

SPRING 2015 NEWSLETTER

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

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COMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

May Species Count, Banff Bird Walks and more. See the upcoming [events](#) list below.

BVN evening speaker series returns October 2015 on the 4th Tuesday of the month. Watch for topics in the fall newsletter published mid Octoberish.

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LET THEM KNOW YOUR MIND...

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



Hoary Marmot (*Marmota caligata*) is one of four HELS (High Elevation Localized Species) you can help BVN monitor by recording your observations our HELS web page this summer. *P. Duck Photo*

1967 - 2015

Ecosystem Protection And Education

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

BANFF COMMUNITY BIRD WALKS

Saturday and Monday mornings 8:15 am; meet at pull-off on Sundance Road beside Recreation Grounds, just off Cave Ave. Final walk on June 8. For more information contact Jason Rogers: banffcommunitybirdwalk@hotmail.com.

MAY SPECIES COUNT 2015

Spend the day outside and make it count! Saturday and Sunday, May 30th and 31st. See the article below for details. People interested in conducting flower identification and phenology can contact Brenda Lepitzki for more information: brblepit@telus.net.

CONSERVATION UPDATES: ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH & RESTORATION IN BANFF NATIONAL PARK

Thursday, May 28, 7 pm. FREE at the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. Parks Canada Resource Conservation Specialists share their monitoring and restoration projects in Banff National Park, answer questions and demonstrate some tools and techniques they use in their work. Conservation Updates are presented as a partnership between Parks Canada, the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies and the Interpretive Guides Association.

WHYTE MUSEUM OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

Plan to visit the Whyte this summer when they will have two exhibitions with a water theme, plus related talks and films offered throughout the summer. Ted Hart will be delivering a presentation about his new book called [Banff: A History of the Park and Town](#), Thursday June 4, 7 PM. FREE.

WATERCOLOUR WORKSHOP: PAINTING IN THE MOUNTAINS

Have you ever wanted to try water colours? Come discover your inner artist under the careful guidance of long time Bow Valley artist and teacher Donna Jo Massie. Painting supplies will be provided and no experience is necessary. Saturday, June 13, 1 To 4 Pm, \$100 Per Person Register with Nathalie at ndelbecq@whyte.org.



NEWS AND ISSUES

THREE SISTERS UPDATE

by Karsten Heuer

As many of you have read in the local papers, Three Sisters Mountain Village is embarking on a planning process that will guide the development of Sites 7,8 and 9. This 634-acre parcel of land is the largest chunk of undeveloped private land left in the Bow Valley and includes an important wildlife corridor linking Kananaskis Country with Banff National Park. It is located on the south side of the Trans-Canada Highway and extends from the eastern end of the current development footprint of Canmore all the way to the mouth of the Wind Valley at Deadman's Flats.

The current owners of the property have proposed a collaborative process as they begin to plan development. It will include the Town of Canmore, the Province of Alberta, and, for the first time ever, a soon-to-be-selected Community Advisory Group (which will include members of the local development, recreational and conservation communities). We are hopeful this process will finally yield a designated wildlife corridor through this all-important squeeze point in a much larger system of wildlife reserves and connections from Yellowstone to Yukon. Time, effort and the continued pressure by all of us will tell.



Looking east down the all-important Three Sisters wildlife corridor from Mt. Rundle. Photo: K. Heuer

ECHO CREEK RAIL SPILL

Peter Duck

At the time of the CP rail spill into Echo Creek late last December it seemed from media or other verbal reports that significant investigations are being undertaken in response to this incident. In early February Bow Valley Naturalists (BVN) wrote a letter to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans requesting this be confirmed through answers to the following questions:

1. Did Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, or the Government of Alberta take samples or collect any other data during or after the spill?
2. If so, when will the results of that sampling and other environmental data collection be released to the public?
3. What types of investigations (public safety, rail safety, environmental effects) are being undertaken in response to this spill?
4. Which agencies, organizations or businesses are conducting these investigations?
5. What is the nature and extent of the terrain modification that was required as part of the immediate spill clean-up?
6. Where were the various materials removed from the site of the spill during clean-up disposed?
7. Have any immediate impacts of this spill, on fish or other aquatic organisms, been documented?
8. Will the impacts of this spill on non-fish species that use this area be studied by any federal or provincial government agencies or by Canadian Pacific?
9. This spill has occurred in a very public location and on public land that is close to the hearts of many residents and national park visitors. Will there be meaningful public involvement in reviewing investigation reports and developing recommendations to prevent future railway related spills in this special area?



