

# SPRING / SUMMER 2024 NEWSLETTER

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS

CLICK A TITLE AND JUMP TO A TOPIC THAT INTERESTS YOU!

## BVN PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Recent Programs AND a Bonus Session

## NEWS AND ISSUES, UPDATES

Look closely - Articles *marked with an asterisk* provide opportunities to have your say about protecting ecosystems!

### Banff Railway Lands

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- Bow Lake Lodge Redevelopment
- \*Lake Louise Visitor Management Strategy
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- Studying Barn Swallows
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## MEMBERS ARE READING, WATCHING, AND LISTENING

## SHARE NATURE RESPONSIBLY

## WHO DO YOU CALL WHEN THINGS ARE AMISS?

## CONTACTS – We Know Who to Call

Please let land managers and planners know you want protection for ecosystems. Call them, write them a letter, or drop a note to journalists. If you need help finding contact information, drop us a note and we will help you send a message to the appropriate desk.



Western Tiger Swallow Tail (*Papilio rutulus*) in Banff townsite.  
Click-the-pic to see some of our other notes about wild things.  
*P. Duck Photo.*

## ECOSYSTEM EDUCATION & ADVOCACY

1967-2024

BOWVALLEYNATURALISTS.ORG

# PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

BVN presents programs on natural history and ecosystem management issues. Mark your calendar for 7:30 pm on the fourth Tuesday of every month from October to April. In December the usual presentation is replaced by the annual Christmas Bird Count and potluck supper, where you are also welcome. Video recordings of past programs are available on our [Public Programs](#) web page. Please be sure you are registered for our updates to receive notifications of programming information and to register for any online presentations.

## RECENT PROGRAMS

From Pikas to Grizzly Bears: Wildlife Population Trends in Banff National Park with Jesse Whittington.

Light Pollution and Terrestrial Wildlife: Research into Practice with Travis Longcore PhD.

Redeeming the Future: Canada In a Warmer World with Bob Sandford.

Early Life in our Rocks: Interpreting the Stromatolites of Dolomite Pass with Astrid Arts. Due to the small screen, you may wish to download the separate [slide deck](#) to read or use a split screen to follow along with Astrid's commentary.



There's life in them thar rocks! The stromatolites (foreground) of the Pika Formation in Dolomite Pass are spectacular evidence of life on our planet about 505 million years ago. *Astrid Arts photo.*

Coming Monday, July 15th at 8:00 pm MST

Gaming the Ecosystem: the Truth About Salvage Logging

Is salvage logging good for nature, communities and climate? While you wait for our evening program series to resume in the fall, register for this interesting discussion hosted by [Conservation North](#) about logging with five experts from B.C. and the U.S. Speakers include:

- Seraphine Munroe (Maiyoo Keyoh Society), strategic advisor for Dakelh Reconciliation initiatives.
- Karen Price, independent ecologist on unceded Witsuwit'en Territory.
- Diana Six, professor of forest entomology and pathology at the University of Montana.
- Phil Burton, Emeritus Professor - Department of Ecosystem Science and Management at the University of Northern British Columbia.
- Dominick A. DellaSala is Chief Scientist at Wild Heritage.

[REGISTER HERE.](#)

## NEWS AND ISSUES

### Banff Railway Lands ARP

BVN would like to thank all those who wrote letters and appeared in person to share their concerns about this project threatening the ecological integrity of Banff National Park. Next steps before the Banff Railway

Lands Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) can be implemented include a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the entire plan and then recommendations from Parks Canada to the Government of Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change on whether to proceed.

When Council approved the ARP, they made changes to the version first presented by Town administration. These changes included removing reference to a future gondola to Mt. Norquay. The plan now supports future multi-modal forms of mass transit according to recommendations of Parks Canada's expert advisory panel on moving people sustainably. However, the ARP does not propose an economic model that encourages mass transit according to those recommendations. Instead, it proposes more free parking in a wildlife corridor for private vehicles. We note that the ARP still states that "Bicycle parking will be located in visible, secure locations close to intermodal transfers such as shuttles, mass transit, and the gondola terminus." We hope this reference to a gondola terminus is a typo. Council also moved up the conservation area rehabilitation and restoration north of the railway tracks to the short-term phase of the plan, rather than in the long-term phase.

These changes are welcome but do not recognize most of the concerns BVN raised in our twenty-page submission to the ARP public hearing such as building a parking lot in a critical wildlife corridor or the proposed obliteration of one of the rarest landforms in the Park. This subtle wave formed landform provides a tangible connection to the shorelines of Glacial Lake Vermilion that were use by prehistoric indigenous peoples and demonstrate the lakeshore landform heritage on which the Town of Banff was established.

