



# FALL 2017 NEWSLETTER

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BVN's 2017- 2018 evening speaker series begins on October 24th. Admission is free. Donations at the door. Mark your calendar and join us on the [dates below](#).

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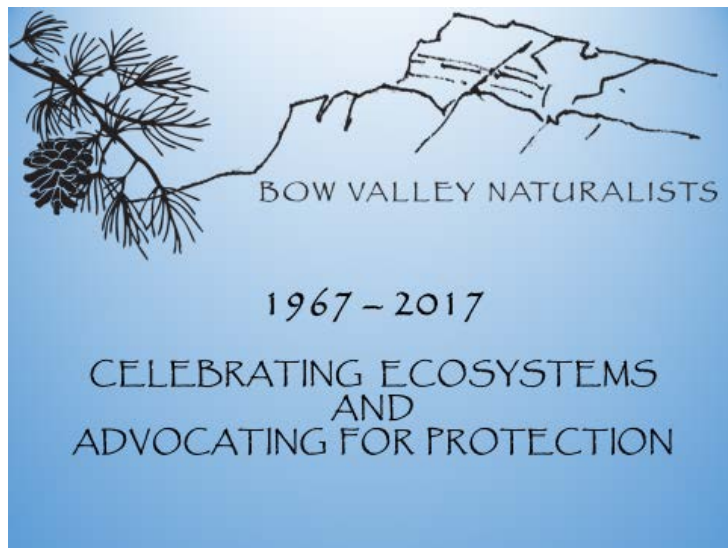
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### LET THEM KNOW YOUR MIND...

[Contact information](#) for letting politicians, governments and land managers know what you're thinking. Give credit where credit is due and remind them that they work for you.

# PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

## 2017 EVENING PROGRAM SCHEDULE AND OTHER EVENTS

Our program of free presentations occurs on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month at the Banff Seniors Centre starting at 7:30 pm. Watch the "[Events](#)" tab on the BVN web site for the beautiful posters advertising these special social and informative evenings!

### October 24

Bow Valley Naturalists' first program of the 2017-2018 fall season will be on Tuesday, October 24, when Cliff White will present "The Buffalo's Great Heartbeat: Historical Ecology of Bison in Western North America". As usual, it will be at 7 pm at the Banff Seniors Centre and free admission. [Details](#)

### October 21

This will be opening night for the museum's fall exhibits, including the artwork of BVN's own Colleen Campbell's, titled: "Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bears: Each One is Sacred". [Details](#)

### October 16

BVN hopes everyone has marked municipal elections on Monday, October 16 on their calendars. There are links below to each community's election page, including information on candidates and forums. [Banff](#) [Canmore](#) [Exshaw](#)


Visit [Canmore Commons](#) for a series of questions for candidates on development and the environment.

### November 28

BVN's evening program at the Banff Seniors Center will feature Alberta Environment and Parks Ecologist John Paczkowski with a research update on human use in the wildlife corridors surrounding Canmore.

### Winter 2018

In the new year we look forward to Jed Cochrane, Fire and Vegetation Specialist for the Lake Louise Yoho Kootenay Field Unit, joining us for a presentation the Verdant Creek fire. Dr. Tony Clevenger will also drop in to give a wolverine research update from his work in the Flathead region of BC and Southern Alberta. Save the evenings of the fourth Tuesday of the month from January to April and watch for details of these and other BVN evening programs.



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**THE BUFFALO'S GREAT HEARTBEAT:**  
Historical Ecology of Bison in Western North America

TUESDAY OCTOBER 24 • 7:30 P.M. • BANFF SENIORS CENTRE  
FREE ADMISSION • EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

Dr. Cliff White, a former Parks Canada scientist based in Banff National Park, will describe how researchers from many disciplines are learning the pattern of historic bison movements, the ways bison influenced both natural and human communities, and how parks can use this knowledge to restore ecological integrity to mountain and foothill landscapes. The talk will include an update on Parks Canada's recent re-introduction of a small bison herd in to their traditional habitat of the Panther Valley in Banff National Park.

# NEWS AND ISSUES

## JASPER BIKE TRAIL *Reg Bunyan*

Parks Canada advises that 1st Nations consultation and the environmental assessment for the proposed Icefields bike trail is still ongoing. More cryptically, they have advised us that there is “no longer a completion date for this work”. Whatever that means???

Part of the initial rush and lack of consultation on the proposed trail was supposedly driven by the need to commence construction by the spring of 2018, in order to be able tap into infrastructure spending. Now, given the time still needed for the completion of the environmental assessment process, and tendering contracts, we strongly suspect that Parks Canada will not be able to make a spring deadline.

Parks Canada does not have a sufficiently large capital budget to fund a project of this magnitude internally, leaving us wondering whether the “no timeline” is a face saving gesture, given the blowback on the project or whether the project will be floated again in a new Park Management Plan.

