BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS
NEWSLETTER, Fall 2010
BOX 1693, BANFF, AB
T1L 1B6
Phone: 762-4160
Web site:
http://www.bowvalleynaturalists.org

PROGRAMS/EVENTS

BVN meetings:

7:30 pm., Banff Seniors Centre.

Wednesday, OCTOBER 27
Climate Change and Adaptation Planning in the Yellowstone to Yukon Region with Wendy Francis

Wednesday, NOVEMBER 24
Wolverines in Alberta with Jason Fisher. **To be confirmed.**

Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 18

Potluck supper and compiling of results will follow at 6:00 p.m. in the Banff Seniors Centre
For details, contact Diane or Mike McIvor at 762-4160

BANFF NATIONAL PARK PLANNING FORUM

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18
FRIDAY,NOVEMBER 19
The Banff Centre

The agenda is not confirmed yet. The public is welcome to attend.

ISSUES

Mountain National Park Management Plans

Mike McIvor

In June, Environment Canada Minister Jim Prentice signed completed management plans for the mountain national parks and tabled them in Parliament. Unfortunately, despite a great deal of concern expressed by the public during the review of the draft plans, Parks Canada was determined to forge ahead with its chosen new direction to increase visitation – there may be parks where this would not be a problem, where it might even provide benefits, but in Banff??? – and to offer more fun and games (special events, new recreational activities) as enticements. Not surprisingly, Big Tourism and its lobbyists have warmly welcomed this outcome.

Senior managers with Parks Canada have concocted a very peculiar rationalization for their shift in emphasis to visitor experience measured quantitatively. It seems to go something like this: if we can attract more visitors, these people will undergo some magical transformation to automatically become supporters and advocates for national parks. National parks will become "relevant" to Canadians we are told. (Of course when we suggest Parks Canada should be making a much more concerted effort through education to make Canadians relevant to their national parks, we receive blank stares.) When asked to explain how this will occur and what sorts of values will be celebrated, few answers are forthcoming. After all, how can you explain magic? Apparently any issues associated with crowding, or congestion, or inappropriate activities will evaporate under the warmth of dollars flowing into government and business coffers.

If you object to the fact your voice and many others like yours were ignored during the management plans review, and if you dislike Parks Canada's aggressively business-friendly approach, be sure to tell Alan Latourelle, the Agency's CEO. And tell the Minister and opposition party leaders. It's time for Canadians to re-claim their national parks from the special interests that have captured them.

Proposed Land Exchange

Mike McIvor

The provincial government is actively considering a proposed land exchange with the MD of Bighorn. The key parcels of concern to BVN are 28 hectares of MD land surrounding Dead Man's Flats that would go to the province and 19 hectares in the Yamnuska portion of Bow Valley Wildland Park that would go to the MD. The Yamnuska land was previously disturbed for a gravel pit operation a number of years ago and is deemed to be of lesser ecological value than the land at Dead Man's Flats.

Late last year, the provincial government identified BVN as an affected stakeholder and asked for our opinion about the proposal.

In our response, we did not dispute the claim of greater ecological values for the MD land, stating it would be a valuable addition to Bow Valley Wildland Park. However, we went on to say that we were not willing to concede land in the Yamnuska as a suitable site for so-called "light industrial purposes". Have we reached a point of desperation where land use in the Bow Valley has been so poorly planned and managed that the only way to gain protection for ecologically valuable land is to sacrifice a piece – even if it is on the edge – of a wildland park in an area BVN has worked to protect since 1973?

The province is seeking public comment with a deadline of November 29th. We'll put together an Action Alert on this issue and circulate it to those on our email list by early November. There is a government site online at:

http://www.albertaparks.ca/consult

From Dungbeetle

Off-leash dogs in Banff - a public service announcement to Parks Canada employees:

If you insist on walking your dog off-leash in the park, at least cover your uniform in an attempt to blend in with all the other off-leashers. The public is watching.

