



Winter 2017 Newsletter

50th Anniversary

Ecosystem Protection and Education
www.bowvalleynaturalists.org

Featured News



BVN 50th Birthday - April 25

Open-house at the Whyte-Museum of the Canadian Rockies 7pm – 9pm (doors open at 6:30pm). Mix, mingle, make merry & sign the guest book. Written or picture memories to fill the scrapbook are welcomed. Light refreshments, including beer and wine, will be served!



Upcoming Events

...

Every 4th Tuesday

Free presentations (donations also accepted) at the Banff Seniors Centre starting at 7:30pm. See the Events tab on the [BVN website](http://www.bowvalleynaturalists.org) for details!

February 28

General Annual Meeting
Banff Seniors Centre at 7:30pm, prior to the evening presentation.

February 28

Ol' fashioned family **canoe trips** with Dan Clark and his family in the Arctic.

March 28

Fossil records connecting the past, present and future for an interesting perspective on climate change with **Jessica Madeleine Theodore**, University of Calgary Associate Professor Ecology & Evolutionary Biology.

April 22 (Earth Day)

BioBlitz Banff

With Parks Canada for Banff National Park's long term ecological monitoring program. We are recruiting for volunteer positions, [details here!](#)

IN THIS ISSUE

Event Details:

[Is This Your Year to Volunteer in Banff?](#)

News & Issues:

[Sunshine Summer Use- Heritage Plan](#)

[Lots of Grain but No Gain](#)

[Ministers Round Table](#)

Wild Things:

[High Elevation Species](#)

[2016 Christmas Bird Count Results](#)

[Tracking the Amazing Flights of Migratory Birds](#)

[Wildlife Corridor Basics: The Importance of Canmore](#)

[Ranger Creek Maps \(1999-2016\) – A Special Accomplishment](#)

Book Review:

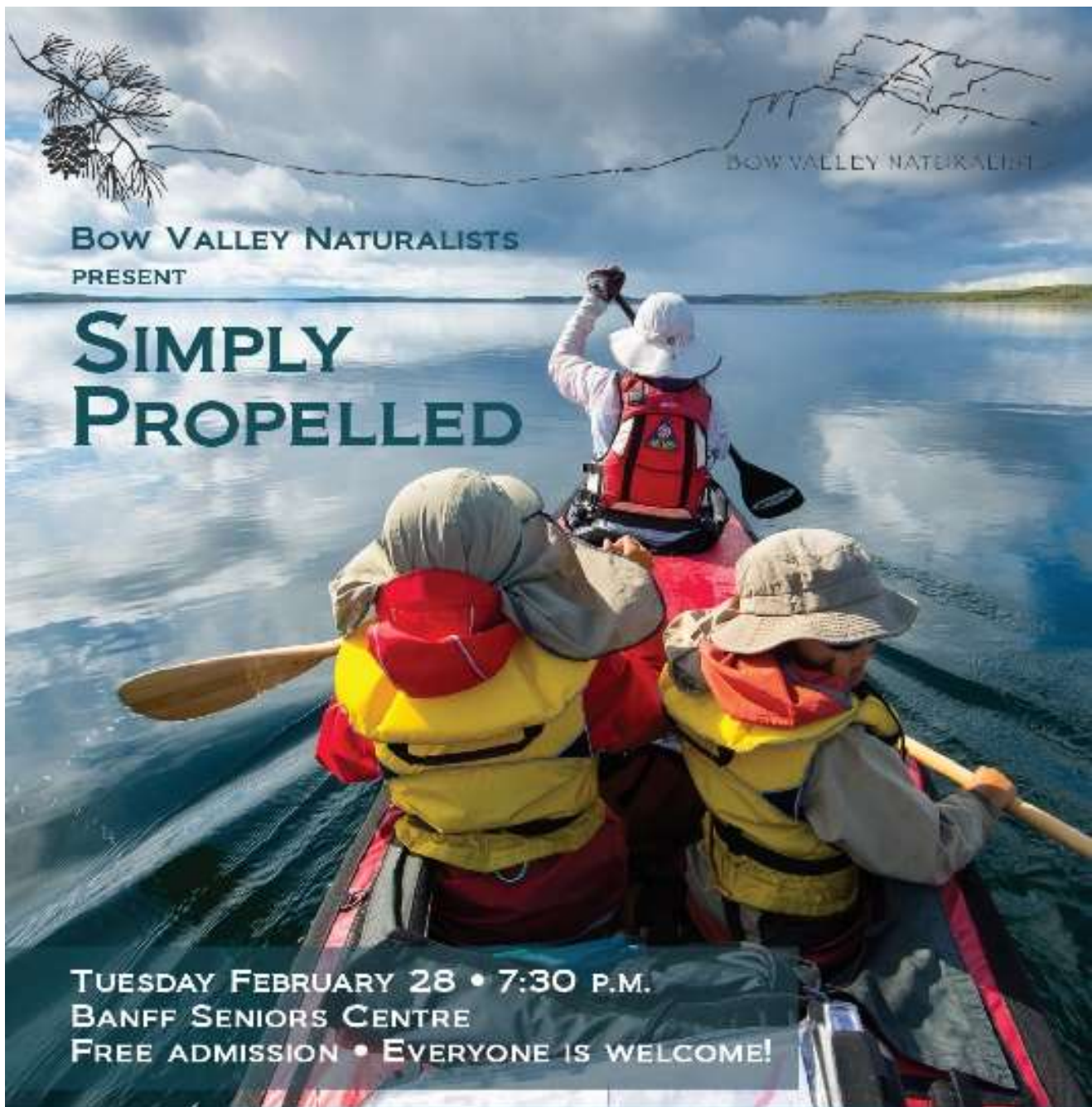
[Citizen Scientists by Mary Ellen Hannibal](#)

