

**BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS
NEWSLETTER, WINTER 2013
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PROGRAMS/EVENTS

REMINDER!

Memberships are now due for 2013.

OUR FINANCIAL YEAR IS THE CALENDAR YEAR.

We want to keep the membership at the low cost of **\$5.00**. If you have extra change to add to the pot when attending a meeting it would help us cover the costs of renting the hall for meetings and mailing the newsletters. We want to remind you that you will receive a charitable donation receipt for donations of \$5.00 or more.

******* MARK YOUR CALENDAR *******

THE BVN MEETINGS WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE 4TH TUESDAY OF THE MONTH DURING 2013 INSTEAD OF THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH.

Tue., January 22 7:30 pm.

**Focal Species in the Canadian Rockies:
Remote Cameras as tools for their**

Conservation with Robin Steenweg.

Location: Banff Seniors Centre.

Tue., February 26 7:30 pm.

Wolf and Grizzly Bear Research in Banff

National Park with Steve Michel and Jesse Whittington.

Location: Banff Seniors Centre.

NOTE.

February 26th is the evening of our **Annual General Meeting and elections**. Anyone interested in participating on the Board of Directors should contact Peter Duck (762-4335 - evenings) or Heather Dempsey (762-3056 - evenings), or any member of the Board before mid-February.

Tue., March 26

7:30 pm.

To be announced.

Location: Banff Seniors Centre.

Tue., April 23

7:30 pm.

A Tale of Two Corvids: using genetic markers to understand barriers to dispersal in Gray Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers

with Kim Dohms. Location: Banff Seniors Centre.

2012 Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count

Mike McIvor

Green-winged Teal	5	Black-capped Chickadee	124
Mallard	326	Mountain Chickadee	216
Common Goldeneye	37	Boreal Chickadee	77
Barrow's Goldeneye	1	<i>chickadee sp.</i>	65
Bufflehead	3	Red-breasted Nuthatch	16
Common Merganser	9	White-breasted Nuthatch	1
Bald Eagle	<i>adult</i> 4	Brown Creeper	3
<i>imm.</i>	1	Winter/Pacific Wren	CW
Ruffed Grouse	1	American Dipper	21
Killdeer	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	3
Wilson's Snipe	3	Townsend's Solitaire	6
Rock Pigeon	153	American Robin	CW
Barred Owl	CW	Bohemian Waxwing	105
Belted Kingfisher	3	Northern Shrike	1
Downy Woodpecker	6	White-throated Sparrow	CW
Hairy Woodpecker	3	Dark-eyed Junco	7
A. 3-toed Woodpecker	9	Rusty Blackbird	CW
Northern Flicker	1	Pine Grosbeak	196
<i>woodpecker sp.</i>	1	Red Crossbill	CW
Gray Jay	40	White-winged Crossbill	76
Blue Jay	1	<i>crossbill sp.</i>	3
Clark's Nutcracker	35	Common Redpoll	88
Black-billed Magpie	150	<i>redpoll sp.</i>	2
American Crow	6	Pine Siskin	32
Common Raven	305	Evening Grosbeak	10
		House Sparrow	87

CW: reported count week

TOTAL SPECIES: 40

TOTAL INDIVIDUALS: 2244

Our 38th annual count was on December 15th, a beautiful day to be outside in the Bow Valley looking and listening for birds. We had another good turnout, with 60 people spending part or all of the day collecting observations to contribute to the overall results.

Fortunately, the beauty of the day more than compensated for what some participants found seemed to be a shortage of birds this winter. In fact, after a near/above average year count last year, this year's results once again slipped below the long-term average. The number of species (40) was 4 fewer than last year and about 3.5 below average. The total of individual birds (2244) was more than 700 fewer than last year and more than 350 below average.

As always, there were interesting aspects in what we found. On the water, 37 Common Goldeneye is the highest number recorded since 2009 and far more than 6 we saw last year. And after not finding

ISSUES

Mt. Norquay Ski Area Long Range Plan and other matters

Mike McIvor

any Common Merganser last year, 9 were reported this year. A similar situation occurred with American Three-toed Woodpecker: Last year, for the first time since the count began we did not find any, whereas this year we recorded 9. For Blue Jay, a species first encountered in this area in the mid 1980s and first recorded by us in 1986, the 1 bird seen this year was the lowest since 1990. Last year we did not have any White-breasted Nuthatch, the first time that had happened since 1975, the first year of our count, and this year only 1 was reported.

