

SPRING 2016 NEWSLETTER

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

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BVN's 2016-2017 evening speaker series runs on the 4th Tuesday of October, November, February, March and April Admission is free. Donations at the door. See you in October for our special 50th Anniversary speakers' series.

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LET THEM KNOW YOUR MIND...

[Contact information](#) for letting politicians, governments and land managers know what you're thinking. Give credit where credit is due and otherwise good, better, best, never let 'em rest – they work for you



A non-native, Seven-spotted Lady Beetle, 25 June 2003, in Banff National Park. See SARA update in this issue. *D. Lepitzki photo.*

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

COMMUNITY BIRDWALKS

People interested in birding are encouraged to join the Banff Community Bird walk group. For an up-to-date list of bird sightings, visit the Wild Flour Bakery Cafe. For more information contact Jason Rogers at banffcommunitybirdwalk@hotmail.com. The final walks for 2016 are scheduled for Saturday, June 4, 8:15 a.m. and Monday, June 6, 8:15 a.m.

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS TURNING 50

The current board of directors of the Bow Valley Naturalists have identified three main projects they would like to pursue on behalf of the organization to celebrate fifty years being involved in natural history and conservation. From October 2016 to April 2017, we will continue to host monthly programs - with some extra special guest speakers.

At the March meeting, we hope to make it a celebratory night with invited friends, food and fun. We hope to illustrate some of the work BVN has been involved in since 1967, by creating a timeline on our website. This is a project we hope members will be interested in as well and volunteer some time to its creation. Do you think you might be interested in helping out on this? If so, let us know. Work would initially entail research, especially in the BVN Fonds held in the Whyte Museum archives, online and newspaper searches, solicit stories from past Board members, present members. We may need professional assistance to create the final on-line version. Final product is to be shared at the March 21, 2017 BVN meeting as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations that night. Interested? Please contact us at bowvalleynaturalists.org.

NEWS AND ISSUES

FIGHT FOR YOUR PARKS - VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Canada's beloved Banff & Jasper National Parks are continually threatened by inappropriate developments that harm wilderness, wildlife and the ecological health of our public parks. Fight For Your parks needs your help to distribute info to Banff residents and visitors, and to collect petition signatures.

1. Will you donate a few hours at our Bow Valley canvassing events (in Banff & Canmore) between June and August? Email blairc@thessageparlour.com or call Blair Cosgrove at 403-889-4293.
2. Will you join 8,000+ of your fellow Canadians by signing the "Fight for your Parks" online petition at www.fightforyourparks.ca? Visit www.fightforyourparks.ca or #FightForYourParks.



CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

The Bow Valley Naturalists' website has undergone a facelift in the past 6 months and will continue to improve in the coming year. In the meantime, if you haven't been there lately, check it out and move around the site to see what's new: bowvalleynaturalists.org.

To get you started, do you need to report seeing one of our high elevation localized species: a Mountain Goat, Marmot, Pika or Ptarmigan? Click on the HELS photo on the top slider. Lots of neat nature notes, such as Jason Rogers' bird checklists are available on the Natural History Section. Considering writing a letter to an elected official using Important Links. Want to get involved? There's a section for that as well. Missed a winter guest speaker's talk? Look under the events where some additional information or reporting has been added.

In the future we hope to link all our communications from the website. At some point we will be asking the membership to join us online and hope you will agree. Thanks to Heather's Dempsey's hard work and patience on this project - Stay tuned.

\$65.9 MILLION FOR JASPER

In case you missed it when you read the 2016 federal budget the following funds were committed to projects in our national parks:

- \$21.6 million to pave highways through Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories;
- \$65.9 million for a new biking and walking trail in Jasper National Park in Alberta; and
- \$17.7 million to build a new biking and walking trail in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve in British Columbia.

We have not heard of any public consultation on these projects. Some of this infrastructure, if rumours are true, will be installed in declared wilderness.

We have heard, and seen in the budget, verbiage relating commitments to science-based decisions, open and accountable government as well as rhetoric about restoring trust in environmental assessment. It is hard to imagine how the above project commitments were based on science if there was no public consultation to present the ecosystem studies that supported funding these projects. This is business as usual carried over from the previous government, rather than restoring public trust, if environmental assessment continues to be conducted for projects that are already approved at the highest levels and passed through parliament with millions of committed dollars on the line. Needless to say, BVN submitted a few words of concern to the Minister of Environment on behalf of our members. Send your thoughts too. Her address is below.