Let Them Know Your Mind...

[Contact](#) politicians, governments and land managers of your thoughts. Give credit where credit is due and remind them they work for you.



Common golden eye (*Bucephala clangula*) – Ethan Denton Photo



BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS
PRESENT

SIMPLY PROPELLED

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 28 • 7:30 P.M.
BANFF SENIORS CENTRE
FREE ADMISSION • EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

Travel into the unknown frees the spirit and gives us a better perspective on ourselves, but how do we stretch our boundaries to reach this place of discovery? Join Dan Clark for a philosophical look at adventure through the lens of family expeditions from the Arctic to the Andes.



Dan is a hiking guide, educator and adventurer who grew up near the Rockies and discovered himself on lengthy ski traverses and high-altitude climbs. Dan's progression as a person, husband and father continues on northern canoe trips and cycling journeys in the Americas.

BioBlitz Banff

On Earth Day, **Saturday April 22, 2017**, *Parks Canada* is hosting our very first official "*BioBlitz Banff*" and we need your help. As part of *Banff National Park's* long term ecological monitoring program, we will be engaging scientists, volunteers, participants and the public in amphibian surveys in 60 sampling sites throughout the Park. **Registration for the public will be open late February.**

Meanwhile we are recruiting for exciting volunteer positions:

- **Survey Leaders**
(You must have scientific background or experience in amphibian monitoring)
- **Survey Assistant Leaders**
- **Base Camp Event Support**
(Set up, take down, gear handling, bus guides, etc)
- **Photographers**
- **Social Media**

Training and gear will be provided. For more information on how to become a Survey Leader, contact **Derek Peterson**, Ecological Integrity Monitoring Coordinator for Lake Louise, Yoho, Kootenay and Banff Field Units, T250-347-6171 or derek.petersen@pc.gc.ca. To register for other volunteer positions please go to this link and you will be contacted late February: www.volunteersignup.org/YFWX3.

Is This Your Year to Volunteer in Banff National Park?

Banff National Park is recruiting more volunteers. We have opportunities for individuals and groups to participate. **From April until late October, a variety of projects will be offered** such as helping with an *Earth Day BioBlitz* as well as other research and monitoring projects; hiking and reporting trail conditions and being assistant leaders on guided hikes; trail work with groups; event support; litter picks and weed pulls; and some backcountry and other leadership assignments. This is a special year to be a part of stewardship in Banff National Park, as we *celebrate Canada's 150th birthday*. Training, gear, and volunteer uniforms are provided. Please go to www.pc.gc.ca/banff-volunteer to find out more and apply!



Deadline is **March 1, 2017**.

