

## IN THIS ISSUE

Select the titles and jump to topics that interest you.

### BVN PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

BVN is presenting our series of natural history programs online this fall and winter.

### NEWS AND ISSUES

Remembering Bob Smith  
Membership and Donations Notice  
Alberta Parks  
Three Sisters Wildlife Corridors  
Transportation, GHGs, Zero Growth  
and Ecological Integrity  
Train Horns in Banff  
Special Events in Banff - Thanks  
Grassy Mountain Mine  
Something Social to Ponder



Remembering Bob Smith. Mike and Diane McIvor Photo.

### OF WILD THINGS

Christmas Bird Count (and Deb's Poem)

### MEMBERS ARE READING WATCHING AND LISTENING

I Heard a Bird Sing  
A Collection of Interesting Connections Submitted by BVN Members

### WHO DO YOU CALL WHEN THINGS ARE AMISS?

### CONTACTS

Please click here to find contact information for those who are responsible for ecosystem protection and for reviewing projects that affect our ecosystems.

# COMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

BVN's series of free public presentations continues online until April. Check the dates for each program below. Watch the "[Events](#)" tab on the BVN website for details about how to register and find links to previous program recordings. Let's hope one day soon you will see a note that we gather in-person again. Until then...

## **The Meaning of Ice: People and Sea Ice in the Arctic - Shari Fox**

Tuesday January 26, 2021

Thanks Shari! A great talk we learned about culture, climate change and will never look at ice the same way. Everyone clicked off with lots to think about.

## **Annual General Meeting**

Thursday, February 18th, 2021 at 7:30 pm.

BVN will hold its annual general meeting on February 18 this year. This Virtual meeting will include a brief election of directors, presentation of annual financial statements and a review of accomplishments and activities over the past year. The formalities will be followed by a special showing of images by Amar Atwal. Members are encouraged to attend. Nominations to join the Board are welcomed or offers to assist the Board with its work will be accepted.

**PLEASE NOTE:** As a result of registering for this meeting you will receive a request to formally accept membership in the Bow Valley Naturalists Society. Acceptance of the membership invitation is not required for meeting attendance. However, this step is being taken verify membership credentials for voting procedures during the meeting. [REGISTER HERE.](#)

## **The Ya Ha Tinda Elk Herd: Long-term Insights into Predator-prey Ecology and Conservation - Mark Hebblewhite**

\*\*Wednesday, February 24, 2021 7:30 pm [REGISTER HERE](#)

The Ya Ha Tinda is one of Alberta's unique ecosystems, and home to some of the best habitat for Banff's wildlife such as wolves, elk, grizzly bears. Since 2001, Mark, his students, and collaborators have conducted what is now North America's longest running research project on elk, learning many new insights into how ungulates like elk make a living in the mountainous systems of western North America. Mark will highlight some of the most surprising and important results of this nearly 20-year research project, and illustrate how this research relates to conservation of woodland caribou and other ungulates and their carnivore predators around the world.

\*\*Note the **Wednesday** date for this program. We have moved from our regular Tuesday evening to avoid a conflict with a [virtual Town Hall](#) being held by Bow Valley Engage about development proposals on the Three Sisters lands.

## **Life on the Edge: Identifying Mountain Goat Habitat Hotspots in the High Alpine - Laura Kroesen**

Tuesday March 23, 2021 [REGISTER HERE](#)

Mountain goats are the original mountaineers eking out a living along cliff sides. These sure-footed climbers rarely venture far from the mountain-tops, so how do we understand mountain goat behaviour



when they are so hard to observe within their cliffy dwellings? Laura's research aims to predict high-value habitat hotspots to pinpoint foraging areas, movement corridors and bedding sites. This work will help land managers identify high value mountain goat habitat and the movement corridors that connect them.

**Stand By for Details About our April Program!**

Tuesday April 27, 2021 7:30 pm

**WATCH THIS SPACE**

## NEWS AND ISSUES

### Remembering Bob Smith

*Mike McIvor*

It was Monday morning January 3 when Diane and I heard the very sad news that Bob Smith, a wonderful person and a great friend for decades, had died the day before at the age of 94. His daughter Marjory Gibney phoned to let us know. And then a flood of memories came pouring in.

Bob was involved with the Bow Valley Naturalists from the earliest days and made some significant contributions. He and Mary, his wife of 61 years who died 6 years ago, introduced Diane and me and many others to the beautiful, diverse area at Mount Yamnuska. And because of the places he knew, we extended the range of our conservation interests in the Bow Valley well beyond the boundary of Banff National Park. Whether it was resisting the huge 3 Sisters development proposal or never-ending expansion of rock quarries or many other projects at Dead Man's Flats or in the Spray or Kananaskis he always stood up for the ecological integrity of the Bow Valley. It was home!