The typical up and down pattern for each species continues through the list. 16 Red-breasted Nuthatch is the lowest since 2006 but 196 Pine Grosbeak is the highest since that year. Also the lowest since 2006 is 6 Townsend's Solitaire but 3 Golden-crowned Kinglet is our first since 2009. And 21 American Dipper is 9 more than last year.

We'll look forward to next year's CBC – ours will be on Saturday, December 14th – and be prepared for whatever surprises and delights await.



Red Crossbill. Only seen during Count Week this year.
Photo: M. Shuster

Special Note from the BVN Board

With our Annual General Meeting approaching in February we want to provide a heads-up to everyone that changes are in the works for our group. After decades of deep involvement with BVN, Mike and Diane McIvor have decided it is time for them to step back a bit and make room for younger members with new energy and fresh ideas to become involved. They will still be around and will continue to be members of the organization. The changes will not be instant, but will be coming over the next year. We want to go out of our way to encourage anyone with an interest in participating to a greater degree in the work of BVN to consider putting your name forward as a potential Board member. Please contact anyone on the current Board to learn more or to volunteer.

The deadline for public comment on the draft long-range plan was January 4th after Parks Canada management thoughtfully (?) put it out for review over the holiday season. A decision will be announced sometime in the coming weeks. We know Parks Canada heard from a number of people who were very concerned about what was proposed. However, given the political climate in the federal government at the moment and the change in direction embraced by senior park managers, we are anything but optimistic those concerns will be heard.

Despite the problems with the GranFondo last year, both in terms of effects on wildlife and on park visitors here to experience the park, Banff Field Unit Superintendent Dave McDonough, a participant in last year's event, recently announced that this special event would be permitted to occur again this year. Obviously, the desire to boost visitation numbers at the park gate and boost cash-register-action for their tourism partners in Town proved irresistible to park management.

The Superintendent also declared that management believes the park "*has capacity for more events in the winter and shoulder season*" (Rocky Mountain Outlook, December 27, 2012). This raises some serious concerns and represents a significant departure from long-standing, if informal, park policy that recognized the critical importance to wildlife of spring and fall - the shoulder seasons - for activities such as breeding, nesting, and giving birth. There also used to be recognition that winter conditions created challenges for wildlife and additional stress should be avoided. Now, it seems the main stress being considered is that claimed by the business community when things are slower than in the summer.

You might think that Banff National Park has more recreational opportunities available than almost anywhere else but the Superintendent, in a year-end interview with the Calgary Herald (January 5, 2013), stated his conviction that Parks Canada needs to create more opportunities. Apparently the over-riding goal, one we have been hearing about ad nauseum for many months now, is to make the park "relevant to Canadians", whatever that means. It seems to mean bring more and more people here and give them more games to play, even if those activities could occur anywhere and are far from dependent on the special character of national parks.

Everyone who took the time to express their opinions on these matters – Norquay, and all the other issues inside and outside the park – deserves thanks. It is extremely important to keep in mind that even when a poor decision seems to be a foregone conclusion, it is essential that citizens make their views known to decision-makers. At least the people making those poor decisions will have to do so in full knowledge that many Canadians do not accept further exploitation of the natural world. (See list of addresses at the end of the newsletter.)

Alberta Land Use Framework - South Saskatchewan Watershed

Karsten Heuer

Thanks to those of you who responded to our Action Alert and offered your comments to the Alberta government about the South Saskatchewan Land Use Planning Process (which includes the Bow watershed). This process is a long overdue first crack at reining in the free-for-all that has typified land use practices in this province over the last 200 years. But, as you might have guessed, it is falling short of its initial promise. Instead of showing courage to resolve land use conflicts with well-defined limits, thresholds and real protection, early documents suggest this long and expensive process may have no teeth. Fortunately it is still early in this exercise. Provincial planners are working on a first draft of the plan this winter and there will be another opportunity to comment and shape the process in the spring. Stay tuned!