OF WILD THINGS

MAY SPECIES COUNT 2016 *Brenda Bunn Lepitzki*

The May Species Count is an annual survey of species of birds and plants in flower which is conducted across Alberta, and coordinated by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

The aim of this survey is to record accurately and in a standard way the stages of flowering spring plants using phenology (life cycle event) codes for the purpose of scientific comparison from year to year. It also is a way of tracking the occurrence of birds, either residents, migrants passing through, or those arriving at their breeding destination, also for annual comparisons.

The challenge is for participants to improve their level of knowledge and broaden their coverage of localities, making both as complete and consistent as possible so that variations in the number of species in flower from year to year reflect only local and regional weather differences (e.g. early and late springs).

The Bow Valley Naturalists have been conducting the May Species Count since its inception in 1976 in the Yamnuska, Banff, and Canmore areas. This year the Banff count was held on May 30th but we will also use bird sightings from the 27th May to 02 June.

People interested in learning about conducting flower identification and phenology can contact Brenda Lepitzki for more information: brblepit@telus.net.

HIGH ELEVATION SPECIES 2016 *Colleen Campbell*

The weekly magazine *New Scientist* has mentioned the value and contributions of citizen science in several articles in past months. Examples include sleep research, light pollution, urban sprawl and migrating patterns of birds. HELS is a citizen science project reliant on “you” for data. The link for volunteer reporting of the four HELS species has been on the BVN website for six years and we have had several inquiries about the collected data. Researchers who have used HELS data report back to us that it is both reliable and important.

Once again we encourage our members and their friends to make note of any sightings of the four HELS species by recording species, number (if known), and estimated location, date and relevant observations. Whether you are hiking in Jasper or Waterton, in the Purcells, the Bugaboos or the Selkirks, anywhere in the Rockies and associated ranges, keep your eyes and ears open for sights and sounds of Hoary Marmots, Mountain Goat, Pika or White-tailed Ptarmigan.

Later, please log onto our website, find the HELS link and enter your sightings. If you do not remember right away, no problem. 2016 sightings can be entered any time before the end of the year.

All the HELS observations entered to the site are helpful and appreciated. Remember that taking photos and documenting wildlife should always be done respectfully. Resist the urge to encroach or disturb any species. Your participation as a citizen scientist will contribute to important research.

BEETLES AND SNAKES: RESULTS FROM LATEST COSEWIC SPECIES' ASSESSMENT

Dwayne Lepitzki, Ph.D., Member of COSEWIC

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) meets twice a year to determine the endangerment status of Canada's biodiversity. The spring 2016 meeting was held in Kelowna, a year when the west was basking under record breaking high temperatures but the leaves were yet to sprout in Ottawa. Early northern ice-bridge breakups and Maritime snowstorms added to COSEWIC member travel difficulties. While nearly a quarter of the 26 wildlife species assessed by COSEWIC from 24 through 29 April were found to be Not at Risk of extinction or extirpation, the list of At Risk species now sits at 739. Two of these species may have been encountered by Bow Valley Naturalists: Nine-spotted Lady Beetle and Northern Rubber Boa.



Northern Rubber Boa. *L. Halverson photo.*

The Nine-spotted Lady Beetle used to be widely distributed in southern Canada from Vancouver Island through to southern Quebec. A variety of threats including the introduction of non-native lady beetles, pesticides, and loss of habitat most likely contributed to the significant decline in abundance; this once common beetle is now rarely seen. These factors lead COSEWIC to conclude Nine-spotted Lady Beetle is Endangered. But surely, it can't be that rare. Didn't I photograph a 9-spotter a few years ago?

In preparing for the species assessment meetings, COSEWIC members read and review status reports, compilations of all the available information on a species and its habitat relevant to its status, in preparation for the discussion at the meeting. I dug out my picture and sent it to the Arthropod Species Specialist Subcommittee experts. While it did appear to have 9-spots (see photo above), it was one of the introduced non-natives – a Seven-spotted Lady Beetle. Not only does one have to count spots, but one has to look at other features. A thick, black line down the back between the two wing covers is one of the other diagnostic features of the nine-spotters. So, I have yet to see a Nine-spotted Lady Beetle – and perhaps never will, given its status.