In 1973, the Alberta Environment Conservation Authority (ECA) held public hearings to consider Land Use and Resource Development in the Eastern Slopes. BVN participated and one of our primary recommendations was that the Yamnuska area be protected. In 1974, we decided we should produce some evidence to help substantiate our position, the result of which was our first publication: "Yamnuska: Introductory studies of a natural area with proposals for its protection and use".

Bob chaired the Study Committee for the project and some of us spent a great deal of time at the Yamnuska that year collecting information about its natural history. Our primary focus was on the vegetation with its richness and diversity as the key element in the push for protection. By the time we completed the work later that year the ECA already had released its final report that included a recommendation for establishment of the Yamnuska as a Provincial Park. But of course, this is Alberta, so it only took another 23 years for actual protective status to be put in place. We used to joke with Bob that if we had proposed a commercial development of some kind it probably would have taken only 23 days for the green light.

Many BVN members had the opportunity to explore the Yamnuska and other areas on hikes/ flower-smelling trips with Bob leading the way. He was extremely generous in sharing his knowledge and his delight in just being out in nature. Diane and I had the good fortune to accompany him to some of his



Bob and Mary Smith

favourite places in the Kananaskis Valley and in return we took him to some of our favourite places that he had not seen in the national park.

He also was passionate about photography and was happy to share his images along with stories about the places they were taken. He did some slide shows for BVN as well as other groups and in recent years he spent countless hours converting thousands of slides taken over many decades to digital images. Those photos provide an amazing legacy.



Mike McIvor Bob Smith. *D. McIvor Photo*

If you want to honour Bob we suggest you go for a walk - or many walks - and don't be in a hurry as you travel. Take your time to soak in the glorious landscapes and starting in the spring be sure to spend lots of time smelling the flowers.



Editor's Note: During BVN's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at the Whyte Museum in 2017 guests were asked to share their ideas for the future. We found a card left by Bob at the end of the evening and several stories in this newsletter speak to Bob's response:

*"The only 'idea' I have is: Keep going for another 100 years!"*

### **Membership and Donations Notice**

The BVN Board is asking all members to not pay their membership fees for 2021. After many years of boasting about how low our membership fee has been for decades, we are reconsidering our approach to membership. In order to give us time to think about how to approach membership fees in the future and as a thank you for staying with us in this confusing year, the Board has passed a motion that all members in good standing in 2020 shall remain so without paying the \$5.00 membership renewal fee for 2020.

Our donation button on the website is always there should our followers feel the need to support the Society's expenses and the causes to which it contributes.

BVN thanks everyone who supports us. We want to especially acknowledge that we receive several anonymous donations every year. Thank you for your generosity! It helps us to continue with all our objectives, especially advocacy work and our educational presentations.

## Our Alberta Parks

Naia Noyes-West

Thank you everyone for supporting the Defend Alberta Parks campaign. The Bow Valley had the highest concentration of signs in Alberta, and gave the Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) the confidence to expand this campaign to multiple communities. In December 2020, The Government of Alberta announced they will not be closing or delisting any of the Parks. Instead, they say they have established 170 partnerships for the Parks. This is good news and what we were aiming for. However, it is critical that WE KEEP THE SIGNS UP. The government has provided no information about the partnerships and major legislative changes are coming. CPAWS and AEN will propose next steps soon. For updates, please visit the [Defend Alberta Parks](#) website.

## Three Sisters Wildlife Corridors

BVN has followed this issue since the early 1990s and we encourage readers to stay engaged in efforts to protect the threat to ecosystem integrity this and other developments in the Town of Canmore pose. Please continue to show your support for Bow Valley ecosystems by reviewing [Y2Y's concerns](#) and sharing your own concerns with [TSMVP](#) and then share those concerns with the [Town of Canmore's elected officials](#).

We also draw our readers attention to [Bow Valley Engage](#) which is planning a virtual Town Hall meeting for Tuesday February 23 from 7 until 9 pm. This information night will help you learn more about the potential impacts of the Three Sister Mountain Village Development Proposal that is currently before Canmore Town Council. There will be short presentations from the panelists followed by an interactive question and answer session. BVN has moved our monthly program to Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> to allow our followers to take in the Town Hall event.



