

FALL 2014 NEWSLETTER

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS
BOX 1693, BANFF, ALBERTA, T1L 1B6

IN THIS ISSUE

COMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Join us for a little conversation and conservation:

[Evening Presentation October 28](#)

[BNP 17th Annual Planning Forum](#)

[Nov. 25th – Meeting. Speaker TBA](#)

[2014 Christmas Bird Count & Help Wanted](#)

NEWS AND ISSUES

[Thanks Jason!](#)

[Is It your Turn?](#)

WILD THINGS

[May Species Count 2014](#)

[HELS Report – A Record Year?](#)

[Field Observations](#)

BOOK REVIEWS & VIDEO VIEWS

[The Tree](#)

[Ancient Trees: Trees that Live for a Thousand Years](#)

[One Day In The Forest](#)

[Trophic Cascade In Yellowstone](#)



Fall Maples in the Bow Valley.
P. Duck Photo

RESEARCH LINKS

[Birds and Windows](#)

LET THEM KNOW YOUR MIND...

[Contact Information](#) for letting politicians, governments and land managers know what you're thinking.

COMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

20Y of Y2Y

On Tuesday October 28 7:30 PM Banff Seniors Centre (upstairs 107 Bear Street) the first evening presentation of the Bow Valley Naturalists will feature an inspiring update from Karsten Heuer, President of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y). Karsten will talk about the ambitious trans-boundary vision to connect and protect wildlife habitat up and down the Rockies so people and nature can thrive.

"The Y2Y Vision is now twenty years old and it's inspiring to look back and see all that's been achieved," says Heuer. "There's still a lot of work to do, but I think people are going to be pretty blown away at the progress that's been made at the grand scale."

The Yellowstone to Yukon vision was born in 1993 shortly after research showed no existing park or reserve – not even Banff or Yellowstone – is big enough to support wildlife over the long term. The need to think big is only being affirmed in an era of climate change where not just animals but plants will need to shift their ranges in response to changing weather patterns. All are welcome and admission is free.

BVN meetings and natural history presentations take place on the 4th Tuesday of every month, October through April with the exception of December when our presentation is replaced with the annual Christmas Bird Count (see below) and potluck supper.

[Index](#)

Banff National Park Community Open House and 17th Annual Planning Forum

The annual planning forum offers a chance for you to speaker directly with park superintendents and their staff. Two events are being advertised:

- Community Open House, Wednesday, November 19, 4-8 p.m., Cave and Basin (Story Hall)
- Year-in Review, Thursday, November 20, 7-9 p.m. Parks Canada Admin Building (Harkin Hall)

For more information, please contact Michelle Macullo, Partnering and Engagement Officer, at 403-762-1544 or michelle.macullo@pc.gc.ca

2014 Banff Christmas Bird Count

The 2014 Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 20th. Potluck supper and compiling of results will follow at 6:00 pm in the Banff Seniors Centre. Take a break from the rush of the holidays to tune into the winter bird world for a few hours or the entire day. Then enjoy the camaraderie of fellow birders at the annual (and always delicious!) potluck and compilation of the day's results. For Banff please contact Heather Dempsey Heather@bowvalleynaturalists.org or 403-762-3056. (For Canmore count, see article below.) Participation is **FREE**. Bird Studies Canada, the compiler of Canadian results, no longer charges a \$5.00 fee per participant.

Canmore Area Bird Count Coordinator Needed!

Did you know that at least half of the birders who participate in the Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count, spend the day in Canmore? The Canmore area spans from the East Gate of the Trans-Canada

Highway to the west side of Cougar Creek, from the Peaks of Grassi to the base of Lady MacDonald, covering approx. half of the 26 km radius circle that defines our Count area. Last year, 27 Canmore birders counted 30 different species and over 1000 individual birds.

How do we know this? A “coordinator” matches birders with areas and then collates and reports the information that all the birders bring back to the coordinator. Colleen Campbell has managed the Canmore area for the past several years and now needs to pass on the coordinator torch.