Of Wild Things...

Wild Images

Karsten Heuer, Resource and Monitoring, Banff National Park

"Where's the wildlife?"
I've lost count how many times I've been asked this question by backpackers and horse riders while I've been working in Banff's backcountry. Regardless of who's asking my answer is almost always the same: "They're out there," I say, pointing to the tracks, trails and scat they've left in their wake. "Get up early," I add, "stay out in the evenings," and, "stop often and look around."

But to what extent wild animals really are "out there" didn't hit home for me until the we started a remote wildlife camera project this past summer, mounting over 20 motion-activated cameras on trees and in rock cairns in canyons, narrow passes and other natural squeeze points throughout Banff's backcountry. This trial project has two scientific objectives – the first is to capture images of grizzly bear family groups for an overall population index like the one used in Yellowstone for the last thirty years, and the second is to track long-term population trends in other large mammal species using a statistical technique called 'occupancy modeling.'

All science aside, however, it's the photos themselves that have had the greatest impact on me, filling what indeed appears to be mostly empty and unused space with a rich record of comings and goings of animals that linger, like ghosts, long after I've downloaded the photo cards and moved on. Whether it's the goats who religiously file down to a forest mineral lick (as do the cougars), or a pack of wolves galloping down a high mountain pass, or a family of grizzly bears studying an animal communication tree, these images fill my head as I make my way through the backcountry, layering what I'm already taking in with my ears, eyes, nose and skin with an overwhelming record of all that's passed through that place in the days and weeks before.

I wish it weren't so. I wish the subtle signs one finds in the forests and meadows – the faint impression of pads in the mud, the tufts of hair wedged between flakes of bark – were enough to evoke such powerful imagery on its own. I wish I could say, as for most of the other technological gadgetry available today, these remote cameras are mere distraction and add little to the experience of being out there in the flesh and bone. But that isn't the case. The next time I meet someone in the backcountry and am asked, "Where's the wildlife?", I'll point to the tracks, trails and other signs and answer as I always have but then I'll add something I never would have imagined saying a year ago: I'll refer them to the Banff Park website where they, too, can view some of this remote camera imagery and further deepen their appreciation of this incredible Park once they get home.

Visit www.pc.gc.ca/banff and click on Wild Images Gallery.

HELS Report

Mike McIvor

During the past few months we have received many observations of pikas, hoary marmots, mountain goats, and white-tailed ptarmigans on our website. They have come from quite a variety of locations in the high country and we thank everyone who contributed their sightings. (And a special thanks to Ben Dorsey who constructed the site for us.)

Over the winter we will compile the results and examine what can be done to make improvements to the project. The experience gained from this initial season of paying attention to **High Elevation Localized Species** will prove very helpful as we have much to learn from it. We welcome your ongoing submissions – marmots are hibernating already and pikas will be out of sight under the snow before long, but ptarmigans and goats remain out and about, if more difficult to see, through the winter. Report your sightings to

<http://bowvalleynaturalists.org/hels>.

And be sure to pass along any comments or criticisms about our system of reporting. Happy HELS Hunting!

photo: D. McIvor

The Mountain Snails of Alberta – Part 1

Dwayne & Brenda Lepitzki

Alberta is home to two species of snails with the official common name of Mountainsnail. This common name is derived from their scientific name *Oreohelix* with *Oreo* meaning mountain and *helix* meaning snail. And these snails are huge in comparison to the snails in Banff's thermal springs with shells that approach the size of a nickel.

According to the scientific literature, Mountainsnails are found in the south eastern and south western corners of the province. The more we learn about these snails, the more we become fascinated, although alarm bells start ringing when we began to fill in the blanks on their distribution maps.