Three Sisters Wildlife Corridors

Karsten Heuer

As many of you know from the local press, the Receiver for Three Sisters is due to come out with a new Area Structure Plan and an associated Environmental Impact Statement for the remaining undeveloped lands on the southeast side of Canmore sometime in the next couple of months. This plan will lay out where another ~2,500 housing units, and possibly over 1,000 accommodation units (all approved in the 1992 NRCB decision) will fall. The big contention is how these units will be accommodated while still maintaining a functional wildlife corridor between Banff National Park, the Wind Valley and the Kananaskis Valley. There are hints that the Receiver may push to have land previously allocated (and cleared) as a golf course re-allocated to residential development. This would seriously undermine its original function as a buffer to the wildlife corridor. There are also hints that the Receiver will push to have narrower corridors than what current science suggests is functional.

This is a complex and convoluted issue that we and other groups (most notably BowCORD) have worked on for more than two decades. The next few months could determine whether the last section of the 8km-long corridor (for which we've all fought for piecemeal) will actually work. Please watch the local papers and get out to voice your concern at hearings that will take place in Canmore over the next few months.

Wildlife Corridors and Community

Colleen Campbell

This is derived from collaboration with Karsten Heuer and Bart Robinson and based on a recent presentation to Committee of the Whole (council and administration) in Canmore.

Canmore is well known for the calibre of its athletes – we're all proud of the numerous Olympians who have been raised here and who come here to train and compete. What is less known is that the Bow Valley also has many "Olympic quality" conservationists — scientists and advocates who have collectively spent decades

working locally, regionally, provincially, nationally and/or internationally. We have innovative and globally respected scientists who are pioneers in researching and establishing wildlife corridors, designing wildlife crossing structures and exploring and mitigating various sorts of wildlife-human interactions. And we have world-class wildlife and wilderness advocates. Our local communities and our Mountain National Parks have benefitted for decades from the work of such people; paid and volunteer personnel have contributed intellectual and physical energy unstintingly for the ecological health of the area. The Bow Valley is brimming with wildlife, habitat and environmental expertise and experience — formally educated scientists and researchers, writers, naturalists and technicians whose expertise benefits such organizations as Y2Y, CPAWS and many smaller ENGOs. In conservation circles, we are an acknowledged innovation hub for wildlife corridors and WildSmart behaviours.

In North America, wildlife extinctions have crept from east to west, south to north. Here, in the Bow Valley, we still are fortunate to have most of the wild species that were here at the time of European contact— and, important to acknowledge, we are also squarely in the crosshairs of the extinctions trend. One condition that contributes to extinction is fragmentation of once-contiguous habitat into smaller and smaller "islands" that are vital for resources and safety to different species. When travel routes (wildlife corridors) are compromised or eliminated by highways, subdivisions, resource extraction or other developments and wildlife are challenged to find ways between useful habitats their needs become more urgent. Poor health results from stresses of negotiating travel and living in areas of diminished resource capacity and undermines a robust population, eventually leading to shrinking numbers, possibly the extirpation of local populations.

Prior to the NRCB hearings (summer of 1992) into development on the south side of the Bow Valley in Canmore, Paul Paquet and a cadre of wildlife researchers recognized the importance of wildlife corridors in the lower Bow Valley. Their research showed how several key wildlife species travel along and across the Bow Valley to access widely separated breeding opportunities, denning sites, resting spots and food resources and that access to all the areas is critical because no single area provides for all the resources wide-ranging species need to thrive. As the graphic on local busses expresses, "they need room to roam."

Our understanding of wildlife corridors has developed and improved over the years. During the late 1990s the Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG), a cooperative partnership of several local agencies from different levels of government, produced guidelines related to wildlife corridors and land use in the Bow Valley. BCEAG gained provincial, national and international recognition for its thorough process and rigorous outcomes. In addition to that work, research and design of (increasingly) functional wildlife crossing structures along the Trans-Canada Highway proved it is cutting-edge; success with wildlife crossings in the Bow Valley has earned national and international recognition.

“Doing it right” for wildlife is also important to safety in our built communities, for the people who live and work in the Bow Valley and for the thousands of visitors to this area. Functional and well-designed wildlife corridors reduce the chances of potentially hazardous encounters with wild animals; decrease habituation; and reduce the incidence of costly practices such as aversive conditioning with rubber bullets and noisemakers, relocation or even elimination of individual animals that have wandered too frequently, perhaps habitually, into our gardens or streets.