It is perplexing that the public were not presented with a range of alternative parking solutions which attempted to avoid harming a critical wildlife corridor and other valued ecosystem components. It would have been meaningful to consider alternative solutions, such as a multi-level parking facility outside of the wildlife corridor, before proposing yet more single level parking on undisturbed ground as a band-aid on a regional transportation challenge. Looking at alternatives would have been consistent with sound environmental planning and the recommendations of the Banff Bow Valley Study to apply precautionary principles with respect to ecosystem protection when considering any new developments and human activity.

*Our questions to Council* were not rhetorical questions. We will carry those concerns forward to the Parks Canada review process and perhaps the federal government will ensure those questions are addressed in a meaningful way with answers shared with the public.

[Town of Banff Railway Lands ARP Information page.](#)  
[Text of BVN's Verbal Railway Lands Presentation To Council](#)  
[Full BVN Submission to the Railway Lands ARP municipal public hearing.](#)

## **Banff Avenue Pedestrian & Shopping Mall**

Banff is already feeling the negative social, visitor experience, and ecosystem effects of over-tourism. Yet the Town Council is committed to converting the main street and other sections of road, to expanded outdoor pedestrian and shopping mall concepts. Along with these closures, more space is being devoted to commercial activity in addition to that currently allowed within in the established indoor commercial space cap. This closing of streets and associated parking opportunities is resulting in dispersing more vehicle traffic into surrounding residential areas during the busiest time of year. Meanwhile, in its new ARP, Council is proposing to Parks Canada that new, or replacement, parking must be developed in the undisturbed forested area just north of the railway tracks. There has been strong opposition from many residents to this approach but their concerns were sidelined while the Town website invited applications for another season of commercial sidewalk seating and outdoor merchandising.



Thanks to those who circulated, and those who signed, a petition to hold a plebiscite on the Town's decision to continue this road closure and commercial expansion, residents will have an opportunity vote on this issue. The YES or NO question to be asked is:

*“Do you support Banff Town Council’s decision to have a downtown pedestrian zone on Banff Avenue every summer, from the May Long Weekend to the Thanksgiving Long Weekend.”*

Note that this time frame is not just “summer” but covers almost half of the year from late spring to early fall. Also note the emphasis on describing this as a downtown “pedestrian” zone with no reference to whether the pedestrian zone also means adding more commercial space, as is currently the case. In addition to acknowledging serious traffic impacts on residents, voters must understand that a yes-vote is, based on the existing precedent, also a vote for the additional commercial land use in the townsite and more of the problems the community and local ecosystems are already struggling with due to over-tourism. Alternatively, one could interpret this question’s wording to make it clear that the Town seeks a pedestrian-only zone and additional commercial space is not on the plebiscite table. Are you confused? This pedestrian zone concept could benefit from a hard pause and serious re-think.



Is this Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) heading to the pedestrian zone as it skips past the late afternoon line of plastic and steel crossing the Bow River Bridge in Banff on June 8, 2024. P. Duck photo.

Plebiscite voting day is Monday, August 12 between 10 am and 8 pm at the townhall. Visit <https://banff.ca/vote> for information about voter eligibility and 3 opportunities for advance voting on July 13, 17 and 29. Eligible voters may request a Special Ballot if they are physically unable to attend a voting station or are away from the municipality for all of the advance votes and on Voting Day.

### **Banff Community Plan**

BVN continues to participate as the environmental sector representative on the Town of Banff Community Plan Advisory Committee. The review of the plan is entering its later stages and an opportunity for public comment on a draft of the revised community plan is likely in late fall or early winter. Please watch for this opportunity to arise or contact us if you would like a progress report. Information on the community plan review process may be found at <https://banffviewpoints.ca/communityplan>.

### **Bow Lake Lodge Redevelopment**

BVN recognizes that this is a unique site with aging historic buildings in need some site aesthetics and structural improvements. But we worry about the precedent for new construction of visitor accommodations and parking lots at this location. With a view for the long term, this project is likely representative of the tourism industry’s desire for continuing expansion of commercial facilities in national parks. Proposals such as this as well as the ongoing calls for new and expanded parking lots and visitor activity in natural habitats in, and adjacent to, Banff townsite, make it clear ongoing cumulative growth in visitation with associated infrastructure will continue into the future. These proposals seem to always occur in some of the most special ecosites in the Park. The Bow Lake wetlands ecosite is just one more special location under threat in Banff National Park. We hope Parks Canada will come to terms with the conflict between its policy mandate, which elevates human use, and its actual legal mandate not just to

maintain but to restore the integrity of the natural resources and processes as the first priority at this unique location.