Sunshine Summer Use – A Heritage Plan

BVN is frustrated about the poor public process around the renewed full-time use of the gondola and chair lift to facilitate access to *Sunshine Meadows* and surrounding lands this coming summer. The approval to easily unload thousands of visitors into this fragile ecosystem rests on a *Parks Canada* approval dating back to 1983. Really. That's 35 years ago, and even before Banff National Park was designated a *UNESCO World Heritage Site*. A plan that old should be retired and given its own heritage status in a museum somewhere. It should not be used as an excuse to further compromise critical grizzly bear habitat. If anyone is interested in the history of how this decision came about, there is a lot of interesting information and internal correspondence in documents obtained from a recent freedom of information request filed by [Ecojustice](#). Contact bvn@bowvalleynaturalist.org to arrange receiving a copy of the documents.

Lots of Grain but No Gain – Colleen Campbell

Research recently presented by the *University of Alberta* and *Parks Canada* relating to the *Canadian Pacific Railway* was narrow and failed to address the real challenge of railway/wildlife conflicts. How many elk, deer, wolves, coyotes, birds, squirrels etcetera are killed along the tracks in addition to bears? Yes, grain cars drop enough grain on the tracks though Banff and Yoho Parks to keep all our bears fat - no matter how good the berry season. But, because this grain has more calories and it is predictably available for many species, there are many other species killed along the tracks, whether mining for grain or just travelling. All are important and even a dead chipmunk or squirrel will attract other species to feed on the carcass, leaving each one at peril. When we put up the orange flags along the highway a few years ago, we were signaling deaths of everything from coyote and larger, in hotspots along the *Trans-Canada Highway*.

How does the rest of the county fare with rail kills? What about antelope and deer, cows and horses? The attention within the national parks is good, but should be a lens to show what happens along the entire length of rail, from the grain silos to the docks in each direction. It is disappointing that the research has been so busy drilling down to local details, that no one is talking about the bigger issues nor is there a strategy for partnerships in solving the problems.

Ministers Round Table

The federal Minister of Environment is required to consult Canadians on the performance the *Parks Canada Agency* every two years. The 2017 round table has recently wrapped up with BVN, [CPAWS](#) and other interested organizations submitting their perspectives and recommendations to the Minister. Anyone interested in reading these submissions and the summary of feedback recorded at the Calgary focus group session please contact info@bowvalleynaturalists.org.

High Elevation Species

As the 2017 observation season begins, *BVN* continues to get requests from researchers to access our database on observations of Marmots, Pikas, Goats and Ptarmigan. We ended up with 428 entries in 2016, which is about four to five percent down from the number of 2015 entries. We now have thousands of observations spread over seven years. We are hoping to get more observations from more people in more diverse locations throughout the *Central Rockies* and beyond – especially from locations and trails that are not commonly used. These observations will help make the database as robust as it can be. Please visit the [HELs web site](#), register as a contributor, and let's make 2017 our best year yet.

Like humans, most species want the easiest routes to follow. The longer a corridor, the wider it should be. Places where a corridor has steep slopes will push animals to the gentler terrain, effectively making the corridor narrower and reducing security of different species, different animals. Constant disturbance along one side such as a highway or residential development will also make a corridor effectively narrower.



Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*) in the Coast Range – an observation now residing in the *BVN HELs* data base. *Chuck Callahan photo.*

2016 Christmas Bird Count Results

The Day: Daytime high was -17°C and the low was -25°C with a windchill of -27°C . Surprisingly, the whining factor was very low - nearly everyone said they enjoyed their day outside. We had 83 participants, by far the most people and effort we've ever had. Overall, 120 hours were spent in the search, covering over 200 km on foot and 133 km by car. How that translated into results I'll get to later. But at least, we can't say we didn't try!

The Results: Altogether, 37 species of birds were counted on the day of the count, plus a great horned owl was seen during the Count week. Our lowest number of species is 36 (2008) since *BVN* started this count in 1975. A total 1854 individual birds were seen, which is definitely in the low category.

Where were the birds you ask? Well, probably like most of us, trying to stay warm and sheltered from the cold and wind. But there is more to it than that. At the potluck dinner, Mike McIvor reminded us that looking up at the spruce trees, you'll notice the lack of cones for the seed eaters, and hence the birds just aren't there.

Of course, the weather warmed up the next day and lots of people informed me of all the birds that were we missed! For example on Christmas Day, Keith Webb saw 2 snow buntings near Vermilion Lakes, hadn't been seen otherwise this time of year, so there are definitely more birds out there.