Canmore is a community built in a wild landscape and we have made a commitment to maintaining the wildness around us. Our town is signatory to the BCEAG Guidelines, supports WildSmart, an acknowledged leading organization of its kind, and Canmore has declared itself to be a Natural Step community which states: *“In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to increasing degradation by physical means”*.

It is our co-existence with nature that attracts visitors and is a significant part of the frequently used description of the Bow Valley as a “world class destination”. We cannot be “world class” for anyone if we fail to protect our “world class” wildlife.

Canadian Democracy And Environment

Peter Duck

Canadian Democracy And Environment

It is fairly well accepted that Canada’s electoral process does not consistently represent the will of the electorate in Parliament. We have a rather simplistic and odd electoral process compared to most modern democracies in the world with many problems leading to embarrassing voter turnouts. Research posted on Elections Canada’s website concludes that “voting rates will likely continue to decline in Canada”. This suggests that running this country according to the will of the people, a fundamental tenet of democracy, is a fantasy. This problem is compounded in Canada because power can be concentrated with the “executive” (Prime Minister’s Office) unlike democracies such as the U.S. that have checks and balances on executive power.

As a result of the distorted form of representation within Parliament, environmental advocacy groups in Canada have come to rely on participating in government processes between elections in order to be able to express their views to the government of the day. It used to be that you could sit on a “multi-stakeholder” committee, view public records and have your say now and again between elections. Given the pressures that environment-centered values face in a simplistic corporate democracy like Canada this is often the best that can be achieved. But even this strategy is no longer available as a government with a minority of support from Canadians makes major legislative changes that dramatically weaken environmental planning processes and laws.

Here are a few things that have happened on the national stage over the last decade or so – most very recently - to dismantle Canada’s previous commitments to participatory democracy on environmental issues. Some of these events relate to matters in which BVN was involved.

1. Sometime around the year 2000 the Canadian Standards Association spent a few years developing a national guideline for conducting environmental assessments. This guideline sought to streamline credible environmental assessments while protecting opportunities for reasonable public involvement. BVN participated in this process and the guideline received approval from 70% of the stakeholders, including aboriginal, environmental, academic, industry, provincial, and municipal representatives. A few stakeholders that sat at the table to develop the guidelines did not support it. The guidelines died a mysterious death behind the scenes as a final draft.
2. The federal Environment Minister’s multi-stakeholder advisory committee on environmental assessment regulations has been disbanded. This was a group of legal, academic, industry, aboriginal, public and environmental advisors with extensive experience in environmental assessment.
3. Federal funding for the Canadian Environmental Network has been terminated forcing an organization that provided the federal government with ready access to a national perspective on environmental issues to close its office in Ottawa. Some parts of the network still struggle to be visible in Ottawa with minimal resources. Meanwhile paid industry lobbyists continue to have access to and advise the government while using huge media budgets to reach out to Canadians.
4. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was repealed last spring, eliminating the requirement to conduct environmental planning and assessment as well as to consider public involvement in literally thousands of projects across Canada. That law had been established because experience during the 1980s showed that voluntary environmental planning and assessment was not being done or being encouraged by government departments. It has now been replaced by a new law that requires environmental assessment on relatively few, very large projects and releases most government departments from the need to assess the effects of projects that influence the everyday life of Canadians. If the public wants to participate in the processes associated with this new legislation they must now prove that they are “directly affected” or have relevant information or expertise. Being a Canadian citizen who cares about the environment or the future is no longer enough.
5. The Fisheries Act was recently amended so that it no longer requires environmental planning and the assessment of environmental impacts of projects that affect fish habitat. In addition, the legal definition of fish and habitat has been changed from an ecosystem-based definition to one that reflects more commercial perspectives.

