

WINTER 2020 NEWSLETTER

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS

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BVN's evening speaker series continues February 25, March 24 and April 28. Admission is free. Donations at the door. Mark your calendar and join us for conversation and natural history presentations.

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Our list of federal and provincial contacts is now posted on the [BVN website](#). Please go there to find addresses of those who are responsible for ecosystem protection. And let them know your mind...



Grey Fieldslug (*Deroceras reticulatum*) at the Cave and Basin thermal springs, 20 January 2020. Not your usual Christmas Bird Count contribution. See Dr. Lepitzki's article below. *D. Lepitzki photo.*

ECOSYSTEM EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

BOWVALLEYNATURALISTS.ORG

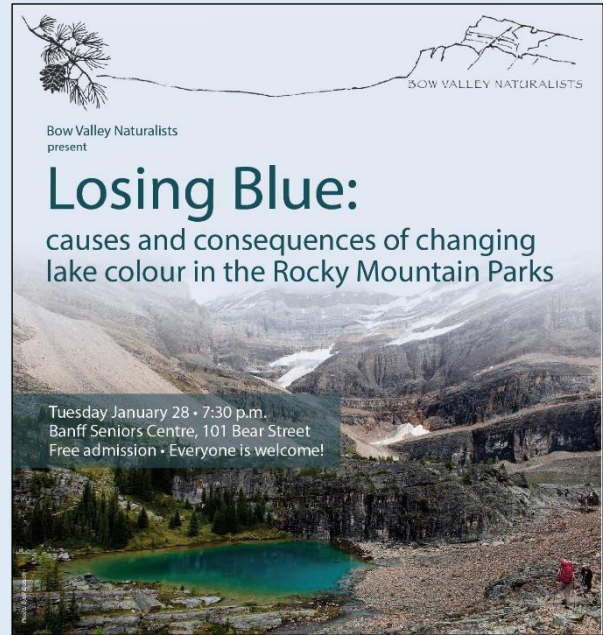
1967-2019

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...

January 28

The “exceptional natural beauty” of our local lakes are included in the official criteria that contribute to the World Heritage Site designation for the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks. Janet Fischer and Mark Olson have worked systematically over the last 13 years to build a unique, local and long-term data set to understand how and why lake transparency varies across time scales in response to rain events, melting glaciers, lengthening growing seasons and advancing tree lines. They also study the plankton that inhabits our mountain lakes. On January 28 they captivated our BVN program audience by explaining how changes in organic carbon and concentrations of glacial rock flour have influenced recent shifts in local mountain lake colour. They left their curious audience speculating about the future of the hues that attract us to our favourite mountain lakes and ponds.



February 25 - Mark Hebblewhite: Elk and Wolf Research

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

April 28 - Robert Barclay: Bats

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting for the Bow Valley Naturalists will be held as part of the evening program on Tuesday February 25th, 2020. Anyone wishing to join our volunteer Board and contribute to the vitality of the Bow Valley’s oldest environmental advocacy and education organization is welcomed to contact us. There is always lots to be done. Financial administration and IT skills are welcome!

NEWS AND ISSUES

Members are encouraged to follow these topics and take every opportunity to share your thoughts about the importance of protecting natural ecosystems with land managers.

TWO MAJOR STEPS FOR ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION

BVN is pleased to celebrate two announcements which we hope will result in more protection for mountain ecosystems.

The first announcement was the decision that the wilderness of Jumbo Valley in the Columbia Mountains west of Invermere, would be spared the development of resort facilities and an entirely new townsite to service them. The proposed resort location and surrounding 700 square kilometres will become an Indigenous Conserved and Protected Area connecting with the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy and protect the sacred Qat'muk lands of the Ktunaxa Nation. BVN congratulates all those who worked hard and long for this ecosystem protection.

BVN knows all too well that results like this do not come without many years of hard environmental advocacy work and, in this case literally, camping in the path of the machinery of ecosystem destruction. BVN salutes all those who worked decades for this protection. More details about Jumbo / Qat'muk may be found [here](#).

We also heard about Parks Canada's intention to stick to established policies and ski area development guidelines in deciding not to further consider a proposal to build a gondola and associated facilities that would extend from Banff townsite to the Mount Norquay ski area. This is the second time in a year, following the decision to not provide new land to the Sunshine ski resort for additional parking, that Parks Canada has decided to hold the line on ski areas expanding their commercial footprints in a national park.

BVN welcomes this commitment to sound ecological decision-making and assertion to limit commercial developments in a national park. We hope this will lead to Parks Canada taking action to protect the Mount Norquay slopes wildlife corridor by simply implementing restricted travel on the Norquay road. This approach makes more sense than using a massive commercial development with potential for all sorts of unintended negative cumulative effects to achieve token and localized ecosystem protection.

