by park managers. But these efforts are undermined by the misuse of one word.

### 2/ Out of Context

For a good part of this winter, people traveling on the Trans Canada Highway between the Town of Banff and the East Gate were greeted by a sign stating: "Caution. Logging

Trucks Approaching Highway”. No explanation. Just the warning to drivers.

The logging trucks were hauling “stems” that had blown down in a previously thinned portion of the Fairholme-Carrot Creek Benchlands Environmentally Sensitive Site during a wild November wind storm. Parks Canada had anticipated a small amount of blow-down following the initial fuel reduction project east of Carrot Creek but nothing on this scale. A decision was made to remove or burn most of the fallen trees because of the fire hazard they posed. It was a reasonable decision since the purpose of the earlier work was to create a fuel break enabling the restoration of fire – through prescribed burns – to the montane forests west of Carrot Creek.

But how many highway travelers were aware of this? It is a safe bet the vast majority were not. How many Canadians and international visitors were either surprised and curious to learn that a logging operation was underway in our flagship national park or simply accepted the notion that a national park was a place where this kind of activity occurs? By default, by failing to offer any information explaining the background and reasons for the presence of logging trucks Parks Canada almost certainly allowed a great many people to acquire a false impression that commercial logging has a place in national parks. It would have been easy enough to provide additional signage establishing the context.



### 3/ Mountains as Commodities

Not long ago the marketing organization, Banff Lake Louise Tourism, embarked on a program it called “*Branding Banff*”. According to a spokesperson quoted in a local newspaper: “*It’s about repositioning the product so we can sell more and it’s about repositioning the destination so that we can connect with the travelers and tourists of today*”.

This reminded me of the time, a numbers of years ago, I was a member of a panel discussing the role of the Town of

Banff in the national park and what the future might bring. The audience was a small group of people from various parts of the world who were involved in scholarly research on the topic of tourism. One of my fellow panelists, a former planner for the Town, emphasized a point he was determined to make by gesturing dramatically out the window at Sulphur and Rundle, the mountains we could see from our meeting room, and declaring: “*Those are our products!*”

Now if you swallow that kind of tourism-speak you probably also believe that Ralph Klein put the oil in the ground in Alberta. But while it’s easy to mock the absurdity of these claims it is far more difficult to resist the global impetus to convert everything – landscapes, other species, people – to commodities that can be bought and sold. One form of resistance is to refuse to accept the way language is used to carry the freight for the kinds of assumptions being promoted.

### 4/ The Corporate Flood

Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin is a multi-agency, multi”stakeholder” entity whose mission is: “*To promote watershed sustainability through awareness, linkages and stewardship*”. Sounds pretty good. But then as you examine the brochure BVN recently received in the mail you find this apparently joyous announcement with capital letters for emphasis:

“*The RIVER is our CLIENT*”

What??!!

Governments at all levels and of all stripes appear to have embraced the corporate model not only in terms of governance but as a means for rationalizing relationships amongst people and between people and the planet. Obviously this “epidemic” is spreading to groups like the Partners that include representatives of non-business, non-government organizations. Citizens should mount a defence on behalf of rivers and themselves against this sort of characterization. Please do me a favour. If you ever hear the Board of BVN referring to our members as clients, fire us. Put us out of our misery.

Language matters. I encourage everyone to be vigilant. In future newsletters I would like to explore more examples of misrepresentation or expropriation of meaning. If you encounter any, please send them along. This will be a long campaign but it is time to start fighting back.

**BVN Newly Elected Board**

The new (old) board was re-elected at our annual meeting in February. Congratulations to all.

President: Peter Duck  
Vice-President: Colleen Campbell  
Past-President: Mike McIvor  
Treasurer: Shelley Mardiros  
Secretary: Diane McIvor  
Directors: Dwayne Lepitzki, Jeanette Fish

#### Rare Visitors to the Bow Valley



photo: Doug McKown

Doug McKown had a remarkable experience recently when he observed a Black-necked Stilt in a wetland near the Bow River west of Johnston Creek. This migrant from South America is known to occur in southern and central Alberta where it breeds on the periphery of its normal distribution. Undoubtedly this is the first record for Banff National Park and an extremely rare occurrence in the mountains in Alberta.



photo: Michael Shuster

This American Black Duck stayed around for a few days in a wetland near the town of Banff. It is an eastern species that may have been seen in the park on one previous occasion.