Mike McIvor, Peter Duck, John Kansas, and Bob Smith on a site visit to Wind Valley while preparing the BVN intervention in the first Three Sisters development hearings in 1991. *D. McIvor Photo*

## Transportation, GHGs, Zero Growth and Ecological Integrity

Banff National Park Net Zero 2035 describes itself as a grass roots, bottoms-up initiative helping to transform Banff into North America's first net-zero emissions community by 2035. The group's [website](#) states:

*"Banff is Canada's first national park. The nature of its existence is to show us all - the country, the world - what is possible."*

This is not quite what the National Parks Act or its dedication clause says. However, it is a welcome and admirable goal to try to address transportation issues while reducing the GHG emissions of our local economy. After all, in the absence of the now overdue Banff National Park Management Plan, which

might address environmental sustainability, it is important that the private sector address its climate change footprint without waiting for government to act.

But the paradigm of continued growth remains the elephant in the sustainability room. Whether you get many people to a national park with traditional levels, or with reduced levels, of emissions is still transporting the same growing number of people to the same location. This past summer showed how continued growth and other social factors can spread crowding from traditionally busy spaces to new spaces. This includes, for example, the sensitive Fenlands portion of the Cascade wildlife corridor as more people are directed to use that part of the Banff townsite to stage new activities or to address the symptoms of a transportation system under stress.

While environmentally sustainable transportation is an important piece of the puzzle, one must wonder if we might just end up finding new ways to squeeze more people into this landscape. The science of ecological economics recognizes that addressing efficiency alone does not address all the environmental or social effects caused by unlimited growth. Low emissions or not, growth cannot continue in a protected ecosystem with real ecological and social limitations. A comprehensive visitor growth management strategy for Banff National Park and adjacent lands that addresses the assumptions of growing human presence in our mountain ecosystem is a prerequisite to plans for sustainable transportation networks.

It never hurts to remind ourselves of the actual National Park Act dedication clause:

*“The national parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment, subject to this Act and the regulations, and the parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations”*

This is followed by Section 8 of the National Parks Act which includes this interpretation of “unimpaired”:

*“Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks.”*

There is no doubt that lower emissions can help. Let’s hope the Net Zero 2035 initiative can indeed show the world what it takes, what is possible, and what hard thoughtful planning needs to be done to understand the limits to growth that we need accept to maintain and restore Banff National Park, and other, ecosystems.

## **Train Horns in Banff**

There is a new campaign aimed at making the Banff area a little more hospitable to both people and wildlife. Jason Rogers, who coordinates the Banff Community Bird Walks, indicates that the walks are almost always interrupted by train horn noise. Jason explains it is a nuisance but say’s it’s also a community health issue and, as a growing body of research is showing, such noise has measurable effects on birds and other wildlife. This is small wonder, Jason explains, given that horns are used as bird deterrents in some places.

BVN is concerned about the long-term integrity of the wildlife corridor between the south side of the Trans-Canada Highway fence, up to and including the railway lands and those lands on the north side of the Town of Banff boundary. This is an important east-west wildlife

**Silence**  
**The CP Train Horn**

Support a Request to the  
Town of Banff to create a  
"Quiet Zone"

The number of CP trains traveling through  
the national park is increasing. Horns are  
unnecessarily intrusive and can impact  
our health!

Learn more and sign the petition  
[www.change.org/silencecpbanff](http://www.change.org/silencecpbanff)

contact  
[silentnightbanff@gmail.com](mailto:silentnightbanff@gmail.com)  
to get involved

movement corridor, which is slowly having its integrity whittled away by development (dog park, bus storage, expanded parking lots and increased human presence, proposals for a new gondola and transportation infrastructure). While we cannot turn the clock back, we feel it is important to continue to attempt to improve the effectiveness of this corridor.

Please consider signing the petition to quiet the trains by contacting [silentnightbanff@gmail.com](mailto:silentnightbanff@gmail.com).

### **Special Events in Banff – A Thankyou**

The Town of Banff is in the process of revising its special events policy. This review has been on the Town's work agenda for some time. In the fall BVN wrote a letter to Council asking for some more time to consider the proposal that was presented to Council. Council granted more time and Town administration subsequently invited BVN to meet and discuss our concerns. Following, and better informed by that meeting, BVN submitted a second letter articulating our concerns and offering a few recommendations that could be applied to special events in the townsite and to special events with impacts extending beyond the town's jurisdiction.

We thank the Town of Banff Council and Administration for their patience in delaying approval of the policy to consider BVN's concerns. Please contact BVN if you would like hear more about our perspective on special events.

