

FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS

IN THIS ISSUE

Select the titles that interest you...

BVN PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

BVN's evening speaker series continues on Tuesday October 22, 2019. Admission is free. Donations at the door. Mark your calendar and join us for conversation and natural history presentations.

REMEMBERING

A Tip of Lens and Thank You Michael

NEWS AND ISSUES

E-Bikes

Lake Louise Ski Resort

Norquay Gondola and Parking Lots

Election Thought

OF WILD THINGS

Fire and Vegetation Update

2019 Christmas Bird Count and Potluck

Contribute To Research

WHAT MEMBERS ARE READING

Birding Mysteries ... Of The Criminal Kind

Secret Life of Beavers

WHO DO YOU CALL?

LET THEM KNOW YOUR MIND...



Another great fall for fungi! This crystal-like fungus was found along the Sherbrooke Lake trail in Yoho National Park. Species? As always, we encourage readers to send in their thoughts on identification to share with other readers. SELECT the photo to see BVN's Mushroom Primer.

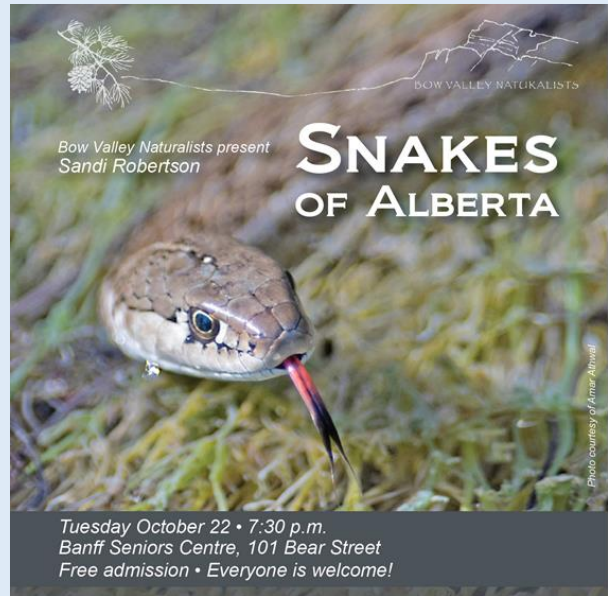
ECOSYSTEM EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY
BOWVALLEYNATURALISTS.ORG
1967-2019

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Our October to April program of free natural history presentations occurs on the 4th Tuesday of every month at the Banff Seniors Centre starting at 7:30 pm. Watch the “Events” tab on the BVN website for updates and the beautiful posters advertising these special social and informative evenings. Admission is free. Donations at the door. Save the dates below and join us...

October 22,
Sandi Robertson: Snakes of Alberta

Snakes are magnificent creatures, but sadly they are misunderstood and despised by most people. The majority of Albertans do not realize the diversity of snakes we have in the province or the ecosystem roles they play. The presentation will introduce you to the snakes of Alberta, their unique traits, the threats they face, their role in the environment, current conservation work and hopefully foster appreciation for these beautiful animals. Sandi is a wildlife biologist with Alberta Environment and Parks based in Medicine Hat.



November 26 - Shari Fox Gearheard: Meaning of Ice

January 28 - Masaki Hayashi: Glaciers of O'hara and Beyond

February 25 - Mark Hebblewhite: Elk and wolf Research

March 24 - Kathren Ruckstuhl: Sheep Research in the Sheep River Valley

April 28 - Robert Barklay: Bats

REMEMBERING

BVN offers thanks and a tip of the lens in remembering Michael Shuster who recently passed away. Michael was a great friend of nature and BVN, was a welcoming face at our evening programs and occasionally took the podium to share his photography with us. In addition to sharing photographs for the newsletter Michael showed great patience in bringing BVN's flower sniffers into the digital age by using his IT skills to launch and maintain our first website. He was a regular participant in the Christmas Bird Count and potluck and his smile and contributions will be missed.



Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*).
Michael Shuster photo, BVN Newsletter Fall 2014.

NEWS AND ISSUES

Members are encouraged to follow these topics and wherever possible speak up to land managers about protecting ecosystems.