## A VIEW FROM THE RED CHAIRS *Peter Duck*

Across Canada one can find red plastic seats offering great views of our natural heritage while the sensitive vegetation around them is destroyed. One need go no farther than the Mount Norquay Viewpoint in Banff National Park to see how these chairs are associated with harm to adjacent vegetation. Most disheartening is the location of the chairs on top Tunnel Mountain. The red Chairs bolted to the mountain there are complemented by interpretive signs asking visitors to please be careful of the sensitive Limber Pines (*Pinus flexilis*) and assures them that parks Canada is committed to protecting this trees species through “ongoing research and monitoring”. One little, struggling, Limber Pine was unfortunate enough to find itself right in the middle of the view from the red chairs. As it has slowly died over the last few years of ongoing research and monitoring its neighbours have continued to struggle to derive sustenance from an area of thin, dry substrate being churned up by people attracted to the vicinity of the red chairs.



Limber Pine is designated as “endangered” by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and by the Province of Alberta.

Waterton Lakes National Park has included Limber Pine in that park’s proposed multi-species action plan for species at risk. Yet, Limber Pine is not included in the corresponding action plan for Banff National Park. Does this omission explain the continued degradation of endangered species habitat atop Tunnel Mountain?

## THE RETURN OF SCIENCE?

In recent years many Canadians have worried about the muzzling of independent science in Canada. Perhaps times have now changed with the announcement that Canada now has a Chief Science Advisor. We hope the Prime Minister’s recent aspirations for a culture of scientific excellence trickle down to decisions affecting our Central Rockies ecosystems:

*“We have taken great strides to fulfill our promise to restore science as a pillar of government decision-*

*making. Today, we took another big step forward by announcing Dr. Mona Nemer as our Chief Science Advisor. Dr. Nemer brings a wealth of expertise to the role. Her advice will be invaluable and inform decisions made at the highest levels. I look forward to working with her to promote a culture of scientific excellence in Canada.” - The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada*

## **50 YEARS AND COUNTING**

It was great to see so many friends last April as we held our open house at the Whyte Museum to mark BVN's 50 years of education and ecosystem advocacy in the Bow Valley. Thanks to Natalie and the staff at the Whyte who have taken such good care of our archives and who made that special evening possible. Some photos of the event are included below to extend the glow of that evening and let the last 50 years continue in our hearts as we continue into the next 50 years. If anyone is interested in the slide presentation from our 50<sup>th</sup> celebration please contact us at [bvn@bowvalleynaturalists.org](mailto:bvn@bowvalleynaturalists.org). Not only is this timeline a fun trip down memory lane, it is a good reminder of 50 years of issues up and down the Bow Valley. It puts many of the current environmental debates and decisions from ski area plans to Canmore Corridors and Yamnuska heliports into context and reminds us that protecting the special places and ecosystems of this valley is very much a work in progress.

# **OF WILD THINGS**

## **HIGH ELEVATION SPECIES UPDATE**

There still almost three months left in the 2017 observation season. We have about 320 records so far ranging in the Rockies from above Azure Lake in central Jasper Park in the north to Lineham Lakes of Waterton National Park in the south. The most westerly observation comes from the Welsh Creek area of the Columbia Mountains. We are hoping to get more observations from more people in more diverse locations throughout the Central Rockies and beyond - especially those locations that are not the most commonly used trails. Please visit the [HELs web site](#), register as a contributor and let's keep this monitoring project going.

*Contributors are reminded to include a verbal identification of their location in the comment box in addition to locating a pin so that we can be sure the location is correct.*

## **2017 MAY SPECIES COUNT** *Brenda Bunn*

The 41st annual May Species Count of plants in flower in the Banff area was conducted on Sunday, May 28th by members of the Bow Valley Naturalists.

This year's count day was a beautiful day, up to 25°C, whereas in 2016 it was a cloudy day only up to 12°C. Yet the number of flowering plants found this year was 86, far fewer than the 125 that were found in 2016. At first that seems strange, especially with this very hot, dry summer, but the spring of 2016 was warmer and warmer earlier, than 2017, which seemed a much more "normal" spring. This is a great demonstration of what can be learned from a survey that is recorded in a standard way and in the same areas from year to year. This information, collected province wide, is helping us understand how plants respond to local and regional climatic variation. Information for each year of the May Species Count going back to 2006 can be found on the [Nature Alberta web site](#).