### **Grassy Mountain Mine And The Eastern Slopes Policy**

Many Alberta environmental advocacy organizations believe that the Grassy Mountain Mine proposal, and others enabled by the current government's misdirected policy, threaten the ecological integrity of Alberta's Eastern Slopes and ecosystem connectivity in the Yellowstone to Yukon corridor that we have worked so hard to protect in Banff National Park and beyond over the last few decades. After submitting a letter to the provincial and federal government, BVN supports the Alberta government's recent token decision to stall some new coal extraction leases. However, it will be essential to keep speaking up to prevent the sale of our descendant's health and ecological heritage. You can get informed and find ways to support ecosystem protection from new coal development. The proceedings of the [Impact Assessment Agency of Canada are a good place to start](#). Also visit the [Alberta Environmental Network](#), [Alberta Wilderness Association](#), and the [Alberta Government](#). The Tyee has an [article on the credibility of provincial government information](#) about this topic. Please take every opportunity to tell decision makers you want ecosystems protected.

### **Something Social to Ponder**

*Colleen Campbell*

Social media is having a big impact on local trails. A few sites draw unofficial routes and post them and others crowd the parking lots and trail destinations. One hint that you should have "Plan B" is discovering that you must be creative to park your vehicle. That might be a good clue to go elsewhere. But where?

It is important to leave as little trace as possible in your wilderness travels: garbage (bag it), the crumbs of your lunch, random bits of a wrapper. Think of the wildlife who use the area. Everything - everything - you leave behind is an inarticulate language to wildlife and probably offensive to other people.

Informal human trails provide travel routes for some predators that they might otherwise ignore, sometimes giving them access to vulnerable species. Packing of the snow in random ski and snowshoe

trails disrupts subnivean populations of creatures by crushing their own travel routes, buried under the snow. Changing their winter habits may make it difficult to forage or to return to shelter.

One of the wonderful lessons I learned while doing wildlife field work was that no matter how often I walk or drive the same route, there is always something new to experience. The greatest pleasure is actually being outside, enjoying the weather, the scenery, the effort of moving about in different conditions, and knowing how special it is, even in a local park, in one's own garden.

When someone posts their "play of the day" take pleasure in their enjoyment. But carefully consider whether following in their footsteps is what best for nature. Go someplace that attracts you because you know what it will demand of you and your companions and what demands you are adding to that place. Knowing you have made a caring decision about how to enjoy the views, the sounds and the smells will help warm your toes, and your heart, at the end of the day.

Author Paul Salopek wrote these words, recently, after walking some 28,000 km around the world:

*"Tread lightly upon the Earth. Share what little you have with strangers. Scan the horizon for rain." Humans are stressing the planet. We do not want to kill it with industry. Playing in wilderness is a privilege. Treat it with kindness."*

## OF WILD THINGS

### **2020 Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count**

*Ethan Denton and Heather Dempsey*

First of all, we want to congratulate everyone who came out for an impressive Count. We beat our previous participant record, and for the first time in our count history we had over 100 people come out, so great job! This is especially impressive given the circumstances we were operating under, and reflects a growing interest in bird-watching since the pandemic hit.

In terms of birds, we were hampered by the heavy chinook winds which I'm sure all of you noticed on count day. Despite this, Canmore managed to add two species which had never been found on this count before - the celebrity Ring-necked Duck, and a Northern Saw-whet Owl found during count week. Other highlights include a late American Robin, Evening Grosbeaks, and a female Red-breasted Merganser in count week (December 16 - 22).

Banff highlights include the Virginia Rail, an immature Golden Eagle, Rusty Blackbird and 2 Hooded Mergansers. Counters also found Horned Grebes in count week, only the second time they have been found on the count.

It wasn't all rosy though. We missed winter finches big time, with only 1 Pine Siskin, 100 Bohemian Waxwings, and very low numbers of crossbills and redpolls. Red Crossbill had to be added in count week. For reference, we have previously observed 1769 Bohemian Waxwings (2018), and hundreds of each of the other species. The only winter finches

*'Twas the day of the bird count,*

*... and all through the Park*

*The birders were searching from dawn until dark.*

*We three walked the Hoodoos with wind in our hair*

*In hopes last year's goshawk soon would be there.*

*But the birds were all huddled snug in their trees*

*And we searched in vain, while our toes they did freeze.*

*When what to our wondering eyes should appear*

*But two mountain chickadees — they filled us with cheer.*

*And shortly thereafter five ravens sailed past,*

*And the call of a magpie was heard at long last.*

*We tramped for three hours, many squirrels we did see,*

*But the birds they were scarce, it was not meant to be.*

*At the end of the day we admitted our fate*

*It was red squirrels 12, and birds a mere 8.*

*Debra Hornsby*



with good numbers were Pine Grosbeaks. Also, notably missing were raptors. Thank goodness Banff had 10 Dippers, or that would have been embarrassing!