E-BIKES

Banff National Park's decision to remove e-bike use from wilderness areas until there is further evaluation and monitoring is welcomed by BVN. While recognizing that e-bikes are very popular for a variety of reasons their addition to the expanding mix of human activities in protected areas requires careful consideration. Their greater speed, range and relative silence is likely to lead to increased visitor and wildlife conflicts, degradation of wilderness values, and add more stress into an already struggling ecosystem. They are a form of motorized access that is inconsistent with Parks Canada's policy of not permitting motorized access in wilderness areas. This increased ease of access shrinks wilderness areas, which are vitally important for sensitive species such as wolverines and grizzly bears.

The use of e-bikes on selected hardened front-country trails where there is less potential for wildlife conflict and in a manner that may reduce vehicular parking and traffic congestion can be welcome. Future decisions on e-bike use must be viewed in the context of the Park management planning process that is underway, be consistent with a future visitor management strategy and be consistent with Parks Canada's own management objectives in the context of ecological integrity.

LAKE LOUISE SKI AREA LONG RANGE PLAN

The Parks Canada Agency (PCA) continues to promote that, in the Lake Louise Ski Area Long Range Plan (LRP), an expansion of the ski area footprint will result in a net environmental gain. BVN sees no evidence to support this position. The Agency continues to ignore input from the public, scientists and other experts who have pointed out the flaws in this argument suggesting that commercial interests are placed ahead of protecting park ecosystems.

PCA's simplistic "ecological benefit yardstick" that measures lease hectares given up vs lease hectares treats all land as ecologically equal. Swapping poor or difficult to develop terrain for new ski terrain primarily benefits the lessee, does not necessarily accrue any ecological benefits and may even create a net ecological loss. Although there are green elements to the plan, the majority of these benefits will be offset by the greatly increased human use, increased motor vehicle traffic through wildlife corridors, a larger developed footprint, more water demands and the amoeba-like intrusion of the lease into Declared Wilderness.

NORQUAY GONDOLAS AND PARKING LOTS

BVN also continues to be frustrated with the proposals for parking in, and a gondola from, Banff Townsite to Mt. Norquay. These proposals are questionable in the context of Mount Norquay planning and are having significant influence on planning in the Town of Banff. While they are promoted to be a solution to Banff's transportation woes they are proceeding in the absence of any comprehensive regional transportation plan. What opportunities are being lost to these quick fixes? What alternatives have been overlooked? The construction of the new parking lot east of the train station this spring came at the cost of the destruction of a patch of mature forest and cutting a road through the rare sand dunes of Glacial Lake Vermilion. BVN believes that building more parking lots is not a good way to discourage private vehicles. We also believe that there are much wider ecosystem planning and protection concerns involved than the Norquay wildlife corridor. It was heartening to read that the Parks Canada Agency recognizes that "the proposal is inconsistent with specific statutory requirements and with key long-standing policies regarding commercial development in Banff National Park." as reported in the

Globe and Mail last July 12. Hopefully more informed and critical thinking will be applied to this proposal in the coming months before more ecosystem components are lost.

ELECTION THOUGHT

Due to the nature of our first-past-the-post electoral system the last several years have seen environmental policy and legislation in Canada swing widely as political parties with a minority of votes gain a majority control of Parliament. The national election next week will start another chapter for the protection the environment in Canada. Let's hope the next Parliament better represents a majority of Canadians' votes and brings some policy stability so environmental advocates can better understand how and where to promote their interests. Voters are encouraged to review the party platforms, take time to vote and include ecosystem protection in their voting preferences.

OF WILD THINGS

BNP FIRE AND VEGETATION UPDATE

Banff National Park recently released its fire and vegetation newsletter for fall and winter 2019/20. This is a worthwhile read for updates on a variety of projects including the extensive and very visible clearing project on the west side of Sulphur Mountain. Also of note is a brief update on the introduction of a weevil species (*Rhinusa pilosa*) to control the invasive weed Yellow Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*). There seems to be confidence that this insect is very specific to this host and is not likely to spread. With all the attention being given to invasive species, naturalists will be keen to follow how this first introduction of a biological control agent in Banff National Park develops. Perhaps conspicuous by its absence in the newsletter is any reference to the status of Mountain Pine Beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) in the Park. With the beetle common in the Lower Bow Valley and moderate survival rates being reported, even after a very cold February last winter, this will be an interesting story to follow this season and incoming years. (See the previous article on this topic in the Winter 2019 newsletter.) Contact us for a copy of the newsletter.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

BVN's 44th annual Christmas bird count AND potluck will be held on Saturday, December 14th. The count is an excellent opportunity to spend the day looking for local birds and is traditionally followed by a potluck supper at the Banff Seniors Centre where results are compiled and stories exchanged about the day's activities. If you are interested in joining the count, experienced or beginner, member or not, contact the Bird Count Coordinator. Everyone is welcome at the potluck!