We began looking for *Oreohelix* in Waterton Lakes National Park. Back in 1874 when George Dawson was the geologist on the British-North American Boundary Commission he collected a snail along the shore of Waterton Lake that was unknown to science. It was eventually named *Oreohelix subrudis limitaris* which we have dubbed the Boundary Mountainsnail. Other scientists followed but as far as we know, no one revisited the original locations in any systematic way and did not study the snail in its natural habitat. Much of the research was done on specimens in U.S. museums, resulting in some claiming it was just a morphological variant.

Boundary Mountainsnail in Waterton Lakes National Park (by D. Lepitzki). Note the size of the snail in comparison to the fir needles.

We applied for, and were granted, Research and Collection permits. On our first trip to Waterton in the fall of 2008 we were directed to an area that had just experienced a prescribed burn because the ground was littered with snail shells. Were these the snails we were most interested in? Yes indeed and we found both dead and live Boundary Mountainsnails. Subsequent forays into other areas on that trip and one in the fall of 2009 started to help determine the distribution of the snail in the park.

According to the literature and some specimens at the Canadian Museum of Nature and in the private collection of a professor who used to be at the University of Lethbridge, Mountainsnails were also found in the Crowsnest Pass area. Our colleague Robert Forsyth found them near Hillcrest and Bellevue, where others had collected them in the past, and we and Robert also found them near Lundbreck. But what about between Waterton and the Crowsnest and how far north did they go?

In August of 2010 we continued filling in the blanks on the map. We found them 6 km north of the Crowsnest Pass and Highway 3 Junction with the Forestry Trunk Road and right at the Alberta-British Columbia border. And we found them near Beaver Mines Lake and along the Castle River.

We also saw the random camping villages; the contrasting relative emptiness of the official provincial campsites on the weekend; the widespread use of all terrain vehicles; and by walking to the top of Carbondale Hill, not just the effects of the Lost Creek fire of 2003, but the constant sounds of ATVs, and the absence of anyone else enjoying the last Saturday of summer on the hiking trail. As well, we learned more about the plans for logging in the Crown of the Continent and the long struggle of local ranchers, landowners, and activists in trying to protect and preserve the area. In the back of our minds we were aware of the plight of other large-shelled land snails in North America, since researchers have noted it's these

large snails that are impacted most by human activities. We couldn't help asking ourselves: What will be the compounding effects of climate change?

All these worries coalesced into an idea that maybe it's not just the grizzlies or fish that should be the poster children of the struggle for the Castle-Crown; perhaps a terrestrial snail also can help. Now, to find the time to convert the idea into action…..

Stay tuned for the next article about the Mountainsnails of Alberta. It will be on a species confined to Cypress Hills, the other southern corner of the province.

A Caterpillar that wasn't

Brenda Lepitzki

Occasionally when we head outdoors we are lucky enough to encounter something new. Late this summer we discovered another member of the diverse, enigmatic microfauna that call the national park home - although it was macro microfauna!

photo: M. McIvor

I now can say I have seen one of the largest, most robust insects that live in North America. Actually we only saw the huge caterpillar-like larva, but the adult is equally gigantic. The great greeny-yellow caterpillar was climbing up from the stream's edge under a birch. It was so large we saw it from several metres away, and upon closer inspection we noted its two black lateral eyes and more legs along the body than usual. True caterpillars usually have six small eyes on each side of the head, and four or fewer pairs of legs along the abdomen. Still, we didn't recognize it as a sawfly larva until after we consulted our books at home. Other sawfly larva are much smaller, up to 2 cm in length, but this specimen was close to 6 cm long and as thick as your pinky finger. Most likely it had dropped from the leaves above and was looking for a place to pupate in the soft soil and duff. We think it was the larva of an Elm Sawfly (in the same family as bees, wasps, and ants) however we'll have to keep our eyes open next summer to see if we can find the new adult in the same area. I saw a very large insect near third Vermilion Lake a couple of weeks ago that easily could have been a similar sawfly, but couldn't get that all-important photograph. As with the cicadas now frequenting the mixed forests in the Bow Valley, these large insects may be moving in following climate warming, or they may have been here all along, living their lives mostly unnoticed. Either way, they are a good reminder to celebrate our local fauna and recognize this International Year of Biodiversity.