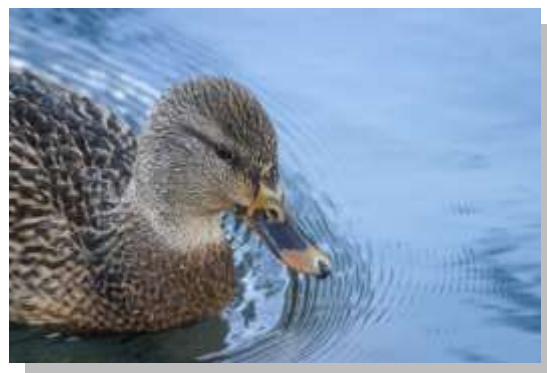
Thank you to everyone who participated in the count in Banff and Canmore. A special mention goes to Cyndi Smith and Peter Achuff, recently transplanted back to Canmore after a stint in the Waterton area, who did “double duty” and had routes in both Banff and Canmore. Also thanks to Jason Rogers for revamping the count recording sheet and to Doug McKown for producing route maps for the Banff areas just like Canmore has. Jeannette Fish and Abbie Swanson made sure the potluck dinner afterwards ran smoothly. Finally many thanks to Ethan Denton and his dad Neil, for all their efforts in coordinating the Canmore section of this count. Ethan also organized the first Kids CBC for the valley on the weekend before ours. According to him they had “13 people, and we saw 7 species amounting to 115 individuals in a single hour. The highlights were a Bald Eagle fly-by, 6 Common Redpolls and the kids were entranced by 75 Mallards.” They even enjoyed treats from JK Bakery and Le Chocolatier - nice start!

Here are this year’s results. You can see the older results on our website:

<http://www.bowvalleynaturalists.org/monitoring/bird-monitoring/birds-counts/>

2	Mallard	230
3	Common Goldeneye	11
4	Ruffed Grouse	1
5	Bald Eagle adult	2
6	hawk sp.	1
7	Wilson's (Common) Snipe	1
8	Rock (Dove) Pigeon	144
9	Great-horned Owl	CW
10	Northern Pygmy Owl	1
11	Downy Woodpecker	7
12	Hairy Woodpecker	1
13	Am. 3-Toed Woodpecker	10
14	woodpecker sp.	1
15	Northern Shrike	1
16	Merlin	1
17	Gray Jay	26
18	Steller's Jay	1
19	Blue Jay	7
20	Clark's Nutcracker	52
21	Black-billed Magpie	161
22	American Crow	2
23	Common Raven	319
24	Black-capped Chickadee	97
25	<i>Mountain Chickadee</i>	179
26	Boreal Chickadee	68
27	chickadee sp.	97

28	Red-breasted Nuthatch	25
29	White-breasted Nuthatch	12
30	Brown Creeper	9
31	American Dipper	25
32	Golden-crowned Kinglet	3
33	Townsend's Solitaire	5
34	Bohemian Waxwing	41
35	White-throated Sparrow	1
36	White-crowned Sparrow	1
37	Dark-eyed Junco	3
38	Song Sparrow	3
39	Pine Grosbeak	10
40	Common Redpoll	11
41	House Sparrow	288
42	TOTAL # SPECIES:	37
43	TOTAL # SPECIES INCLUDING SPs:	40



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) -
Ethan Denton Photo

Tracking the Amazing Flights of Migratory Birds – Cyndi Smith

The miniaturization of technology continues to allow researchers unprecedented insights into bird migration. The latest innovations are tiny radio transmitters, called nano-tags, which are small and light enough to use with the smallest animals, such as hummingbirds, and even dragonflies and butterflies. The smallest tags might have a battery life of only a couple of weeks. Each transmitter broadcasts a unique signal several times per minute, which are detected either by hand-held receivers, or more impressively, by semi-permanent automated receiver stations that scan for signals of animals that pass within range 24 hours a day. The station data is then transmitted to a central repository accessible to researchers. When results from a broad array of these stations are combined, animals can be tracked across thousands of kilometres.