Echo Creek stream banks before the derailment. Photo: P, Duck

BVN also asked that if an investigation is not already underway to determine whether there has been any violation of the Fisheries Act, National Parks Act or any other environmental statutes that this be commenced immediately and that the detailed results of these investigation be released to the public. At the time writing we have had no response to our letter.



FISH HABITAT: Federal Abdication of Responsibility?

Peter Duck

After seeing Shelly Humphries recent evening presentation to BVN one might get the impression that fish habitat is being protected in Canada. However, in spite the great restoration work being carried out by dedicated people in our area, fish habitat protection across Canada is swimming against a strong current of government deregulation. On the University of Calgary Faculty of Law Blog on Developments In Alberta Law authors Martin Olszynski and Alex Grigg present work entitled "Assessing Canada's Habitat/Fisheries Protection Regime". The authors note that the Federal Government's Jobs, Growth and Long Term Prosperity Act (omnibus Bill C-38, 2012) fundamentally changed some of Canada's most important environmental protection laws. Of particular note was the 40 year old provisions of the Fisheries Act that protect fish habitat from destruction by development projects. In their research conducted in preparation for a conference on environmental law practice to be held in Kananaskis in June the authors conclude:

"Long story short, it appears that the federal government has all but abdicated its role in protecting fish habitat in Canada".



INTRUSION OF THE DRONES (Follow -Up)

Following up on the article on drones in the Winter 2015 newsletter Jason Rogers submitted the following link:

Audubon Magazine - How Will Drones Affect Birds?
<https://www.audubon.org/news/how-will-drones-affect-birds>



RACING THROUGH NATURE

Jason Rogers shared a link with BVN about a new opportunity to surprise a grizzly in its tracks or to enjoy the experience of spending as little time as possible on a national park trail. See Glacier Grind race. Maybe you can be one of 200 racers who have the opportunity to have a grinding national park experience. If you are thinking of registering we are reasonably sure that "grind" does refer to interpreting the trailside evidence of the erosional dynamics of the sub-glacial environment.

BVN continues to follow the approval process for the proposal to hold an international ski event at Lake Louise this coming winter. A trial race that was run though sections of declared wilderness was held last January after being advertised and having trees removed to facilitate the event prior to approval. Not much has changed for the main event in 2016. As indicated on their web site The Alberta World Cup Society has scheduled the event for March 11, 2016 with officials scheduled for training on the previous day.

Keeping in mind that in our national parks the special event promoter/partner and regulator are often one in the same we encourage you to let regulators know what you think about these events on public land. See contact information below.



OF WILD THINGS

MAY SPECIES COUNT 2015

The May Species Count will occur on Saturday and Sunday, May 30th and 31st 2015. This 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 and is always held on the last complete weekend in May.

The aim of this survey is to record accurately and in a standard way the stages of flowering spring plants using phenology 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 will be held on May 31st but we will also use sightings from the 30th. People interested in birding are encouraged to join the Banff Community Bird walk group, check for their schedules for the last weekend in May: banffcommunitybirdwalk@hotmail.com

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

We strongly encourage everyone to spend this day outside, enjoying the diversity of life in this wonderful place we call home and making an effort to learn more about it.

Special Note: Anyone wanting to contribute bird or flower information should avoid Parks Canada closed areas, including voluntary closures, such as the trails behind Johnson Lake and the wildlife corridor near the old airport. We will not use bird or flower sightings from these areas out of respect for the intent of the closures.



TWO MORE AT-RISK SPECIES IN BANFF NATIONAL PARK

Dwayne Lepitzki, Ph.D. (Member of COSEWIC)

Two more species were added to the growing list of species at risk of extinction that habitually occupy Banff National Park (see table) when COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) recently met near Quebec City from 26 April to 1 May 2015. The Black Swift, a bird known to nest behind waterfalls, was assessed as Endangered while the Vivid Dancer damselfly, whose larvae inhabit some of Banff's thermal springs, was assessed as Special Concern.



Black Swift in Johnston Canyon.
Photo: Amar Athwal

While most of the North American population of Black Swift is found in British Columbia, they are also known to nest in Maligne and Johnston Canyons in Jasper and Banff National Parks as well as in Marble Canyon to the west of Banff. This bird lays but a single egg per year and after spending the summer in Canada, winters somewhere in South America. They rely on a diet of flying insects and as with many other aerial insectivores have undergone large population declines in recent decades. The swift's population in Canada has declined by more than 50% since the 1970s, which is a threshold that triggered the status of Endangered.