Maple Trees in the Rockies

Peter Duck

In a land of poplar, spruce and pine we often overlook some of the interesting deciduous trees on our doorstep and rarely think of maples. But they are here. Perhaps the most common maple in Alberta is Manitoba Maple *(Acer negundo)*. The leaves look like ash rather than maple and this tree is more native to the eastern prairies. It has been planted as a drought tolerant shade tree in Alberta and the Columbia Valley. While a bit weedy in its regeneration habits it can be a wonderful climbing tree with spreading branches that make great squirrel runways or tire swing supports. My favourite Manitoba Maple is an old matriarch growing at the Dunvegan settlement 90 kilometres north of Grand Prairie where this tree was likely planted in the late 1800s.

Well known Banff maples are the YWCA Vine Maples *(Acer circinatum)*. These two ornamental trees always turn beautiful orange and red in fall in front of the "Y". Unfortunately, their spreading growth form suitable to their west coast range is not well adapted to our late spring and early fall snowstorms. Recent dumps of the white stuff have thinned their branches significantly.

Our native Alberta maple is the shrub-like Douglas, or Mountain, Maple *(Acer glabrum)*. Common in south and central British Columbia this tree is on the eastern edge of its range on the east slope of the Rockies. One has to look carefully to find it in small specialized habitats, but there are pockets at the bottom of the Sulphur Mountain gondola trail, around the Rimrock, on the east side of Tunnel Mountain, and near canyons and outwash fans. Douglas Maple is also found on the southwest slopes of Mount Wilson near Saskatchewan River Crossing. I recently discovered what for me is the most eastern example in the Bow Valley growing beside the 1A Highway opposite the Graymont plant. (According to the McIvors, there are additional locations to the east in the Yamnuska.) These clumps try to blend in with birch shrubs but clearly stand out in fall when their leaves turn colour much earlier than those of hardier neighbours.

Seed wings of Mountain Maple. D. McIvor

Olympic Moments

Mark A. Bowes

This long cool wet spring and early summer prepared me for my visit to what is reported to be the wettest spot in the USA outside Hawaii – the Hoh Rainforest of Olympic National Park in Washington State. This lush verdant spot receives some 5 m of rain annually and is home to the largest trees in the US outside of California. But Olympic is so much more and in fact, is three parks in one, protecting one of the most diverse ecosystem arrays in the world including 117 km of pristine seashore, 3 old-growth temperate rainforests and glacier-clad mountains. Along with being a National Park, Olympic is also a Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. The park is 3626 km2 in area, 95% of which is officially designated as "Wilderness" by the US Congress. By definition, this is "land in its natural condition with opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation and embraces values of restraint and humility" (*Wilderness Act,* 1964).

As early as 1897, President Grover Cleveland created Olympic National Forest Reserve to protect the remaining great forests of the Olympic Peninsula from being destroyed by poor logging practices. In 1909, President Teddy Roosevelt upgraded the status to a US National Monument to protect the primeval rainforests and the 4000 to 5000 remaining Roosevelt Elk that are found here and nowhere else (they are larger, shyer and have more "bunchier" antlers than their Rocky Mountain cousins). In fact, due to its geographic and genetic isolation, the Olympic Peninsula is home to over 20 subspecies of animals and plants that are found nowhere else on earth. In 1938, the Monument was further upgraded to a full-fledged National Park. However, it was not until 1976 that the sea stack riddled shore component was added to the initial inland-based park and is now one of the longest protected stretches of wilderness coastline in the lower 48 states. It took until 1985 before all the land was transferred to federal ownership and now comprises the Olympic National Marine Sanctuary. To further its wilderness status, the Elwha River hydro-electric dam in the northern part of the park will be removed in 2011 to restore natural salmon runs into the interior.