Some may, however, have spotted a Northern Rubber Boa, near Radium Hotsprings, as Agency. This rubbery-looking snake also seems two-headed, because both the head and tail end are blunt. Radium is the closest this snake gets to Banff. It is patchily distributed in the southern half of British Columbia. While there are inferred declines in numbers of mature individuals based on habitat trends and some subpopulations continue to be threatened by human activities, COSEWIC confirmed an earlier 2003 status of Special Concern. The species could become threatened in the future.

Full results of the April 2016 COSEWIC wildlife species at risk assessment meeting can be found at cosewic.gc.ca. The next meeting will be held in Ottawa in November 2016.

ETHAN DENTON: CANMORE MAYOR'S AWARD FOR VOLUNTEER EXCELLENCE

Early in 2016 Heather Dempsey suggested that Bow Valley Naturalists nominate Ethan Denton for a Canmore Mayor's Award for Volunteer Excellence. Ethan is the young student who coordinates the BVN Christmas Bird Count in Canmore. We all supported the idea, Heather penned a wonderful nomination and Ethan won a volunteer award in the "youth" category.

Ethan is a one of those rare folks who discovers a keen interest early in life. While in kindergarten he and his classmates were challenged to find 12 species of bird in the Bow Valley and to bring the information back to class. Ethan found 17 and has been keeping track of birds ever since.

Managing the Christmas bird count is a lot like herding cats. The proximity to Christmas and the vagaries of weather make it difficult to secure commitments from participants and Ethan is proving to be an expert "cat-herder", with successful participation from regular and new birders during annual event.

Ethan also participates annually in a "birdathon" raising funds for Bird Studies Canada <http://www.birdboy.ca/birdathon/gcb-2016-sticky/>. Each participant is permitted 24 consecutive hours during which to log as many species as possible. Last year Ethan worked in Ontario; this year his efforts will be concentrated in the Bow Valley, possibly as far as Calgary.

Currently, his favourite bird is a Caspian Tern, a long-distance migrator we might even see flying across the open prairie skies.

One of Ethan's most notable sightings is of a very small Flammulated Owl, whose summer range pokes north into south-central BC. He is discreet about its location and has learned from locals that the nesting owl he discovered is an annual visitor. Ethan has bird-blogging friends, one in Manitoba and one elsewhere in Alberta. He admits that he is competitive with them but I think he really is all about the birds, their status and safety.



Ethan Denton with Mayor Borrowman and other award volunteer award winners. *P. Duck Photo*

Last year Ethan and others initiated regular bird-walks in Canmore, akin to the weekly spring Community Bird Walks in Banff. Though local interest was insufficient to sustain the walks (yet), Ethan maintains a fairly regular “bird route” in Canmore and logs his findings on his interesting and informative blog at www.birdboy.ca. Other than the short personal introduction, his blog truly is “for the birds”. It gives readers direct access to his observations.

When his family travels, Ethan experiences new opportunities to find birds. His “list” from local efforts has been expanded during family trips - so far to BC, Ontario, Colorado and England. Currently, his wish-list includes Zambia, Costa Rica and the Galapagos. As well, Ethan is interested in organizing a kids participation Christmas Bird Count. Three cheers for that!

On April 13th Peter Duck and I attended the Canmore Mayor’s Awards for Volunteer Excellence, an event that included a very tasty dinner with a room full of enthusiastic volunteers and their supporters. As a nominee, Ethan was in attendance with his family: mom, dad, brother and sister. Everyone cheered as Ethan was presented with his award. He related that he was surprised with both the nomination and the award. Ethan is a wonderful example and influence for naturalists of all ages. His sense of competition is just enough to keep him pushing his own boundaries and learning. He shares in ways that are interesting and more than a little infectious. Watch for Ethan as a possible speaker for Wildsmart in Canmore <http://www.wildsmart.ca>.

BOOK REVIEW

YELLOWSTONE: BATTLE FOR THE AMERICAN WEST *Peter Duck*

The May 2016 issue of National Geographic Magazine is dedicated to the human and natural history of Yellowstone National Park. There is some great photography and creative graphics interpreting everything from the super volcano that has created the park ecosystem to analysis of elk migration routes and the effects of human history over thousands of years. The stories, including those of wolf survival and native trout on the edge of extinction, are very relevant to our own Central Rockies Ecosystem making this fun reading and viewing with lots of opportunities to reflect on our local condition.

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If your call to your MLA, or any Alberta government office, is long distance then please dial 310-0000 then the area code and the phone number for toll free access.

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