## **SPECIES AT RISK UPDATE** *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. Since the spring 2016 BVN newsletter, COSEWIC met in Ottawa (November 2016) and Whitehorse, YK (April 2017). The list of species in danger of becoming extinct or already



extinct or no longer living in the wilds of Canada steadily increases and currently sits at 751. Of interest to the Bow Valley, the local population of Westslope Cutthroat Trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) was confirmed as being Threatened (Nov 2016) while Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) and Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*), which are occasionally sighted in the local area, were both assessed as Special Concern (April 2017). Results from both these meetings, which saw another Canadian wildlife species being declared Extinct, are available on the [COSEWIC](#) web site.

### **FANTASTIC FLYCATCHER** *Peter Duck*

BVN's 2017 Ranger Creek MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) project was once again a success for citizen science. While the 2017 captures per 100 net hours (69) was considerably lower than in 2016 (109 - our highest year ever), it is slightly above the long term average (66). At 39 species in 2017 we tied with 2001 for the highest diversity.

Of note, there was a female Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*), banded in 2009 at the Ranger Creek site and recaptured every year since, including this year. It is now tied for the 2nd oldest record in North America for that species. Our bander-in charge, Cyndi Smith, tells us this is amazing, really, because females usually have higher mortality risk. We will be watching closely next season to see if this bird returns.

Thanks to Cyndi and Ken Symington for offering their banding skills, Parks Canada for its continuing support and all the other volunteers who's dedication to the wee hours of their summer mornings help to keep this valuable long term monitoring project going year after year.



Peter Achuff, Cyndi Smith and Ken Symington discuss a recently banded bird at the Ranger Creek MAPS station.

### **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SWIFTS?** *Peter Duck*

Mid-morning on August 29 I gazed up from my work below Loder Peak to see a large number of birds passing in swirling circles low overhead. These birds had the unmistakable silhouette of Swifts. But so many and so low? They were swirling around and around but managing to drift into a southwest wind gusting between 20 and 40 kilometers per hour. My gaze returned to my work but curiosity drew my eyes back to the sky. Sure enough they were still there. No. They were farther up wind and had been replaced by another group swirling above my head. They too drifted further past me into the wind. Sure enough, a look northward showed another group approaching. This passing lasted for about half an hour. There was time to walk to my car and get my binoculars. The birds were large for what I know of Swifts and with a little care it was pretty clear that there was a gentle notch in some of the tails.

Were these endangered Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*)? Twenty-five to fifty of them? Nah, can't be. But what could it be? Jason Rogers who is very knowledgeable in these matters was politely skeptical. "Well, never say never. However, this would be a major portion of the estimated Alberta population" Jason's caution also arose from the understanding that most Swifts had likely not yet fledged at that time. At the Wild festival in Canmore last Saturday I chatted with Cliff Hansen who keeps track of all things bird out Exshaw way. Cliff has seen at least one similar event but with fewer birds. The rest of that Saturday was spent helping people watch the Golden Eagle migration above Canmore. This migration was unknown until BVN helped to document it in the early 1990s. With each Eagle that passed through our field of view I wondered what we really know about Black Swift migration.

# BOOK REVIEWS

## **OWL: A Year in the Life of North American Owls, Paul Bannick.**

Colleen Campbell

This is a book full of dramatic photos and well-written text about the owl species on this continent. The distinct environmental niche of each type of owl becomes clear and the reader should become convinced of the intrinsic value of each and every one. These graceful and powerful birds are elusive and elicit excitement when we see one in the wild. Because they hunt mostly at night, they may sit on a branch or at a nest with obliging calm during the day. It is books such as this, combining excellent images with informative and engaging text that encourages humans to respect wild animals.

## **The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places, Bernie Krause**

Heather Dempsey

I'm the first to admit I don't have great hearing. Mike McIvor likes to remind me that I can't hear a golden crowned kinglet singing its heart out right next to me. So with my bad ears, I love a good read about sounds. Bernie Krause has devoted many decades to recording sounds, first in the music industry, then as a natural sound recording producer. Now he's known as a foremost sound ecologist, having documented soundscapes around the world. His well-penned descriptions of recording experiences are at times terrifying, other times joyful and musical. He reveals the music in nature and nature as the source of all music. A bonus for this book is the website ([www.the thegreatanimalorchestra.com](http://www.thegreatanimalorchestra.com)) that goes with it and to click and hear what Krause is talking about. The final paragraph in the book sums up the book nicely and why we need to listen to the world more closely.

*"In the end, before the forest echoes die, we may want to step back for a moment, and listen very carefully to the chorus of the natural world, where rivers of sound flow from crickets, the tiniest frog, whirring insects, wrens, condors, cheetahs, wolves - and us. The whisper of every leaf and creature implores us to love and care for the fragile tapestry of the biophony, which - after all - was the first music our species heard. Those messages told us that we weren't separate but rather essential parts of a single fragile biological system, voices in an orchestra of many, with no more important cause than the celebration of life."*







# CONTACTS

(Please let us know if you find any of these contacts need to be updated)

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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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