This White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) was banded at BVN's Ranger Creek monitoring station on June 26th this year. According to our records one could be seen again in the Christmas bird count. Will you join us at the potluck to celebrate the find? *Cyndi Smith photo.*

Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) are done throughout North America and in some tropical areas in Central America, northern South America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. The activity began over a century ago in the U.S. as a protest of the existing Christmas tradition in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and other animals in one day.

CONTRIBUTE TO RESEARCH WHILE SITTING AT YOUR COMPUTER

by Cyndi Smith

I think that most of us have heard of “crowdfunding,” where people raise small amounts of money from a large number of people for all sorts of projects, from new businesses to covering health care costs for a rare disease. “Crowdsourcing,” meanwhile, refers to getting work, information or opinions from a large number of people, over the internet, social media or smartphone apps, usually from volunteers. It is often called a “platform for people-powered research.”

As the days get shorter, you might want to consider contributing to a research project from the warmth of your home. The largest collection of projects can be found through Zooniverse, which is a collaboration between universities in the U.K., such as Oxford, and in the U.S., such as University of Minnesota, to provide an internet-based platform where individuals can help researchers with projects across many disciplines in the sciences and humanities. Projects are grouped under arts, biology, climate, history, language, literature, medicine, nature, physics, social science and space. Go to <https://www.zooniverse.org/> and click on one of the disciplines and a list of projects come up, then scroll your mouse over the project title and a brief description appears.

Under “Nature” many projects involve classifying trail camera photos, also called “camera traps.” These projects are from as close as Calgary (“Calgary Captured” features urban park wildlife) and as far as Africa or the Amazon (e.g., Amazoncam Tambopata). Another project was called “Plant Letters,” and requires reading through 19th century hand-written letters, looking for references to plant species, localities and the scientists who were recording them. How about “Measuring Giraffes” in the Masai Mara to monitor growth and survival rates? One bird-related project, “Nest Quest,” is from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and involves digitizing old handwritten nest data cards.

No previous experience is required for these projects (some have training modules even), and researchers check the results afterwards for accuracy. You can sign up for projects on the Zooniverse website. You can also sign up for an e-newsletter that will advise you of new projects.

And if you like looking at photographs of birds (who doesn't?), there's the “Merlin Vision” project to annotate photos from the Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab. By drawing a box around the target bird within a photo, you are helping to “train” and improve the accuracy of the ID tool used in the Merlin bird identification app. Go directly to <https://merlinvision.macaulaylibrary.org/about>.

WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE READING

BIRDING MYSTERIES ... OF THE CRIMINAL KIND

by Cyndi Smith

If you are a fan of murder mysteries, crime thrillers and police procedurals, but want relief from the well-written but disturbing “Nordic noir” books out of Scandinavia, you might want to consider these two series.

Canadian author Steve Burrows writes the “Birder Murder Mysteries,” which feature Domenic Jejeune, a Chief Inspector with the Norfolk Police in the U.K. I read the first book in the series, *A Siege of Bitterns*, as an e-book borrowed through the Canmore Public Library. Jejeune puts his birding skills to work to solve the murder of a local conservationist and arbiter of county bird lists. Other titles include *A Pitying of Doves*, *A Cast of Falcons*, *A Shimmer of Hummingbirds*, *A Tiding of Magpies*, and *A Dancing of Cranes* (set in Wood Buffalo National Park).

J.R. Ripley writes “A Bird Lover’s Mystery Book Series,” featuring Amy Simons, who opens a birders’ store in North Carolina. In the first book, *Die Die Birdie*, Simons has bought an old multi-story house in which the ground floor becomes the birding shop and her home, and she has inherited an irascible renter of the second-floor suite ... and then she finds a body in the attic, of course. She becomes an amateur detective to solve the murder and clear herself as a suspect, at odds with the local police. Examples of other titles in the lengthy series include: *To Kill a Hummingbird*, *How the Finch Stole Christmas*, and *Cardinal Sin*.