What does this entail, how much work will this involve? Colleen has done a great job of compiling all you need to take this on and all files (contact names and emails, maps, data forms) are up to date and in excellent order. In early December, the new coordinator will need to review the files, contact potential birders and deploy birders to each of the 11 different areas within Canmore. Much of the work can be done by email but it's important that you be available by phone as well, especially on Count Day. On that day, you become Bird Central - fielding calls and collecting and collating data from those out in the field. At the end of the day the coordinator and other participants from the Canmore area attend the pot-luck dinner and reporting session in Banff.

It is possible that two or three people can take on the responsibilities of organization and follow-through for the day in Canmore. Colleen (kemuri@telusplanet.net) is available to mentor the person/s who take over the Canmore area of the Christmas Bird Count.

[Index](#)

NEWS AND ISSUES

Thanks Jason!

Bow Valley Naturalists thank Jason Rogers for participating on our Board for several years. In the Bow Valley Jason is known for sharing his encyclopedic knowledge of birds, especially through his participation at Christmas Bird Counts, the coordination and leading of Community Bird Walks and his thorough research and compilation of updated bird checklists for Banff and Jasper National Parks. The revised lists can be found on the [BVN website](#). Jason resigned recently, to focus his energies elsewhere. We wish him well in all his endeavours – current and future.

Is it your turn?

Many members have asked us in the past if there is a way to get involved with BVN. The answer is definitely YES! We are actively looking for individuals to join our Board of Directors as we know there is at least one vacancy now, and anticipate others in the new year. The Board meets approximately 6 times a year to plan the winter speaker program, manage finances, promote annual events such as the Christmas Bird Count and send out a newsletter 3 times each year. There are also opportunities to represent our members and promote the goals of BVN in the community. To join our Board, please speak to a Board member at upcoming events, or send a note to Info@BowValleyNaturalists.org.

[Index](#)

OF WILD THINGS

May Species Count 2014 *Brenda Lepitzki*

The May species count took place on 24 and 25 May this year, with warming temperatures and partly cloudy skies. Although it was not a formal outing, groups of bird lovers such as those on the Banff Community Birdwalk and a professor with a few students from the University of Manitoba identified and

reported species they encountered near the stables, along local trails through the forest and wetlands, the Vermilion Lakes, and Lake Minnewanka loop. Fewer in number but equal in enthusiasm, flower lovers searched for any signs of plants beginning to flower, and carefully assessed the flowering stage of each they found as well as the species' population in the overall Banff area that was searched. Standard routes and areas are used, in order to maintain comparability of information from year to year. And yes, people reporting unusual or uncertain sightings received the usual grilling so as to solidify identifications! Data were compiled and sent on to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists to be part of the provincial data base, something the Bow Valley Naturalists have been doing since the count's inception in the Bow Valley in 1976.

Here is a brief summary of our findings, and a comparison with the last couple of years.

Flowering Plants: 8 people found and assessed 64 species of flowering plants in 2014, 8 people assessed 71 species in 2013, and 10 people assessed 70 species in 2012.

Birds: 25 people reported 481 birds of 68 species in 2014, 29 people reported 633 birds of 87 species in 2013, and 22 people reported 648 birds of 92 species in 2012.



Yellow Lady Slipper
P. Duck Photo

[Index](#)

HELs Report – A Record Year? *Peter Duck*

So far this year we have 416 reports to the High Elevation Species project web site. Our highest number of observations since the project began in 2010 was 433 in 2011. With great weather lingering and more than two months to go this could be a banner year for recording the presence of Pikas, Marmots, Goats and Ptarmigan. To learn about the project and enter your observations or to view past results go to the [HELs Project](#) page.