The developer is committed to their gondola concept and has indicated a revised proposal will be submitted. Like the last proposal which suggested the project could address Banff's parking problems, a revised version will likely try to position more commercial development as a solution to the problems created by commercial development.

In the meantime, BVN is grateful for the Parks Canada decision to reject the current proposal.

BANFF TOWNSITE PARKING

A public input workshop, the final part in Phase 1 of the Town of Banff's consultation on the Banff Parking Proposal took place on January 30. Visit [Banff Viewpoints](#) for details on the proposal and to follow developments related to this proposal. It will be very interesting to stay on top of parking

developments given the need to encourage public transit in the Park and the recent Parks Canada decision regarding the Norquay gondola proposal which included expanded parking opportunities.

TRAVEL ALBERTA'S SUSTAINED TOURISM GROWTH STRATEGY

The Alberta Government is in the process of developing a strategy to grow Alberta's visitor economy. Travel Alberta intends that the new 10-Year Tourism Strategy "will support the development and sustainability of the province's tourism industry and lay the foundation to help achieve the Government of Alberta's bold vision to grow tourism revenue to \$20 billion by 2030."

Environmental sustainability is one of 8 key themes that will be taken into consideration when building the new strategy. It is hard to believe that one can use the term environmental sustainability while proposing to double economic activity. Tourism already faces massive environmental challenges due a huge greenhouse gas footprint, stresses on protected ecosystems and the demand for natural resource consumption to build and operate new infrastructure demanded by such aggressive economic aspirations. Given the Alberta Government's desire to roll back minimum wage standards environmental sustainability may not be the only public value stressed by this growth strategy.

We encourage everyone who lives in the Bow Valley and is well aware of the stresses caused by perpetual growth of tourism to follow this planning process closely. Unfortunately, the recent public survey period closed on January 24th. You can follow the development this plan being developed by Travel Alberta and its industry partners on the [10 Year Tourism Strategy](#) website.

CIGARETTE BUTTS - AN ECO-HAZARD

Colleen Campbell

As debris, most people pay little attention to cigarette butts on the ground. However, based on annual worldwide consumption about 5.6 trillion (5,600,000,000,000) cigarette butts are cast to the ground or into water every year. A single mishandled butt might burn down a house or cause a wild fire. But what else do they do when carelessly tossed into our ecosystem?

Cumulatively, cigarette butts constitute an insidious, persistent and serious environmental hazard, everywhere. Filters degrade very slowly, mix in the sand on beaches, litter sidewalks and settle into the gutters and gardens of city streets. They float in the water of lakes, rivers and oceans. They wash easily into groundwater systems and natural waterways with wind and rain. As a smoker inhales, the filter collects toxins from the burning tobacco. These toxins — some natural to tobacco, some chemical — are then discarded with the filter. Toxins, including mercury, arsenic, lead and formaldehyde, are leached from the filters into natural systems, aggregating with pollutants from other sources including households, agriculture and industry. The Centre for Marine Conservation, which manages more than half a million volunteers for annual beach cleanups all over the world, added cigarette filters as a separate item on their data cards in 1990 and cigarette filters now top the list as the most common debris collected.



Nicotine, a toxic alkaloid, is used as an insecticide and a rat poison. Smelling of the last food the smoker ate, the toothpaste recently used or even the saliva in the smoker's mouth, used filters appeal to different animal species. Many small creatures can become ill and may die from ingesting cigarettes or cigarette butts.

Inherent and complicated toxicity is not the only issue. As the 12,000 cellulose acetate fibres in the core of each filter slowly break apart, they enter the ecosystem as micro-plastics, now a ubiquitous air and water hazard and a key part of international efforts to reduce single use plastics.

There is no program, no plan (as with bottles and plastic containers) to discourage the casual “flick to the ground”. What if cigarette packages included a small debris compartment? What if smokers could claim a rebate for salvaged filters to increase recycling opportunities already available for this waste? What if there were strategically located cigarette-only receptacles along our streets and trails? What if, amongst souvenir coffee mugs and t-shirts, pocket-ashtrays were also appealingly displayed? What if pocket ashtrays were given away as promotional favours at events? What if everyone, including all those smokers who do not litter, nicely asked those who “flick” to find an alternative way to get rid of their filters?

Some jurisdictions in California and Florida have made a point of civic pride to have streets with no cigarette litter. Can we do that, without regulations, just because enough of us care?

Ah, yes! Cigarette butts and used filters are small annoyances but a big environmental challenge.