Canada's very own *Motus Wildlife Tracking System* (Motus is Latin for "movement") is a world leader in this technology. *Motus* is a partnership of *Bird Studies Canada and Acadia University*, with research input from *Western University* and *The University of Guelph*, and other research partners depending on the project. The purpose of *Motus* is "to facilitate landscape-scale research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals." Among other things, researchers can find out where animals go, how fast they move between points (migration ecology) and how long they stay in an area (stopover ecology). As of September 2016, there is a network of over 320 receiving stations across the *Western Hemisphere*, and more being set up in Europe.

A fascinating example of this collaborative research comes from a project in Colombia, where 67 Swainson's (*Catharus ustulatus*) and Gray-cheeked (*Catharus minimus*) Thrushes were outfitted with nano-tags in the early spring of 2015. Prior to the birds northward journey, researchers collected real-time data on their movements locally in the *Andes* and *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain ranges*, which is very useful information for local conservation efforts. One of the Swainson's Thrushes, tagged on March 19th, remained at the shade-grown coffee plantation study site until April 14th. Then, a month later, on May 18th, it was detected flying by a receiving array at Chaplin Lake, Saskatchewan, a journey of nearly 6000 km in just 34 days, flying at least 175 km/day for a month. One of the Gray-cheeked Thrushes, detected on the north shore of *Lake Ontario*, had already travelled 3674 km in 13 days (280 km/day) and was probably not yet at its breeding site. An even more amazing record was of another Gray-cheeked Thrush that was detected in Indiana, 3200 km from its capture site in Colombia, just 3.3 days after it left ... 986 km/day ... what a tailwind!

As a bird bander, I find it humbling and a privilege when I hold any migratory bird in my hand, knowing that it has flown thousands of kilometres through many perils to return to exactly the same place I had captured it before, and sometimes the exact same net ... what amazing creatures! More information, with interactive maps, can be found at both the *Motus* website and at the [Bird Studies Canada](#) website.



Wildlife Corridor Basics: The Importance of Canmore – Colleen Campbell

Wildlife corridors have been discussed amongst politicians, developers, planners and scientists for several decades. While “science” should be primary, it is usually relegated to a lesser position as most of the dialogue becomes focused on ‘mitigation’ – a word that I now understand as “let’s pretend to make it work”. An effective corridor provides cover, forage and sanctuary from human encroachment—physical encroachment and invasive sounds. A wildlife corridor is not simply a passage, as one sees a corridor on the way from an elevator to a hotel room or dentist office. For wildlife, it is a (long) habitat patch where several key species find sufficient cover, resources and safety, using the route to move from one area of greater safety and abundance to another.

If a wildlife corridor does not feel safe, wildlife will resist using it. Though different species and individuals have different dispositions, we should be considering conditions for the most cautious and wary of each species that we intend and hope, will use a particular passage. Around *Canmore*, those species include large carnivores and ungulates. Like humans, most species want the easiest routes to follow. The longer a corridor, the wider it should be. Places where a corridor has steep slopes will push animals to the gentler terrain, effectively making the corridor narrower and reducing security of different species, different animals. Constant disturbance along one side such as a highway or residential development will also make a corridor effectively narrower.

The corridor above the *Three Sisters* lands stretches many kilometres. The 350 metres being suggested is too narrow. Corridor science suggests that longer passages must be consistently widened. The corridor along the south margins of *Canmore* should be a kilometre wide at minimum, and coupled with persistent messages to minimize presence of humans with dogs, bicycles, cameras, binoculars, etc. – to make it an area not used for human needs. If we establish a functional corridor that is generously wide then we are doing the right thing, we offer local wildlife of all species an opportunity to move to different parts of the landscape with relative ease. If we make it too narrow or too restrictive, we could be making an irreparable error that cannot be corrected.

The *Bow Valley* is a critical link in the entire north-south landscape of the *Yellowstone to Yukon corridor*. A long corridor, such as the one across the south side of the *Bow Valley* between *Canmore* and *Wind Valley*, should be consistently wide and without restrictive passages.