The Quinault Valley rainforest in the southwestern portion of the park is home to six of the largest known specimens of their species in the world – Sitka Spruce, Western Red Cedar, Douglas Fir, Yellow Cedar, Mountain Hemlock, and Western Hemlock, most over 500 years old and with a diameter at breast height of nearly 6.1 m. The "Hall of Mosses" in the nearby Hoh Rainforest is home to 70 species of moss, along with a myriad of ferns and epiphytes (plants that live off of others without being parasitic) that give the area its primeval, ethereal jungle appearance. Temperatures in the rainforests seldom exceed 24'C in summer, nor drop below freezing in winter due to the moderating impact of the ocean. Meanwhile, 2425 m high glacier-clad Mount Olympus some 28 km from the nearest road receives anywhere from 9 to 12 m of snow annually, comprising the third largest glacier system in the lower 48 states behind Rainier and Hood). It acts as a barrier, creating a semi arid rain shadow on the eastern side of the park that receives a mere 46 cm of rain annually (compared to the west's 508!), so dry that prickly pear cactus flourishes.

photo: M. Bowes

So, if it is variety you seek and a place where wilderness trumps visitor numbers, then Olympic, truly a world apart, beckons. But, be sure to pack your rain slicker as precipitation is a sure bet.

André Gareau

Mike McIvor

The land and the people of the Bow Valley lost a good friend recently when André Gareau died after suffering a massive heart attack. André had made his mark on this place in a very positive way just as it had marked him. And perhaps it was this two-way relationship that so distinguished him. Because all that he gained in experience, knowledge, and pleasure from living here, was returned in equal measures, or more, of time and energy as he worked to shape a future when humans in the valley would inhabit a coherent, respectful part of the larger, natural community that surrounds us.

With a PhD in social psychology as well as a law degree, in his academic background, he was a man with wide and expanding interests – from music to astronomy to conservation; from hiking mountain trails and paddling rivers and lakes to watching birds and the rest of nature; he loved family and friends and was inordinately fond of puns and bad jokes. There was more than enough to keep him occupied and he easily could have done what so many of us do, which is to wish the world would change for the better but also to wish that someone else will do the changing for us. Instead he threw himself into the nitty gritty of municipal politics; for more than 10 years as a member of Town Council he worked to make Canmore a better place. His concerns embraced the human residents as well as the wildlife living in, or travelling through this part of the valley.

André and Mary were long time members of BVN and we were privileged to have André participate on our Board of Directors for several years before stepping down to run in a by-election. We send our deepest sympathy to Mary and are honoured that she and the family have requested donations in his memory be directed to BVN. We will ensure this money is spent in a way he would have appreciated. And if we can learn from him that we all should be more engaged with the world around us, his influence will continue to "gareau".

A Gorgeous Geologist Remembered

Peter Duck

Some fond memories were revived early this summer when I received a note that Eric Mountjoy had passed away. The obituary recognized Eric as "a distinguished Canadian geologist, explorer and university professor" who mapped the geological formations of much of the Canadian Rockies. It went on to say he was an inspiring professor of geology at McGill University. Inspiring indeed! Our trails crossed several times early in my career but one moment with Eric will never be forgotten. As a Parks Canada naturalist in the early 1980s I looked forward to spring training sessions. There were field trips lead by Eric who would come from Montreal to share his enthusiasm for these mountains with the latest crop of compulsive explainers hired for the summer. One sunny June day on the Icefields Parkway Eric looked up with a huge grin and pointed to a fault on Observation Peak - "Look at that gorgeous geology!" I have repeated that phrase often and will always be inspired by the memory of the joy in his face that day and his passion for sharing the stories in the rocks.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

The Abstract Wild
by Jack Turner

Reviewed by Karsten Heuer

Despite what you may think or have been told, Thoreau didn't write, "In wilderness lies the preservation of the world." What he wrote was: "In *wildness* lies the preservation of the world." It's a small but important difference, says author Jack Turner in ***The Abstract Wild*** (1996, University of Arizona Press). Wilderness is a place, he argues, wildness is a quality – not just within a landscape, an animal, or a valley, but within each one of us. And whether or not we realize its potential to reunite ourselves with what surrounds us will determine the fate of the natural world.