The Vivid Dancer is a brilliant blue-purple damselfly commonly seen flying at the Valley View Middle Springs Marsh and Cave and Basin National Historic Site in Banff National Park. When resting it folds its wings along its abdomen, unlike its close relatives the dragonflies which hold their wings perpendicular to their body when at rest. In Alberta they are known only from some of the thermal springs in Banff where the aquatic larvae live and grow, crawl out and transform into flying adults. The Vivid Dancer joins two other thermal spring dependent species that call or called some of Banff's thermal springs home: the extinct Banff Longnose Dace and the Endangered Banff Springs Snail.

Being assessed as at risk by COSEWIC is only the first step on the long road to listing and hopefully habitat protection and recovery under Canada's *Species At Risk Act* (SARA). COSEWIC is the group of wildlife experts that assesses the status of wildlife species, both plants and animals, at risk of extinction and recommends these species to be listed under SARA. In order to be listed under SARA, the federal government consults with Canadians before deciding whether to add the species to the SARA list. As shown in the table, these consultations can take years and do not automatically result in listing and protection under SARA.

Full results, including the press release from the recent COSEWIC assessment meeting can be viewed at <http://www.cosewic.gc.ca>. See <http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca> for the SARA status of species, for copies of COSEWIC status reports, and to become involved in the SARA listing process.



Vivid Dancer
Photo: Dwayne Lepitzki



WILDLIFE SPECIES WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT

Parks Canada's Banff National Park web site includes information on two species at risk. Here is a list of no less than 19 wildlife species that we should be concerned about in that park. The list would be much longer if we included vegetation. In the interest doling out downers in manageable doses we will provide the latter list at some other time.

Committee On The Status Of Endangered Wildlife In Canada (COSEWIC) and Species At Risk (SARA) status of wildlife species habitually occupying Banff National Park as of May 2015. *Compiled by Dr. Dwayne Lepitzki.*

Common Name	Scientific Name	Latest COSEWIC Assessment Date	SARA Status
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COSEWIC EXTINCT SPECIES

Banff Longnose Dace	<i>Rhinichthys cataractae smithi</i>	May 2000	NO STATUS
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COSEWIC ENDANGERED SPECIES

Black Swift	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	May 2015	-
Limber Pine	<i>Pinus flexilis</i>	Nov 2014	-
Central Mountain Woodland Caribou	<i>Rangifer tarandus caribou</i>	May 2014	NO STATUS ¹
Little Brown Myotis bat	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Feb 2012, Nov 2013 ²	ENDANGERED
Northern Myotis bat	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Feb 2012, Nov 2013 ²	ENDANGERED
Whitebark Pine	<i>Pinus albicaulis</i>	April 2010	ENDANGERED

Banff Springs Snail	<i>Physella johnsoni</i>	May 2008	ENDANGERED
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COSEWIC THREATENED SPECIES

Plains Bison	<i>Bison bison bison</i>	Nov 2013	NO STATUS ³
Saskatchewan-Nelson Population of Bull Trout	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	Nov 2012	Consultation to 15 July 2015
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	May 2011	Consultation ended Feb 2012 – NO STATUS
Alberta Population of Westslope Cutthroat trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi</i>	Nov 2006	THREATENED

COSEWIC SPECIAL CONCERN SPECIES

Vivid Dancer damselfly	<i>Argia vivida</i>	May 2015	-
Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	May 2014	Consultation ended 15 April 2015
Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>	May 2014	NO STATUS ⁴
Calling Population of Western Toad	<i>Anaxyrus boreas</i>	Nov 2012	NO STATUS ⁵
Western Population of Grizzly Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	May 2012	NO STATUS ⁶
Western Population of Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	April 2009	Extended consultation ended 1 March 2011 – NO STATUS
Rusty Blackbird	<i>Euphagus carolinus</i>	April 2006	SC

¹Re-assigned to different population and up-listed from THREATENED (May 2002) to ENDANGERED; previous Southern Mountain population SARA listed as THREATENED (2003). Extended consultation to add to SARA list began 13 January 2015 and will end 15 October 2015.

²COSEWIC Emergency Assessment February 2012 but full assessment report completed in November 2013 before SARA listing in December 2014.

³COSEWIC assessed as THREATENED in 2004 but decision made in July 2005 not to add to SARA list. Extended consultation to add to SARA list ends 15 October 2015.

⁴COSEWIC assessed Western Population as SC in May 2003 but not listed under SARA. Extended consultation to add to SARA list ends 15 October 2015.

⁵COSEWIC assessed Calling and Non-calling populations as one combined entity as SC in May 2002; combined population was listed as SC under SARA in 2005.