IMMIGRANTS? Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) observations have been frequent in the Bow valley in recent years. But this striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) observed on Vermilion Lakes Road in mid-January was an unexpected report. *Amar Athwal and M. Mcivor. Photos respectively.*

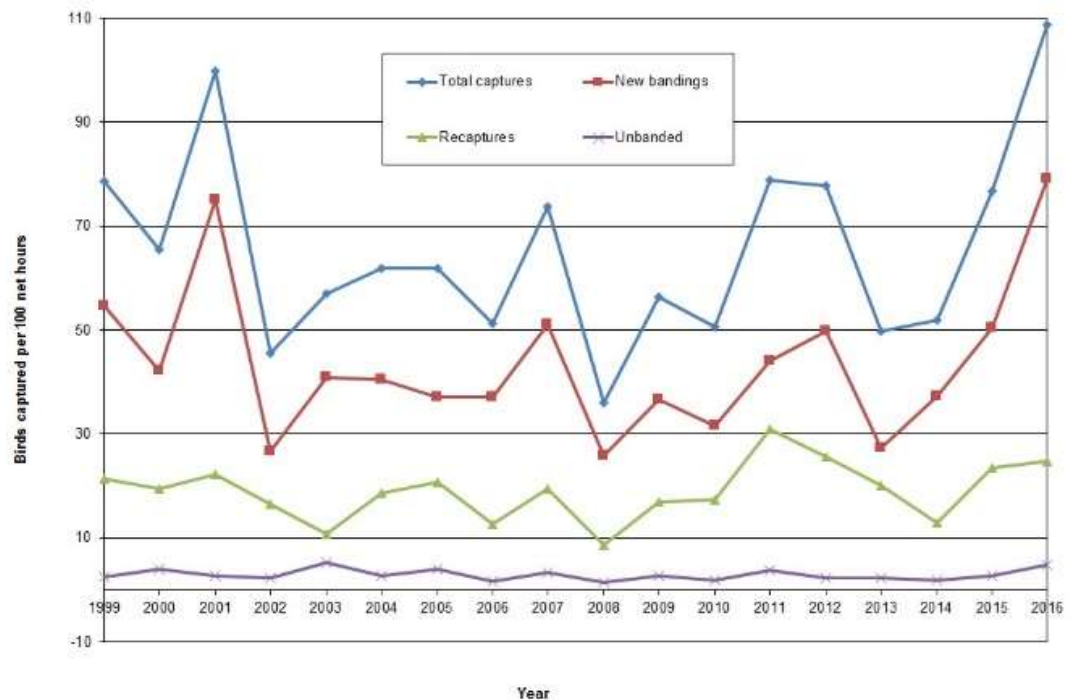
Ranger Creek Maps (1999-2016): A Special Accomplishment – Cyndi Smith

The *Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS)* program began in California in 1989, and currently has some 500 stations operating in North America (although some 1200 stations have operated for at least one year since then). Birders in Alberta were early adopters of this program, with the first station opening in Canada at Beaverhill Lake in that same year. It is the longest continuously running station (28 years) in the country. The second station opened near Saint Andrews, NS, in 1991, and operated for 24 years (1991-2014). The next two stations to open, in 1992, are still operating, near Kanata, ON (25 years) and in Calgary (Inglewood Bird Sanctuary; 24 years, as one year was missed). Two other long-operating stations at Beaverhill Lake Natural Area (opened in 1994 and 1996) ceased operation in 2015. This puts *Ranger Creek*, at 18 banding seasons, as the 5th longest running station in Alberta, and 7th longest in Canada. This is an impressive record!

Ranger Creek is also the longest running *MAPS* station, and only current one, in a national park in Canada. Two others stations operated for 10 years, in Mount Revelstoke (1993-2002) and Fundy (1997-2006) national parks. Two stations operated for seven years, one also in Fundy (2002-2006) and one in Gros Morne National Park (1999-2006).

Since 1999, we have captured a total of 4,021 birds at *Ranger Creek*, and banded 2,677 of these. A further 1,165 were recaptures of birds banded previously at the site, and 179 were released unbanded (accidentally or on purpose). A total of 62 species have been captured. Because the number of nets and hours that we operate varies somewhat each year, the figure below is standardized to the number of birds captured per 100 net hours. As shown in the figure, the number of new bandings has been on the increase for the last three years. Quite a few of those were hatch year birds, which is encouraging.

The success of this banding station relies on the strong commitment of the many volunteers who crawl out of bed in the middle of the night, as well as the supportive executive of the *Bow Valley Naturalists*, and the financial contribution of Parks Canada. The *BVN MAPS* website hosts a description of the methods employed, a gallery of photographs, and summary reports.