### **Lake Louise Visitor Management Strategy – Have Your Say!**

While the visitor management issues in the Lake Louise area need attention and future management guidance, BVN's primary concern is Parks Canada's continued piecemeal approach to visitor use planning. Our view is that visitor use management needs to also be viewed through a wider landscape-level lens. When area visitation demand exceeds opportunity, the options are to either expand existing area opportunities or to directly, or indirectly, displace that visitation demand elsewhere. By not looking broadly at visitation and capacity issues throughout the entire park, Parks Canada runs the risk of resolving site specific problems and inadvertently creating visitation or ecological impacts elsewhere.

Examples close to home of the unforeseen consequences of piecemeal planning decisions include the parking impacts on the Town of Banff resulting from the seasonal Bow Valley Parkway motor vehicle restriction and traffic displacement into residential areas as a consequence of the Banff Avenue closure. And then there are the foreseen complications created by the tourism industry's desires to resolve crowding issues by intentionally displacing visitor activity into less crowded seasons or to locations that are not yet, but soon will be crowded. There-by ensuring crowding remains the status quo and tourism-ecosystem interface continually expands.

There are a number of interesting ideas proposed in the strategy and our hope is that these future planning decisions don't occur in a planning vacuum and that adequate thought is given to the potential impact of those decisions on other areas of the park.

Learn about the Visitor Use Management Plan for the Lake Louise Area and [Have Your Say Using This Link](#). Deadline for comments is July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

### **Canmore Region Trails Strategy**

The Government of Alberta is undertaking a multistakeholder consultation for developing a strategy to manage trails and trail use in the Canmore region. Like Banff, this area is also under the stress of over tourism and expanding trail use from residents and visitors. Key issues that need to be addressed include expanding development of undesignated trails, protection of wildlife corridors, whether the plan should be visitor/user oriented or should wildlife concerns be a priority, and the expanding use of e-bikes including those designed for use on rough terrain.

There is lots of information about this initiative on the [Canmore Area Trails Strategy](#) website including a survey that closes on July 22 as well as an opportunity to contribute to an interactive map. Please make ecosystem protection a priority in your contributions to this process.

### **The Plan for Alberta Parks**

The Government of Alberta is also gathering input to develop a new [Plan for Parks](#) to ensure their long-term sustainability. The survey for this planning process closes on August 18, 2024 and can be found at the above link along with some background information.



Kidney-leaved Violet (*Viola renifolia*). Note the subtle purple stripes Brenda mentions in her article on the May species count below. *Brenda Bunn Lepitzki photo.*

## **Jasper Visitor Management Strategy**

The first phase of engagement on visitor use management planning for Jasper National Park is now underway. This planning strategy is taking a less piecemeal approach than the isolated area plans in Banff National Park. A number of planning areas are being considered under a single planning initiative. Jasper National wants to understand your thoughts on challenges and opportunities with increasing visitation and its effects on ecosystems and is open to public comment until September 13, 2024. You can [complete a survey](#) or just send your thoughts to [opinion-jasper@pc.gc.ca](mailto:opinion-jasper@pc.gc.ca).

## **Lots of Good People Doing Good Work For Ecosystem Protection**

Learn about other important ecosystem protection topics from organizations that are also active in protecting the Bow Valley and surrounding region.

[Alberta Wilderness Association](#)

[Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society](#)

[Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative](#)

[Wildsight](#)

[Ecojustice](#)

## **DONATIONS & THANKS!**

A special thanks to the Paddy Mulloy Memorial Fund at the Banff Canmore Community Foundation. You can read about [Paddy Mulloy](#) and her values and contributions to our communities.

BVN is grateful for the numerous donations that allow us to do the things we do. Funds we receive pay for ongoing administrative expenses such as website subscription, support for our program series expenses, and MAPS operational expenses. These donations also allow us to pool funds to support other individuals, projects and organizations. All BVN's routine administrative tasks, including Board activities and preparing the newsletter, are done by volunteers. Please use the donation button at the bottom of our web pages if you wish to support the work we do.

## **WILD THINGS**

### **Please Press Record – Use Public Science Databases**

As the season progresses in your backyard or backcountry, please be sure to record your natural history observations on citizen science databases like iNaturalist and eBird. These databases are becoming important sources for researchers and environmental impact assessment practitioners. Even routine observations can hold important information like plant phenology, animal migration or breeding seasons. It is also fun to use the “Explore” functions on these sites to check up on wild things of interest to you.