EAGER: THE SURPRISING, SECRET LIFE OF BEAVERS AND WHY THEY MATTER

Ben Goldfarb, 2018 *by Colleen Campbell*

I have been fascinated by beavers since summer trips into the backcountry east of Lac la Hache when I was a “single-digit” kid. Beaver activity was everywhere. I was amazed at how quickly they would construct a dam, very secretly when no one was watching. I had not yet learned that beaver prefer the nightshift. Occasionally seeing one was thrilling.

In 1975, the beaver was designated an emblem of Canada, our national animal. When you read *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, you will cheer that decision and likely thrill to evidence of beaver in our landscape wherever you encounter it.

A few weeks ago, while halfway through *Eager* I visited a friend on a ranch with a large beaver complex. On a crisp autumn morning, we launched two kayakers into the glassy water and enjoyed a quiet peaceful interlude, trespassing in the beaver family’s garden.

While drifting through channels and across ponds, scrutinized by a bald eagle perched on a snag, I marveled at the size of trees the beavers had taken down along the edge of the water and knew they were managing a never-ending construction project and that the work they do provides habitat for a complex of creatures: mammals, birds, amphibians, invertebrates and fish. I felt privileged to be in the middle of a small “beaverdom”.

Eager tells a story about how we nearly wiped out beavers in North America. Now, with serious effort to restore them in many areas of the continent critical habitat and large ecosystems are being restored. Equally important to providing habitat for many, beaver complexes are natural impediments to flooding, slowing the rush of water across the land when snow melts or storms drench the hills and beaver dams also raise local water tables, holding water within the soils rather than losing it to evaporation.

Read this book. It is about a lot more than beavers and their industrious nature. It is also about humans and our odd habit of abusing what we have and then lamenting what we have done. This book might stimulate or restore a sense of how wonderfully “intelligent” nature is and prompts us, if any is needed, to respect and protect what is around us.



Colleen Campbell Photo

WHO DO YOU CALL?

You may come across situations or observations that you want to tell the authorities about. We recommend you have these phone numbers handy. Remember, cell phone coverage is spotty in the mountains so take notes if you need to move on to make a call.

Ambulance, Fire Department, Police (RCMP): 911

Banff Dispatch: 403-762-4506 for Park-related emergency only (avalanche, forest fire, mountain rescue, etc.)

Banff Dispatch: 403-762-1470 for Park non-emergency (e.g. bear or large carnivore sightings, human-wildlife conflicts, injured animal, illegal park activities such as fire, camping, drones)

Kananaskis Emergency Services 403-591-7755 for emergencies, bear, cougar and problem wildlife sightings, illegal activities. This is also the number to report a poacher. If you wish to remain anonymous while reporting a crime, phone 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

CONTACTS

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

CANADA

You may send letters to Members of Parliament postage-free, by addressing them:
% House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Environment Minister
Catherine McKenna
catherine.McKenna@parl.gc.ca

Chief of Staff to Minister McKenna
Marlo Raynolds
marlo.raynolds@canada.ca

NDP Environment Critic
Alexandre Boulerice
Alexandre.Boulerice@parl.gc.ca

Opposition Environment Critic
Ed Fast
ed.Fast@parl.gc.ca

Leader, Green Party
elizabeth.may@parl.gc.ca

Blake Richards MP
blake.Richards@parl.gc.ca
Airdrie Constituency Office:
Blake@blakerichards.ca

Ron Hallman
CEO Parks Canada Agency
Parks Canada National Office
30 Victoria Street
Gatineau, Quebec, J8X 0B3
michael.Nadler@parl.gc.ca

Dave McDonough
Office of the Superintendent, Banff Field Unit
pc.directeurbanff-banffsuperintendent.pc@canada.ca

Rick Kubian
A/Superintendent, LLLKY Field Unit
llky.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, B.C. Canada V0E 2S0
250-837-7500
pc.mrg.information.pc@canada.ca

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Dominic LeBlanc
dominic.LeBlanc@parl.gc.ca

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
Jason Nixon
rimbey.RockyMountainhouse.Sundre@assembly.ab.ca

MLA Banff-Cochrane
Miranda Rosin
banff.Kananaskis@assembly.ab.ca