[Index](#)

Field Observations *Shelley Mardiros*

Ever since my introduction to the fine art of goat-watching (see [“Caprimania”](#), BVN newsletter Spring 2013 p.6), I have been surprised to discover that finding goats is often just a matter of... looking up. Since far-away goats bear a strong resemblance to white rocks or snow patches (and vice versa), it can sometimes take a combination of patience and a telescope or telephoto lens to confirm a possible goat sighting. While hiking in Larch Valley at the end of June, Michael and I spent half an hour viewing from various angles a distant white dot on the slopes of Mount Temple. It seemed to have a goat-shaped head, but it was rock-like in its immobility. We were 96% confident that it was NOT a goat – until the rumble of an avalanche jerked the “rock” to its feet!



Goats
M. Shuster Photo

Other summer goat sightings required far less diligence. Descending on the Bourgeau Lake trail in early September, we looked up and across the valley to see a herd of 22 goats on a craggy slope near

the ridge. When we looked again, they had glided away to invisibility, as goats are wont to do. Of course we reported these and all other goat, pika, marmot, and ptarmigan sightings on the HELS page of BVN's website, and hope that you reported your HELS sightings too.

Looking up can yield a different kind of surprise. I was inspecting what I took to be mouse crap on my doorstep this summer, then noticed a tiny pellet on the door itself, and on the stucco wall above the door, and – yikes! A Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) was asleep on the wall above me, where the balcony makes a sheltered corner. He spent the day there and seemed not to be disturbed by the resident paparazzo snapping a portrait. An enlargement of same shows a sleepy bat with an oddly conspicuous orange spot on his ear. A researcher's tiny ear tag? A funky ear-ring? We consulted our friends the Snoopers*, who relayed our question through a series of experts until it arrived at the desk of bat biologist Cori Lausen. She replied: "These are ear mites. Always bright orange clusters, typically in colony roosting bats." Check out her website [batsRus](http://batsRus.com) for all sorts of bat info, as an antidote to spooky Halloween stereotypes. Also see Greg Horne's bat report on the [Parks Science](http://ParksScience.com) page of the BVN website.



Little Brown Bat
M. Shuster Photo

One more interesting observation this summer was this oddly red-stained Clark's Nutcracker on Big Beehive. Once more we consulted the Snoopers and learned that they had once observed a similarly stained nutcracker near the Tunnel Mountain hoodoos. They tracked down an article by David McIntyre, a forest scientist, reporting on threats to pine forests in AWA's Wild Lands Advocate in 2007.

The article included a photo of a mildly pigmented nutcracker with the explanatory caption that the nutcracker, a symbiotic species that disseminates the whitebark seed crop, is singularly equipped to break into the tough pinecone, anchoring its feet and using its whole body strength to do so. The red staining comes from contact with anthocyanins (red pigments) released from the broken ends of the whitebark cone scales. It's a fascinating world. **Mike & Diane McIvor*



Clark's Nutcracker
M. Shuster Photo

BOOK REVIEWS & VIDEO VIEWS

The Tree

By Colin Tudge Three Rivers Press: 2005

Colleen Campbell

This is a beastly book to read. I bought it on spec' a couple of years ago after reading a brilliant two-page article by Colin Tudge in an old New Scientist. The Tree is paperback with 400 larger format pages (5 3/4" x 9") plus chapter notes, glossary, bibliography and index. I have spent time with it in my lap many, many evenings during the past several months. I am compelled to pick it up every day or two and read half a dozen pages after which I become completely bamboozled by *Chamaecyparis*, *Hamamelis*, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, *Zizuphus jujube* and *Ximenia American*. Italics are rhythmically scattered on every page. Frequent references to family, genus and species have not overcome my need to refresh understanding of their ordering. Piled onto those complexities is the constant reassurance that the science guiding discussion of tree naming and relationships is only reflective of

current agreement amongst researchers. It is all subject to change. (Scientific findings are like that – always subject to change.)

The preface snagged me. Tudge's opening foray was bait for a trap that was secured by the end of chapter one, *What is a Tree*. One can escape only by exploring the maze and experiencing a growing sense of awe about trees, how they have adapted and changed through the influence of their habitats and how, really, trees add so much – aesthetically, biologically and physically – to the lives of all other beings.