6. The Navigable Waters Protection Act has been replaced by the Navigation Protection Act. This change in titles says a lot about government protection priorities; these priorities are also reflected in the fact the old NWPA protected all navigable waters in Canada while the new NPA is limited to 3 oceans, 97 listed lakes and 62 listed rivers.
7. At the same time the Government of Canada carries on discussions with corporate lobbyists it is working very hard to be sure that non-profit public environmental advocacy groups do not use their charitable status to influence government policy. The spring federal budget allocated money for the Canada Revenue Agency to investigate the charitable status of environmental groups. To facilitate the spending of this money a powerful industry lobby group has apparently filed formal complaints about high profile environmental groups to the Canadian Revenue Agency. Some environmental organizations are now being audited.
8. The Canadian government has made it clear that those who get upset about diminishing environmental protection in Canada had better be very careful about how they express their concerns. Here is a quote from Canada's 2011 Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

“Domestic Issue-based Extremism: Although not of the same scope and scale faced by other countries, low-level violence by domestic issued-based groups remains a reality in Canada. Such extremism tends to be based on grievances—real or perceived—revolving around the promotion of various causes such as animal rights, white supremacy, environmentalism and anti-capitalism”.

It is interesting to note that this Strategy uses the word throughout but provides no definition of “violence”. The document does follow this quote with examples such as the Oklahoma bombing as things the Government is worried about without making it clear why environmentalism is associated with this type of event. No reference is made to the terror and “violence” committed on the planet’s environment or its peoples throughout history in the name of capitalism.

If one believes in environmental protection and participatory democracy these are sad times in Canada. It is hard to believe that most Canadians would support eliminating the environmental protections put in place over the last 40 years but that is the direction the current government has taken. The next election will not resolve this issue. This is a country where half the votes cast in an election are not represented in Parliament and unchecked executive power can be gained with a minority of support from the electorate. If we continue to embrace our odd electoral system then we must expect the legal and policy pillars to topple backward like this now and again. It is unfortunate that it may take another 40 years to straighten them out again. In the meantime, other countries move forward and opportunities for Canadians to be involved in protecting their environment are fading.

Of Wild Things

Still no wolverine sightings, but...

Shelley Mardiros

The more time one spends out of doors in observational mode, the more glimpses one gets into the lives and dramas and interactions of species that are present but easily overlooked.

Surprisingly recently I became aware of the term “subnivean” (from the Latin words for “under” and “snow”) in reference to the habitat of small mammals such as mice, voles and shrews that are active all winter – but under the snowpack. They tunnel out runways close to the ground, where temperature is a fairly consistent (and livable) 0° Celsius, and the critters are invisible to their predators and to us.

Invisible... but not necessarily safe.

In past winters, Michael and I have seen coyotes, ears cocked over the snowpack, ready to pounce, and, even martens stealthily hunting on the snow. The great grey owl that visited our neighbourhood in November 2011 was able to localize the sound of rodents from surprising distances, its facial discs and asymmetrical ear openings assisting in accuracy.

One afternoon last month we came across the ultimate subnivean predator, and very close to home. While walking our resident rodent-o-meter around the block, we noticed a tiding of magpies (how’s that for a dandy collective noun?), all a-flap and a-squawk about some intruder on Caribou Street. We half expected to see an owl, but a slim, slinky weasel in white winter pelage emerged from under a car, darted across the street, threaded through a picket fence, and disappeared. Michael had quickly snapped a couple of photos with his cell phone, confirmation that we had seen – in town and in broad daylight – an ermine.



Ermine on Caribou Street.

Photo: M. Shuster

Mustela erminea is a year-round resident of Banff National Park, our commonest small weasel, though it is rarely seen because of its nocturnal nature. Also known as the short-tailed weasel, ermine, or stoat, the species is native to northern latitudes of North America, Europe and Asia. In the Rockies, it prefers subalpine habitat. It eats mice and voles and, more ambitiously, ground squirrels and young hares.

The short-tailed weasel has a brown topside in summer with a buff underside, but is all-white in winter except for its black-tipped tail. Sizes vary but males are about 30 cm long with a 5 – 8 cm tail. Females are somewhat smaller. Ermine are fearsome hunters, pursuing prey through burrows or subnivean runways, killing with a piercing bite to the neck or skull, and stashing kills in a larder to ensure the steady food supply they need to support their very high metabolic rate. Populations fluctuate dramatically, depending on prey abundance. (*editor's note: for pikas, these are the most dangerous predators.*)

Here's where the rodent-o-meter adds to our knowledge. We all know it's educational to accompany an observant naturalist on an outing. Our in-house expert, Scruffy, has a deep interest in rodents of all kinds, along with an acute sense of hearing and a sense of smell that we can't even fathom. By observing her responses, we have concluded that Banff townsite had a bumper mouse crop this summer (in fact, there was even, for the first time, a mouse nest behind the Rundle-rock decorative wall that abuts our garage.) The mouse boom continued into winter, with mouse tracks to be seen on the snow and mouse noises (according to our canine expert) to be detected on virtually every block in town. (An occasional actual mouse body was sacrificed to the cause of research, serving as confirmation.) It may be the case that, just as an abundance of spruce cones heralds a good year for seeing red-breasted nuthatches, pine grosbeaks and crossbills, an abundance of mice ups one's chance of seeing predators of rodents. For sure, I'll be looking out for more ermine and I have hopes for owl sightings too.