### **Banff May Plant Count 2024 *Brenda Bunn Lepitzki***

The flower sniffers' hiking boots hit the ground running on the last full weekend of May. We diligently search for the return of familiar and sometimes unfamiliar plants eking out a living in the mountains, in all kinds of habitats at various elevations. Actually, we move quite slowly, as many of the early flowering plants are small and inconspicuous, with delicate flowers. The Kidney-leaved Violet (*Viola renifolia*) has tiny white flowers with pencil-thin purple stripes which appear very early in spring and are usually finished



by count time. Cool weather held them back, so we were treated to a great show. Other small plants, easy to miss if you're walking too fast and not looking carefully, are the green-flowered Northern False Toadflax (*Geocaulon lividum*), Blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia parvifolia*), and Fairy Candelabra (*Androsace septentrionalis*). A few plants quickly shoot up a bit taller and are hard to miss, such as the Cut-leaved Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*) and Bob Smith's Holy Moly! (*Arabis holboellii*).

Other plants that we usually see on warmer count years are, as expected, slow to develop this year. Baneberry, Small-leaved Pussytoes, and even weedy Black Medick were not yet in bud or only just starting to flower. Every year there is something different to witness, and that's why it is valuable to do these counts over a long period of time. BVN has participated since the inception of the May Species Counts in 1976.

There are annual variations in the response of plants to the spring weather, but the long-term trends of flowering times are what are really interesting, given long term changes in levels and timing of moisture, and temperatures. Of course, to be certain of what we "feel" is happening, the information needs to be run through some statistical tests to verify our theories. It sure seemed the last few years that everything was flowering two or three weeks early, but then a cool spring like this has us questioning our assumptions. Our Banff flowering plant data are submitted to Nature Alberta and the Alberta Native Plant Society, who make the information available to researchers or interested individuals. Plant counts are submitted on a province-wide spreadsheet, and are also submitted to [iNaturalist](#).



Golden Cordyalis (*Corydalis aurea*). Brenda Bunn Lepitzki photo.

As we see the plants, we're recording the degree of flowering, in 7 different stages. The average stage of flowering for that species in the entire area that has been searched is reported, not just for individual plants. The area represented stretches from Sunshine Road east to Carrot Creek, but not all of our survey areas are always covered every year. Reporting in future years may be separated, and done for each of the different areas within the Bow Valley count area, which will show more detail for plant communities in different habitats with different microclimates.

Of course, when we're out on the land, our eyes have to be looking up frequently too, as it's a busy time for elk, deer, sheep, and bears. Our slow movements and careful observing luckily have meant that, so far, we have had no interactions with larger animals, except those other humans that tromp carelessly through a patch of delicate plants in front of us!

A good indicator that we spend lots of time in spring in the great outdoors, besides dusty or muddy boots and smiles on our faces, is the tickly (no pun intended!) feeling of an eight-legged friend searching for a good spot for a meal. This year we found two Rocky Mountain Wood Ticks (*Dermacentor andersoni*) who had hitched a ride with us. They were duly captured and then released back into their habitat to find a different host to help them with their life cycle.



Few-seeded Draba (*Draba oligosperma*). Brenda Bunn Lepitzki photo.

I'm always pleasantly surprised as I tally up how many plant species we found flowering in May, even in cooler weather. Their number is usually well beyond my expectations. Perhaps it's because I've actually forced myself to really focus on the plants, instead of relegating them to the background of the larger landscape. These early spring flowering plants demonstrate a remarkable resilience and adaptability to variation in local weather conditions.

This year we found 72 flowering plants in the entire count area, a pretty good number considering the cool nights and lack of a spring heatwave. Last year's warm, dry May influenced many more plants to flower during the count period, resulting in 102 flowering plant species seen then. The 2024 BVN May Plant Count was a success, and is in the books. The final task is to enter the coded flowering stages for each species on a giant spreadsheet, and then to submit the information to Nature Alberta. But that sure isn't the end of our flower sniffing for the summer!

*Editor- Brenda and her helpers deserve a hearty thank you for keeping this long-term monitoring project running year after year.*

### **Barn Swallow Study**

Gina Calabrese and her team at the Safran Lab of the University of Colorado are studying migration and genetics in Barn Swallows to better understand their evolution and conservation. They are looking for sites in the Banff area as well as further out along Hwy 1 in both directions where Barn Swallows regularly nest. The most important sites are those in which a colony is nesting inside of a barn or other building, and where the property owner is known so that we can ask permission to sample the birds on their land. If you have Barn Swallows nesting in your barn or other structure, or have tips about such nesting sites, we would be very grateful if you would please contact [Gina.Calabrese@colorado.edu](mailto:Gina.Calabrese@colorado.edu).