Some species of trees evolved before Pangaea spread apart, and many closely –related specimens are found in distant locations such as “northern China and Christmas Island” or “New Caledonia and coastal North America”. Others, such as the beautiful *Ginkgo biloba*, may no longer exist in their native habitat. Some trees are valued for their straight grain, some are easy to carve, some have persistent and wonderful aroma and others, well, just stink. Some species and/or individual trees are revered, some disdained.

Tasty sentences, sentences that evoke the sensuous or strange and quirky nature of processes, products and relationships within the massive family of trees, reward the reader on every page. There are luscious descriptions of how trees take in nutrients, protect themselves from damage (wind, fire, rain, insects, animals), how they provide habitat for many species and how they seduce pollinators to promote reproduction.

Occasionally the author laments not having seen a specimen of some species or other growing on its home turf (remember – you have to read chapter one to figure out what a tree really is) and the reader begins to wish for better personal memories of places visited and trees encountered, even close to home.



Trembling Aspen
P. Duck Photo

Following the detailed litany of how trees are ordered and related (which includes wonderful bits of their characters), Tudge moves into explaining what he calls their “social lives” – how they live where they do, how they get on with other trees and various other fauna, and how they get on with various fauna, large and small. These are chapters that bring order to the complexity of the first couple of hundred pages.

The Future With Trees (the final chapter – and the only one that begins with a quote) starts with a short passage from *Binsey Poplars*, a poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins dated 1879. It is prescient.

“O if we but knew what we do
When we delve or hew –
Hack and rack the growing green!”

With the first sentence, “HUMANITY IS IN A MESS”, Tudge forges into observations and tough questions about industrial stressing of the planet. The importance of trees is emphasized; as growing organisms they provide habitat and shelter, take up water and slow flooding, clean the air, contribute to soil health, affect weather patterns and protect shorelines. Their symbiotic relationships with many thousands of other creatures and organisms are critical to the overall well-being of the planet. Every tree should give rise to a sense of awe. They are very much more than “board feet of wood product”.

The Tree is not a quick read; it is compelling and interesting, challenging and annoying, intriguing and thoroughly rewarding - worth every agonizing second spent in its pages. Every page is equally dense with content. Colin Tudge tells all; The Tree is a detailed exposé of a complicated ancient and regal family.

Dare to read it. Your appreciation of nature will be finely honed.

[Index](#)

Ancient Trees: Trees that Live for a Thousand Years

Edward Parker & Anna Lewington, Kew Garden Botanical Gardens, Batsford Press: 2012

Colleen Campbell

Ancient Trees: Trees that Live for a Thousand Years full of beautiful photographs, some pertinent data and an interesting essay about each of the long-living trees included. It is a wonderful foil to The Tree: descriptive photographs, manageable data (botanical names, religious significance, distribution, oldest known specimen, conservation status) are supplemented with interesting essays, mythology, historic relevance, and a few poems. Each species is self-contained and one can browse the book randomly.

In a completely different way Ancient Trees: Trees that Live for a Thousand Years inspires reverence for trees and nature equally with The Tree.

[Index](#)

[One day in the forest...](#)

This video clip provides a good sense of the day-to-day drama we rarely have the opportunity to observe. *Credit as available on the linked site.*

[Trophic Cascade in Yellowstone...](#)

This is not about our Bow Valley ecosystem but it sure is an enjoyable presentation of a very similar ecosystem and story. *Sustainable Man.*



RESEARCH LINKS

Birds and Windows Project

It's bad enough we drive our cars, but must we have windows too? And don't blame it all on the office towers. Check out [this research](#) into the impact our housing has on bird injury and mortality. Register to answer a survey and monitor your windows to do a little citizen science close to home. (Enter student number 112 when completing the survey and a Bow Valley student will get course credit for sharing this information with us).

[Index](#)

Sharp-Shinned Hawk
Killed in a collision with a Bow Valley
residential window October 3, 2014.
P. Duck Photo

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Let these people know your thoughts about current issues

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[Return to Top](#)