Sign of White-tailed Ptarmigans taking flight. Photo: A. Athwal

High Elevation Localized Species

Mike McIvor

We greatly appreciate the fact that a number of our members, and others, have continued to submit their HELS sightings to our website. Over 400 observations from a wide variety of locations in the mountains and throughout the seasons were contributed this past year. If you haven't done so before, be sure to check the HELS Reporting page on our website to see a map with all the observations for the year. You can zero in on any you find of particular interest to see where and when they occurred.

<http://www.bowvalleynaturalists.org>

Over the next few weeks, those data will be compiled and summarized with a final report prepared for distribution. Also, we will be preparing the site so it is ready sometime soon to receive sightings for 2013. Until then, if you do see any of the 4 species we are tracking (although you won't encounter any marmots for several months) please make a note of it and enter your observations once they can be received. We extend a huge thank you to everyone who contributed sightings in the past and hope you will continue to help as we try to increase our understanding of life in these mountains.

This coming season we will continue to collect random observations and make them available to all who are interested. We well remember during Kathy Martin's fascinating presentation to BVN about White-tailed Ptarmigan, her strong emphasis on the importance of long-term projects such as HELS.

Four local species recently assessed by COSEWIC

Dwayne Lepitzki PhD. COSEWIC member

- East Kootenay Badgers – Endangered**
- Saskatchewan-Nelson Population of Bull Trout – Threatened**
- Calling Population of Western (= Boreal) Toads – Special Concern**
- Prairie/Boreal Population of Tiger Salamander – Special Concern**

So says COSEWIC, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. These four local/regional wildlife species, along with 43 others, were either assessed for the first time or re-assessed at their November 2012 meeting in Ottawa. This brings the total number of wildlife species - including plants - that are at risk of going extinct to 668, a list that continues to grow with every COSEWIC meeting.

There are as few as 100 mature East Kootenay Badgers west of the continental divide in B.C. Road kill as well as habitat loss from forest succession and urban development are continuing threats. This population of Badgers very easily fits below the threshold level of 250 signifying an endangered species under the D criterion. Once a population is so low, it can seldom recover, without heroic action.

The Prairie Boreal population of Western Tiger Salamander, which can be found east of Banff National Park, also faces numerous threats from habitat loss and degradation which includes fish stocked in their breeding ponds, and new emerging diseases. Road kill and disruption of migratory routes as well as loss of breeding and upland terrestrial habitat contributed to this species' assessment as Special Concern. Some of us may even remember the study in the late 1990s that documented mortality of Tiger Salamanders

trying to cross the TransCanada Highway between Chilver and Middle Lakes in Bow Valley Provincial Park.

The Calling population of the Western Toad, a species that is found throughout Banff National Park, also was assessed as Special Concern. Skin diseases, which have been linked to the global amphibian decline, urban expansion, conversion of habitat for agriculture, and habitat fragmentation are all threats. The 15-year study by the Bow Valley Naturalists contributed to the status report on this species. A photo by Diane McIvor (below) showing the vocal sac in a calling toad near the Simpson Monument in Kootenay National Park was proof that the range of this species does extend into British Columbia.



Boreal Toad vocalizing: Kootenay National Park

Habitat degradation and fragmentation due to dams, overfishing, as well as stocking and introduction of non-native Brook Trout are all factors contributing to the Saskatchewan-Nelson River population of Bull Trout being assessed as Threatened. This population of Bull Trout, confined to the foothills and eastern slopes of the Rockies in southern Alberta was the most at risk of the five separate populations of Bull Trout assessed by COSEWIC, with others being either Special Concern, Data Deficient, or Not at Risk. While it is illegal to kill this fish in the province and national park, it is still susceptible to mortality in catch-and-release fisheries. All subpopulations are small and over half have declined from previous levels. The warming of waters from climate change also poses a new threat.