Overall, however, a successful count. We did very well in count week to add 7 species to the list, including several Owls. With these added, the total species count comes to 55, an excellent number for the valley.

The detailed species tally may be found at the end of this newsletter. And it appears there can be much more to a bird watcher than a fancy pair of binos.

## WHAT MEMBERS READ, WATCH, AND LISTEN TO

### BOOK REVIEWS

#### I Heard a Bird Sing

I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December  
A magical thing  
And sweet to remember,  
"We are nearer to Spring  
Than we were in September,"  
I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December.



Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*) Cyndi Smith photo.

*Oliver Herford, from Welcome Christmas! A garland of poems (Viking Press, 1955).*

### A COLLECTION OF CONNECTIONS - Submitted by BVN Members

Are you getting enough nature? What are you reading or viewing over morning coffee or tea in these times? What are your go-to nature web sites? How do you keep in touch with ecosystem issues that are important to you? Let us know how you fill your time at home with nature so we can share those ideas with others. Here is a collection of connections recently sent in by our members.

✓ Colleen Campbell has offered this list of on-line environmental and social news sources:

- The Hakai Institute conducts long term coastal research in British Columbia.
- The Tyee: an independent, online news magazine from BC
- The Narwhal is a good source of environmental news.
- Other on-line sources of videos and information:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/user/AlbertaParks>
  - <http://www.insectivora.org>
  - <https://www.calgrizzly.com>
  - <https://www.kuow.org/podcasts/thewild?page=4>
  - <https://whalesanctuaryproject.org>

- <https://rewilding.org>
- <https://www.internationalowlcenter.org>
- And this will take you to Parks Canada [wildlife videos](#).

✓ Cyndi Smith asks “Anyone interested in owls?” If so, the [International Owl Center](#) has an interesting YouTube channel. Cyndi highlights a Snowy Owl and a Great Gray owl presentation. There is one presentation each week into March. continued...

✓ Here’s an update by Cathy Ellis in the Rocky Mountain Outlook on [Black Swifts](#).

✓ Do you enjoy online games? [Wingspan](#) looks like it might offer some educational fun with friends if the limits of winter birding are not filling your checklist. (*Yes, it’s a commercial site. No, we do not endorse, only let you know of things that might interest you.*)

✓ Interesting follow-up to Louis Price’s November presentation on forest insects:

- The Alberta Government’s [forest pest page](#).
- Mountain Pine Beetle Ecology Science Round Up - [Webinar Series](#) from friResearch.

## 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).

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS  
2020 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT TALLY

SPECIES	NUMBER	SPECIES	NUMBER
Mallard	209	Clark's Nutcracker	91
Green-winged Teal	4	Black-billed Magpie	182
Ring-necked Duck	1	American Crow	6
Common Goldeneye	6	Common Raven	264
Hooded Merganser	2	Black-capped Chickadee	133
Common Merganser	3	Mountain Chickadee	332
Red-breasted Merganser	CW	Boreal Chickadee	62
Ruffed Grouse	1	Chickadee Sp.	70
Grouse sp.	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	54
Horned Grebe	CW	White-breasted Nuthatch	6
Rock Pigeon	35	Nuthatch sp.	2
Virginia Rail	1	Brown Creeper	19
Wilson's Snipe	4	American Dipper	10
Golden Eagle (imm.)	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	19
Hawk sp.	1	Townsend's Solitaire	3
Great Horned Owl	CW	American Robin	2
Northern Pygmy Owl	CW	European Starling	2
Northern Saw-whet Owl	CW	Bohemian Waxwing	100
Belted Kingfisher	1	House Sparrow	314
Am. 3-Toed Woodpecker	10	Evening Grosbeak	2
Downy Woodpecker	6	Pine Grosbeak	84
Hairy Woodpecker	4	Common Redpoll	9
Northern Flicker	1	Redpoll sp.	1
Pileated Woodpecker	1	Red-winged Crossbill	CW
Woodpecker sp.	2	White-winged Crossbill	4
Merlin	1	Pine Siskin	1
Northern Shrike	CW	Dark-eyed Junco	9
Canada Jay	36	White-throated Sparrow	3
Steller's Jay	2	Song Sparrow	3
Blue Jay	9	Rusty Blackbird	1