OF WILD THINGS

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

The following table summarizes the results of the 44th BVN Christmas Bird Count held on Saturday, December 14th, 2019. The count was an excellent opportunity to spend a day of beautiful weather looking for local birds and was followed by the usual potluck supper at the Banff Seniors Centre. Thanks to all those who participated and especially Heather Dempsey and Ethan Denton for all the behind-the-scenes coordination so the rest of us could have fun. Check out these results and mark your calendar for Saturday, December 19 this year! The total number of species was 42 on the day of the count and 47 different species were recorded during the count week. A total of 2446 individual birds were counted by 99 observers. Observers travelled a total of 230 kilometers on foot during 123 “party hours.” By comparison the average number of species (1975 – 2019) is 43 and 2670 individuals. In 2018, 88 observers recorded 46 species and 5954 individual birds, 30 percent of these were Bohemian Waxwings.

Cliff Hansen reported that the BowKan Birders count was held on January 4, 2020. On that day 832 individual birds were counted, the seventh lowest for that count and well below the overall average of 1315. The species count of 27 was the second lowest and again well below the average of 35 species. Cliff plotted the total species for each of the 28 counts conducted for that area. The graph shows an increasing trend for both birds and more so for species from 1992 to 2007. From 2007 to our last count the trend for both is a decrease in numbers. It is difficult to comment on these patterns but Cliff says the long-term trend is worth watching.



Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) on the Bow River east of Exshaw on January 6, 2020. *Cliff Hansen photo*

BANFF-CANMORE 2019 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT							
SPECIES	#		SPECIES	#		SPECIES	#
Mallard	183		Pileated Woodpecker	3		Brown Creeper	7
Bufflehead	5		Woodpecker sp.	1		American Dipper	10
Common Goldeneye	4		Merlin	1		Golden-crowned Kinglet	1
Common Merganser	CW		Northern Shrike	1		Townsend's Solitaire	8
Ruffed Grouse	3		Canada Jay	55		Varied Thrush	CW
Spruce Grouse	1		Steller's Jay	2		European Starling	CW
Rock Pigeon	28		Blue Jay	21		Bohemian Waxwing	110
Wilson's Snipe	CW		Clark's Nutcracker	49		House Sparrow	413
Northern Goshawk	1		Black-billed Magpie	263		Pine Grosbeak	99
Bald Eagle adult	1		American Crow	2		Common Redpoll	3
Eagle species	1		Common Raven	455		White-winged Crossbill	8
Northern Pygmy Owl	1		Black-capped Chickadee	165		Snow Bunting	7
Am. Three-toed Woodpecker	25		Mountain Chickadee	319		Dark-eyed Junco	7
Black-backed Woodpecker	1		Boreal Chickadee	34		White-throated Sparrow	3
Downy Woodpecker	5		Chickadee Species	57		Song Sparrow	CW
Hairy Woodpecker	11		Red-breasted Nuthatch	53		Sparrow Species	1
Northern Flicker	1		White-breasted Nuthatch	14		Rusty Blackbird	2

HELIS IS BACK

After a long period of being off-line the BVN High Elevation Localized Species database is back in operation. We apologize for the delay and encourage you to catch-up with entering your 2019 observations and start adding new 2020 records. If you are new to this program for recording Goat, Marmot, Pika and Ptarmigan observations please visit the [HELIS website](#), register as an observer and start adding to our knowledge of these species!

Thanks to Jon Ball for wading into our cyber habitats and clearing our PHP perplexity.

CHRISTMAS SLUG COUNT! WHY NOT?

Dwayne Lepitzki

The results of the 2019 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will have been reported above. The low number of birds was one thing noticed by many of the groups, including Brenda and me. In fact, we saw almost as many slugs as we saw individual birds.

Slugs you ask? Yes, the areas immediately around Banff's thermal springs are oases of green surrounding by snow and ice during the annual CBC. Some unique life forms occupy these areas and some others, that would normally not be active during winter, can continue their warm-weather wanderings. We commonly see Grey Fieldslugs (*Deroceras reticulatum*) on the CBC and 2019 was no different. This western European species has been widely introduced across North America. It is likely the most serious plant pest on the continent because it eats live plant material. Ask any gardener!

How they arrived at the springs is a good question. They can be easily transported on ground sheets or the bottom of tents, in soil along with garden nursery plants, or even on building lumber. In September 2013, the Northwest Territories was added to their known Canadian range when a group of

malacologists (a.k.a. mollusc experts), including me, found them at Hay River. While easily transported by humans, Grey Fieldslug has not made it to all parts of Canada as they thankfully may still be absent from the Flathead region of southeastern British Columbia, where we didn't find them during the 2013 bioblitz. I wonder if any other CBC count circles have ever included slugs in their tally?

RAVEN CACHING FOOD DOWNTOWN

Ravens are always interesting entertainment. A BVN member recently reported seeing a Raven being rather particular about hiding a morsel of food in downtown Banff. It is well known that Ravens will cache food for future use. Perhaps less well known is their habit of spying on other Ravens in the act of hiding food in hopes of raiding the cache sometime later. Research has shown that these birds are capable of playing both sides of this game of avian piracy. While watching a neighbour hide food, Ravens in the area will apparently pretend not to watch. Conversely, lab tests have shown the hider will intentionally place food in locations that are not in any obvious line of sight.