### **Bird Banding History and a MAPS Gallery**

The first banding of a bird in Canada at Toronto in 1905 is officially designated as an event of national significance. Such events have been designated by Canada's government, on the advice of the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board as being defining actions, episodes, movements or experiences in Canadian history.

Locally, we are in the middle of another season of bird banding as part of the North American-wide Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship project (MAPS). We look forward to sharing a summary of the results of this long-term bird monitoring project in our fall or winter newsletter. In the meantime, enjoy this small gallery of close-up taken by photos by Cyndi Smith during recent banding sessions. In order of appearance: Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*), Tennessee Warbler (*Leiothlypis peregrina*), and Townsend's Warbler (*Setophaga townsendi*).







## MEMBERS READ, WATCH, AND LISTEN

If you have recommendations, fiction or non-fiction, that share science or perspectives of our natural world (see this section in previous BVN Newsletters) send them along with the author, title, year of publication and a sentence about what makes the suggestion interesting to you.

Beavers Stand Aside! Cyndi Smith alerted us to this fascinating [article about muskrats](#) in Hakai Magazine.

As glaciers disappear in the Rockies Canmore film maker and BVN Board member Leanne Alison has showed us we are we [Losing Blue](#) in her award-winning film. Are we exchanging blue for orange in the arctic? [Who saw this coming?](#)

[Ticks](#) – Since Brenda brought it up in her plant count article above, you may be interested in this CBC podcast with Janet Sperling, entomologist and the president of the Canadian Lyme Disease Foundation, as she answers questions about dodging ticks.

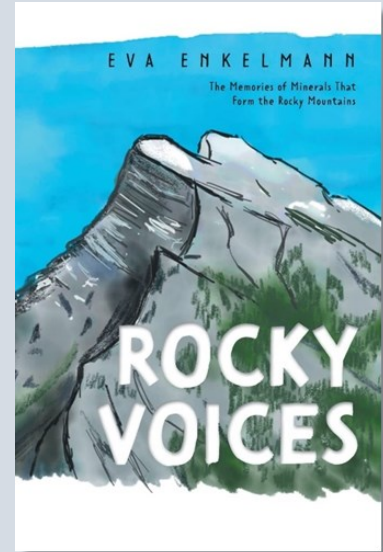
Nature Can't Run Without Parasites. What happens when they start to disappear? While you are on the topic of parasites and are possibly speculating about how this year's mosquito season will turn out, why read this article, also submitted by Brenda, on parasites and climate change.

**Rocky Voices: The Memories of Minerals That Form the Rocky Mountains by Eva Enkelmann**

Imagine if rocks could talk! What would they tell us about their life and feelings while you travel through the Rocky Mountains? *Rocky Voices: The Memories of Minerals That Form the Rocky Mountains* is a roadside geology book for all ages traveling through the Rocky Mountains. Unlike similar geology books, these twelve creatively written stories give ancient minerals a voice and capture the surprisingly adventurous, sometimes heartbreaking, and always entertaining truths of the minerals of the Rocky Mountains.

Featured personified minerals include Lucy Calcite, Ray Clay, Sir Charles Zircon, Emma Amphipora, Bridget Cement, and more. Each story shows the minerals' captivating perspectives of today's well-known destinations in the Rocky Mountains, such as Lake Louise, Banff, or Canmore. These factual stories are as educational as they are fun and mesmerizing.

Author Dr. Eva Enkelmann is a geology professor at the University of Calgary and passionate about sharing her knowledge about mountain building with the public. The book is illustrated by the author with images that show the location of each story and QR-codes that provide the reader with the driving direction to the destination. Visit these locations, have a picnic, and read a story about the fascinating processes of mountain building.



The book is available on online at Banff and Canmore Museum stores, or ask your local bookstore. [More information can be found here.](#)

**RESPONSIBLE NATURE WATCHING**

BVN cautions all readers to not use publicly accessible social media style applications to post the locations of sensitive natural features, plants or wildlife that will attract people to that location. It's good to know nature is out there but in these days of social media such sharing of sensitive information will put the nature we love at risk of being loved too much.

## 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.

For Emergencies such as Ambulance, Fire Department, Police (RCMP): 911

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

Banff Park **Non-emergency**: 403-762-1470, (bear or large carnivore sightings, human-wildlife conflicts, injured animal, illegal park activities such as fire, feeding wildlife, camping, drones etc.)

Kananaskis: Call 310-5263 for bear, cougar and problem wildlife sightings, illegal activities or to help report damage to public land, noise complaints and general land-related inquiries and information requests. To report a poacher, call 1-800-642-3800 or fill out an [on-line report](#). If you wish to remain anonymous while reporting a crime, phone 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).