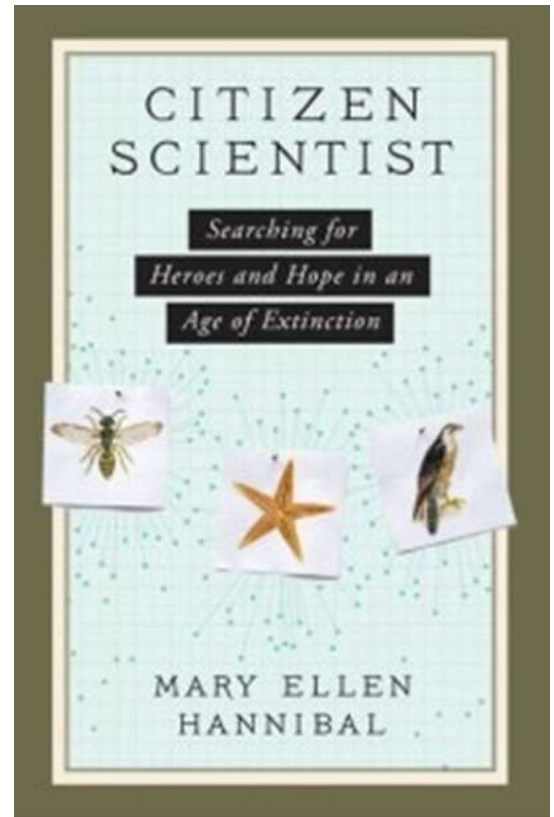
Book Review

Citizen Scientist: Searching for Heroes and Hope in the Age of Extinction

by Mary Ellen Hannibal

Speaking of Citizen Science projects, this is a good read available from the Banff Public Library / Marigold Library System. According to Stuart Pimm, Doris Duke Professor of Conservation Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University.

“Species are going extinct a thousand times faster than they should, our science tells us. But how do we know which, and where, any why, and above all what we can do about this crisis? No expensive technological machine counts biodiversity. Our knowledge comes globally, across decades, and from every land and sea, from the ‘citizen scientist.’ That’s you and me, our kids, grandkids, and friends, armed with a notebook or perhaps a smartphone, but with those priceless and essential attributes of passion and curiosity. This book tells their story brilliantly.”



MORE IMMIGRANTS? While relatively common in the Columbia Valley to the west of us River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) are much more rare in the Bow Valley. But this winter a number of otter observations were reported including this slide. *Dave Hunter photo*

CONTACTS

CANADA

Environment Minister

Catherine McKenna

Catherine.mckenna@park.gc.ca

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

NDP Environment Critic

Linda Duncan

Linda.Duncan.c1@parl.gc.ca

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

Opposition Environment Critic

Ed Fast

Ed.Fast@parl.gc.ca

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

Leader, Green Party

elizabeth.may@parl.gc.ca

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

Blake Richards MP

Richards.B@parl.gc.ca

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

CEO Parks Canada Agency

Daniel Watson

Daniel.Watson@pc.gc.ca

Dave McDonough

Superintendent, Banff Field Unit

Dave.McDonough@pc.gc.ca

Melanie Kwong

Superintendent, LLKY Field Unit

llyk.superintendent@pc.gc.ca

Alan Fehr

Superintendent, Jasper National Park

Alan.Fehr@pc.gc.ca

Mount Revelstoke/Glacier National Parks

P.O. Box 350

Revelstoke, BC, V0E 2S0

250-837-7500

[Email](#)

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Dominic LeBlanc

Dominic.LeBlanc@parl.gc.ca

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

ALBERTA

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

Minister Environment and Parks

Shannon Phillips

Legislature Office

208 Legislature Building

10800 - 97 Avenue

Edmonton, AB, T5K 2B6

Phone: 780.427.2391

Fax: 780.422.6259

lethbridge.west@assembly.ab.ca

MLA Banff-Cochrane

Cameron Westhead

Legislature Office

6th Floor, 9820 - 107 Street

Edmonton, AB, T5K 1E7

Phone: 780-638-1418

Fax: 780-415-0701

Constituency Office

102, 721 Main Street

P.O. Box 8650

Canmore, AB, T1W 0B9

Phone: 403-609-4509

Toll Free: 1-866-760-8281

Fax: 403-609-4513

banff.cochrane@assembly.ab.ca