Of course none of these skills may have helped in the incident recently reported. The treasure was hidden in a windrow of snow on the side of Banff Avenue which was likely due to be removed shortly thereafter. Unlike what we are hearing from some of the human inhabitants, our local Ravens may hope Town Council approves a lower budget for townsite snow removal.

BUGS AND DISEASES

What do ski areas, Whitebark Pine, Siberian Larch and Mountain Pine Beetle have in common along with advice about not eating slugs? These are all topics in the most recent newsletter of Alberta's forest health team - *Bugs and Diseases*. This newsletter is a fascinating read about the interactions among Alberta's forest ecosystem components from big trees on down to some of our smallest eco-elements such as fungi and insects. The December 2019 issue provides some MPB updates along with advice on eating native insects and such (avoid the slugs) and a note about the merits and possible complications of introducing a non-native larch species, Siberian Larch (*Ls, Larix sibirica Ledeb.*), to Alberta. And who from our area would think that a ski area would be awarded the descriptor "Whitebark Pine Friendly"? Well it happened in 2016!

When you are done with the delights offered in this BVN newsletter, [look up past issues of *Bugs and Diseases*](#). The August 2019 issue has an interesting note on Spruce Broom Rust or the "Witches Broom" (*Chrysomyxa arctostaphyli*) commonly seen in trees along our mountain roads and trails. Unfortunately, the most recent issue is not yet posted. [Send us a note](#) and we will forward a copy to you.

WHAT MEMBERS ARE READING

COLD SKIES by Thomas King
Colleen Campbell

Cold Skies, has all the "quirk" found in King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. Fiction that is funny, interesting, sometimes poignant, mostly plausible and it includes a few unresolved storylines that may thread into as-yet-untold *DreadfulWater* exploits. Protagonist, Thumps *DreadfulWater* has sadness in his past, a sense of the absurd and clever problem-solving skills. He is kind and patient and, in some situations, a little insecure.

The dialogue mimics the everyday chatter one might have with a friend, simultaneously zigzagging amongst two or three topics. The "uber-theme" is about murders related to leased land, water rights

and water conservation. Imbedded are other themes: relationships amongst the many interesting characters, the apparent interest everyone seems to have about Thumps life, cars (old, new, rented), a bit about fashion, healthy diet for a diabetic, and, though the story takes place in Montana, there are many clever references to Canada.

It is a good mystery with interesting and believable characters, several murders, shenanigans around land ownership, questions about water and water ownership, many different relationships amongst the characters. The story is told mostly by the folks who live in the small town of Chinook, Montana. The chapters are short, making this book easy to read nearly everywhere one might enjoy a distraction. This is the third of four Thumps DreadfulWater books. The first two, *DreadfulWater* and *The Red Power Murders*, were reissued in 2017. *Cold Skies* (2018) links back to Thumps earlier life as law-enforcement on the west coast and the last sentence cleverly leads to *A Matter of Malice* (2019).

The DreadfulWater mysteries are available in various formats through our local library system.

THE LOST WORDS by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris

Heather Dempsey

I'm a big fan of Robert Macfarlane's writings. His award-winning works on nature, place and people (*Mountains of the Mind*, *Landmarks* and, my favourite, *The Old Ways*) take you to faraway places, deep in time. I'm currently enjoying his latest work *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* which is marvelous.

But I want to talk about *The Lost Words*, as Macfarlane is not only a celebrated author and a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge but also a father of young children. *The Lost Words* is a collaboration with artist Jackie Morris as a bit of a protest. The catalyst was the Oxford Junior Dictionary's 2007 decision to cull words related to nature like "acorn", "heron", even "heather"! The OJD argued they weren't in use by children, and needed the space for more frequently used words such as "broadband" and "celebrity".

Warning: It's a hefty book, more coffee table sitter than doorstep - and it's literally spell-binding as its subtitle, *A Spell Book*. It's meant to be read aloud - by all ages. They are also lyrical acrostic poems. Though the book takes its inspiration from the English countryside, they've chose enough common species to please North American audiences as well. This book has also spawned more ways to enjoy the artwork and words through jigsaw puzzles, educational guides and now music in the form of the *Lost Songs Song Book* - a recording which is equally beautiful and inspiring. The book is available to borrow through Marigold library system or on order at Cafe Books and a quick web search using "lost word" reveals a wealth of related educational resources.



Now heron hauls himself into flight - early aviator, heavy freighter - and with steady wingbeats boasts his way through evening light to roost." (*The Lost Words, A Spell Book* © 2017).

Ivy

I am ivy, a real high-flyer.

Via bark and stone I scale tree and spire.

You call me ground-cover; I say sky-wire.

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).