So can species really go extinct? COSEWIC has already assessed 15 species that used to live in Canada and have disappeared from the face of the earth. COSEWIC members and their guests had the chance to visit the collections at the Canadian Museum of Nature, a depository for some of Canada's vast biodiversity. The group fell silent as one of the curators opened the cabinet showing some of the bird species that are indeed extinct: Labrador Duck, Great Auk, and Passenger Pigeon. These joined some of the other Canadian species gone forever: Ungava Population of Grizzly Bear, Lake Ontario Population of Atlantic Salmon, Eel Grass Limpet, Macoun's Shining Moss, and Banff Longnose Dace. Yes, extinction is real and it has happened in our own back yard. Humans have elaborate ceremonies to mark the passing of individuals. How should society mark the passing of an entire species?



Specimens of the Extinct Passenger Pigeon (Ectopistes migratorius) housed in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Nature (by D. Lepitzki).

Full results, including the press releases from the recent assessment meeting can be viewed at <http://www.cosewic.gc.ca>.

Trumpeter Swan Winter Range Expansion Program

Cyndi Smith

Mike McIvor's article on the banded trumpeter swan in the Spring 2012 issue of this newsletter prompted me to report on eight collared trumpeters that I saw in April of 1995. They were on ponds east of Scott Lake Hill, on the north side of the Trans Canada Highway where it intersects Hwy 68 that goes south to Sibbald Flats. I passed the sightings on to Gerard Beyersbergen, of the Canadian Wildlife Service in Edmonton, who sent me a few details on them.

All eight birds were part of a project to relocate trumpeters to new wintering areas, in an attempt to reduce over-crowding on winter habitat in the Tristate Region (Montana, Wyoming and Idaho). Once widespread and abundant, by the 1930s fewer than 200 trumpeters had survived the commercial trade in plumage, subsistence hunting and habitat change. Many of these were wintering in the Greater Yellowstone area, where warm springs kept forage areas ice-free even in the most severe winters, and they were not hunted. About 80 of these were residents, and 100 migrated yearly to their nesting areas near Grande Prairie, AB. Many trumpeters used to migrate further south yet, but those wintering areas had been destroyed by 1930, and knowledge of the migration routes had been lost. There were also small remnant populations found in Alaska and British Columbia.

In an effort to save the trumpeter swan from extinction, between 1935 and 1992 (when the program was discontinued) they were fed grain during the winter at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, in southern Montana, which had been established in 1935 to protect the remnant swan population. In those six decades the population rebounded to the point where they started to eat themselves out of house and home. At some sites, most notably Harriman State Park on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River in northeastern Idaho, the aquatic plants were no longer providing enough forage for the ever-increasing flocks of swans, as well as geese and ducks.



Red Rock Lake, Montana

photo: C. Smith



Trumpeter Swans flying over the Bow River last fall.

Photo: A. Athwal

To help alleviate the over-wintering pressure, between 1988 and 2005 over 1700 trumpeters were captured at Harriman (six of the swans I saw) and Red Rock Lakes (two of the swans I saw), only about 30 kms apart. In the winters of 1990, 1991 and 1992, the swans I observed were transplanted to new habitat in south central Oregon (Summer Lake, northeast of Klamath Falls) and southern Idaho (Bruneau Dunes, south of Boise; and Ft. Hall, north of Pocatello). Others were transplanted to southwest Wyoming (Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge, west of Rock Springs) and Utah (Fish Springs, west of Salt Lake City).

While I don't know the fate of the collared birds I observed, and whether they returned to winter at their new homes, trumpeter swans are slowly increasing their use of wintering sites as far west as Oregon and California. Although there is concern that wintering flocks are still expanding in eastern Idaho, many at sites that could freeze in a severe winter causing starvation, the resident population is declining and restoration efforts are underway to increase nesting sites. One of those efforts is the Mission Valley project with the Salish-Kootenai tribes in Montana, where Mike's swan had been banded.

Selected website references:

<http://www.fws.gov/redrocks/Trumpeter-Swan-Range.htm>

<http://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/>

Cyndi retired recently after a long career with Parks Canada.

Addresses

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