⁶COSEWIC assessed as SC in May 2002; decision made to not add species to SARA list.

PLEASE REPORT HIGH ELEVATION LOCALIZED SPECIES

Colleen Campbell

The four HELS are found most typically in high elevation habitats and are considered particularly vulnerable to climate change. Their distribution may be changing.

In 2010, BVN initiated an experiment in web-based citizen reporting of four species of interest to hikers, scientists and park managers. These are identified as high elevation localized species (HELs), an acronym coined by Dr. Tony Clevenger in 2009. The species we encourage people to report to HELS are hoary marmot, mountain goat,

pika and white-tailed ptarmigan. (For the original announcement of this initiative, see the [BVN Newsletter Spring 2010](#).)

We encourage those who travel into alpine areas and observe any of the identified species to report their observations to the HELS site. Your data entries will help to develop and add detail to a map of the distribution of each of the four species in the Central Canadian Rockies. Observations from national and provincial parks and public lands are equally important.

Take initiative. Never assume that someone else in your group will submit an observation.

On the [web site](#), you are asked to register with a user name and email address. This is necessary only once; on further visits to the site, you can log in directly and proceed to enter your observations.

If you identify any of the four species during your travels, keep track of details — species, number (if known), and estimated location (UTM easting and northing / latitude and longitude), date and relevant observations. You can enter data from your GPS or you can zoom into the map on the HELS page on the BVN website and click on the position of your observation. That will add the latitude/longitude location in the boxes on the left side. When you are finished entering your observation, click “submit”.

All the HELS observations entered to the site are helpful and appreciated. HELS data are summarized at the end of each calendar year and are available through the HELS archives on [<bowvalleynaturalists.org>](#). Researchers who have requested accumulated data from HELS have reported back to BVN that the data are very useful.

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.



BOOK REVIEWS

Future Arctic: Field Notes from a World on the Edge

A review by Colleen Campbell

I am an avid fan of a weekly British publication *New Scientist*. In every issue one or two new books are introduced; the ones that I have read have each lived up to the encouragement of the reviewer. I recognize the names of many of the authors and I suppose that I have been aware that the books reviewed are global in origin. Nonetheless, it was a nice surprise to be recommended to a book by an Alberta author, Ed Strusik's, whose writing I first noticed in the *Edmonton Journal* and later when he regularly contributed to *Canadian Geographic*.

Future Arctic: Field Notes from a World on the Edge is the subject of a long review by Alun Anderson in *New Scientist* (April 11-17, 2015). Alun Anderson is a consultant for the magazine and has also written about the Arctic. His book, *After the Ice: Life, death and geopolitics in the new Arctic*, (2009) is considered an important text about the effects of climate change on Arctic environments, physical, social and political.

Anderson offers enough detail about Ed Strusik's book to tempt a reader and points out that the book is far more than a litany of damages and challenges, that it is balanced and offers ideas for solutions and an urge to action, rather than frustration or resignation about the current trajectory. I am waiting for my copy to arrive.

(Do you have a book that you think our readers would enjoy? Send us a few sentences we can share it with our newsletter readers.)



CONTACTS

Let these people know your thoughts about current issues.

CANADA

Federal Environment Minister
Leona.Aglukkaq@parl.gc.ca
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

NDP Environment Critic
megan.leslie@parl.gc.ca
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Liberal Environment Critic
john.mckay@parl.gc.ca
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Leader, Green Party
elizabeth.may@parl.gc.ca
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Blake Richards MP
Richards.B@parl.gc.ca
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Alan Latourelle,
CEO Parks Canada Agency
Alan.Latourelle@pc.gc.ca

Dave McDonough,
Superintendent, Banff Field Unit
Dave.McDonough@pc.gc.ca

Melanie Kwong
Superintendent, LLKY Field Unit
Melanie.Kwong@pc.gc.ca

Greg Fenton
Superintendent, Jasper National Park
Greg.Fenton@pc.gc.ca

Mount Revelstoke/Glacier National Parks
P.O. Box 350
Revelstoke, B.C. Canada
V0E 2S0
250-837-7500
Email

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Gail.Shea@parl.gc.ca
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

ALBERTA

Alberta Minister Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
TBA

Cameron Westhead
MLA Elect Banff Cochrane
Constituency Office
102, 721 Main Street
P.O. Box 8650 T1W 0B9
Canmore, Alberta
Phone: 403-609-4509
Toll Free: 1-866-760-8281
Fax: 403-609-4513
banff.cochrane@assembly.ab.ca