This isn't straightforward stuff, which is why Turner (like Thoreau in *Walden*) uses most of the book to explore it, stopping off in the Age of Enlightenment, at the cave paintings of Lascaux, and amongst the Kalahari Bushmen along the way. He does so in plain, easy-to-read language. And, like Thoreau, he borrows heavily from his own experiences, both as a philosophy professor and a climbing guide, including some unforgettable descriptions of ascending amidst soaring pelicans to the top of Wyoming's highest peaks.

It is the biographic chapter on Doug Peacock (author of *Grizzly Years* and inspiration for Ed Abbey's character, Hayduke, in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*) that clinched the book for me, however, for it is here that Turner finally nails what he's been circling all along. His description of Peacock's modern-day quest to reclaim wildness makes for gritty, soul-searching reading, and the universal sense of belonging Peacock realizes is something we all yearn for but few of us will ever achieve. But that shouldn't keep us from trying. Indeed, Turner spins out Peacock's life story in a way that will have you reaching for your backpack and hiking boots. And, like Abbey and Peacock, he doesn't shy away from getting a few digs in along the way: his rants about wildlife research and the limp, bureaucratic doublespeak of the US National Parks Service will give you plenty to think about as you head up the trail.

Published 14 years ago, *The Abstract Wild* is not a new book, but given the current emphasis on visitor numbers here in Banff National Park it is a timely read. It reminds us of the value and power of wilderness no matter how few people visit it and, more importantly, re-inspires us to unplug and get out there to rediscover the wildness within.

The Wolverine Way
by Douglas Chadwick

Reviewed by Shelley Mardiros

Since moving to Wolverine Street 17 years ago, I have been on the look-out for Gulo gulo in the wild. No luck. I have been close to a wolverine sighting – the hikers who just saw one, the canoe that just passed one, the fresh 5-toed tracks in virgin snow. But close doesn't count in wildlife viewing and I'm always left singing "Wolvereeeeen – why cain't you be seen?" (with apologies to Chuck Berry.)

So I was looking forward to reading Doug Chadwick's new book, "The Wolverine Way", in the hope of learning more about wolverines and upping my chance of seeing one. Chadwick, author of "A Beast the Color of Winter", a great book about mountain goats published in 1983, tells us about his involvement as a volunteer in a 5-year wolverine research project undertaken by Jeff Copeland in Glacier National Park in Montana. Wolverines were trapped, collared or implanted with signal devices, and tracked by radio signal or GPS locator, to give biologists a more accurate picture of the lives they lead. The epithets most frequently applied to wolverines – "elusive" and "ferocious" – are certainly warranted, but the research project uncovered a far more complex, interesting and – dare I say? – loveable side to this large mustelid.

Chadwick offers little hope for aspiring wolverine watchers: even the radio-trackers following the signals of tagged wolverines actually get a "visual" only once every few hundred hours! The book does, however, explore the secrets of wolverine existence – sex, family life, their extraordinary travel routes and one particular murder mystery.

Chadwick does his usual excellent job of interweaving personal observation, anecdote, science, and analysis. The reader is not only awestruck by the wolverine's astonishing mountaineering feats, but we see how the species plays an integral role in the ecology of high elevation habitat, and also how it is especially vulnerable to climate change and a shrinking snowpack.

After reading "The Wolverine Way", check out the noninvasive hair-collection research that is being conducted by Dr. Tony Clevenger in Banff and Yoho National Parks, and if you're one of those lucky observers who DOES see a wolverine, report it via the website www.WolverineWatch.org.

There is a copy of "The Wolverine Way" in the Banff Public Library, or it can be ordered through the Canmore Public Library.