



The Alberta Wildlifer

Official Newsletter of the Alberta Chapter, The Wildlife Society
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Editor: Dave Hobson

President's Message

Several of us have returned recently from the International Wildlife Congress in Christchurch, New Zealand. I was delighted to see how well Canada and especially Alberta was represented at this important international meeting. A. R. E. Sinclair from UBC launched the congress with an insightful keynote address. Alberta had more scientists in attendance than any other province of Canada, and from the USA, only Colorado had more delegates. Albertan's included SRD's Jim Allen, Larry Roy from the Alberta Research Council, and Susan Hannon, Evelyn Merrill, Jacqui Frair, Elsabe Kloppers, Colleen Cassidy St. Clair, Lana Ciarniello, Milton Freeman, and yours truly from the University of Alberta. In addition, a large contingent of First Nations' people from Canada participated in special sessions on the role of aboriginal people in wildlife management. New Zealand was a grand place to host the IWC, and all who participated found it to be a professionally rewarding meeting.

Back home in Alberta, the prairie region continues to frustrate wildlife conservation. Last fall we learned that 5 of 30 radiocollared Greater Sage-Grouse died of West Nile Virus. The last thing that this tiny population needs is another demographic insult. And our efforts to secure information on the province's land exchange of native grasslands for potato field development appears to have been scuttled by the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development's FOIPP process, because the developer presumably stands to suffer economic consequences if we should be provided with the information. Something appears terribly wrong with Alberta's FOIPP.

This also has been a tough year for grizzly bears in Alberta. Roads, pipelines, and seismic lines associated with industrial development have created human access throughout bear habitats on the east slopes of the Rocky Mountains, and as expected, this is resulting in high mortality for grizzly bears. At least 44 grizzly bears died to human-caused sources of mortality during 2003, and clearly, the small population of perhaps < 500 bears cannot persist unless something is done to

reduce such losses. Access management appears to be receiving increased attention by the province, so long as it doesn't interfere with the ever-increasing pressures to extract energy resources.

The 2004 Annual TWS Conference in Calgary on September 18-22 is approaching rapidly. Do not overlook the deadline for contributed papers and posters, which is 2004 February 16. Contributions are being sought in the following subject areas:

- Ecology and Conservation of Birds
- Ecology and Conservation of Mammals
- Ecology and Conservation of Reptiles and Amphibians
- Conservation of Communities, Ecosystems & Landscapes
- Wildlife-Habitat Relationships
- Wildlife Population Dynamics & Management
- Wildlife Damage Management
- Human Dimensions, Conservation Education & Conservation Policy
- Wildlife Diseases & Toxicology
- Biometrics in Wildlife Management
- New Technology in Wildlife Management

Go to the following link for details:

<http://www.wildlife.org/conference/index.cfm?name=2004cfp>

Registration for the conference will begin in June. We will be hosting our next business meeting for the Alberta Chapter of TWS during the Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

Mark S. Boyce, President

Editors Note

For this issue, I'd like to thank Mike Norton for the Conservation Committees report and Margo Pybus for bringing to our attention Bill Samuel's award. I'd especially like to thank George Mercer and Lindsay Tomy for providing the Feature Articles. Now ask yourselves, if it weren't for their efforts in providing this info to this newsletter, would you even be aware of these interesting programs occurring in Alberta. Now it's your turn!

Finally, I'd like to beg your forgiveness for being late.

ACTWS 2004 Annual General Meeting and Memberships

Call for Nominations

Can you donate some of your time to the ACTWS Executive? There will be 4 positions vacant on the ACTWS Executive following the Calgary TWS Conference in September. They include President – Elect, Secretary/Treasurer and 2 Directors. If you are willing or know someone that is, contact Nominations Director, Dale Eslinger at Dale.Eslinger@gov.ab.ca or call him at 403 528-5205 in Medicine Hat. Please participate actively!

The ACTWS AGM, usually held in the spring, will be delayed this year and held in conjunction with the TWS conference in September instead.

Membership Dues

Membership dues for 2004 are due in January. Annual fees remain at \$10.00 for a regular membership and \$5.00 for students (must be accompanied by verification of student status). Avoid the rush and send your renewal to Alberta Chapter Of The Wildlife Society Box 4990 Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5G8

Membership form is on the ACTWS website @ <http://www.albertadirectory.net/actws/>.

2004 Service Awards

The Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society is seeking Nominations for the following two awards:

William Rowan Distinguished Service Award

The William Rowan Distinguished Service Award is presented to an Alberta wildlife biologist who has made outstanding contributions to the management **and** conservation of wildlife and their habitats. These contributions might involve excellence in research, teaching, public allocation (hunting, non-consumptive use), habitat protection and development, land use planning, impact assessment, endangered species management, work in professional associations or any other area of the wildlife management profession.

The awards committee is asking for nominations from the membership for this prestigious award. A nomination involves a letter of support from one or more Chapter members along with the candidate's curriculum vitae/resume. The letter should explain the value of the nominee's contributions in the areas outlined above.

Dedicated Service Award

The Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society Dedicated Service Award is granted to an ACTWS member in recognition of exceptional individual dedication to the Chapter and Chapter activities. The awards committee is asking for nominations for this award in the form of a letter of support from one or more Chapter members.

Nominations

Please submit your nominations for both these awards by **April 15, 2004**, to:

Harry Stelfox
Policy & Planning

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
9th Floor, South Petroleum Plaza
9915-108th St., Edmonton, AB T5K 2G8
Phone: (780) 427-2044, Fax: (780) 422-5136
E-mail: harry.stelfox@gov.ab.ca

ATTENTION WILDLIFERS!

Just a note to encourage further membership of those who support wildlife interests in Alberta. Please "spread the word" about the ACTWS and the advantages of belonging to the Society, including access to wildlife conferences, exchange of information, and heads-up about activities related to wildlife in Alberta. Please encourage those you know to join!

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The Wildlife Society**

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Chapter News

Conservation Committee

The ACTWS conservation committee is focusing on the related issues of access development and access management. The proliferation of new linear disturbances, particularly in forested regions, is of concern because of direct impacts to wildlife habitat. In addition, linear features provide opportunities to the public for additional access, which can increase sensory disturbance and hunting pressure in previously remote areas. The conservation committee is considering strategies to promote greater controls over the creation of new access as well as the management of human access along existing routes. These are complex issues, and the committee has opted to take a longer term, more strategic approach to try to address them, rather than sending a quick letter to the relevant minister. We plan to look for opportunities for collaboration with other groups or agencies (e.g. Adaptive Management Experiment team, Alberta Chamber of Resources). We also hope to develop a short position paper outlining our concerns along with potential solutions, and then to request a meeting with senior government officials (ADM or higher) to discuss.

A second issue that ACTWS is engaging on relates to the permitting of 8 sections of native prairie (part deeded, part Crown grazing lease) near Bow Island to be converted into a potato farm. Alberta Public Lands has a policy of no sale, but accepted a land trade for an area of land near Taber which is seeded to crested wheatgrass. A Public Land agrologist did a wildlife assessment of the Taber lands. No referral to Alberta Fish and Wildlife occurred. At a time when no record of a land transfer existed, an ACTWS member noted 12-14 tractors plowing the land, installation of an irrigation system was in progress and seeding was underway. As a starting point, ACTWS has filed a FOIPP request to investigate the situation, and will take action accordingly. The Alberta Wilderness Association also has taken an interest in the situation. As of 4 December 2003 we have not yet received the materials.

The conservation committee currently consists of Mike Norton, Elston Dzus, Blair Rippin, and Larry Roy. More volunteers are welcome because existing committee members are suffering from a lack of time to make really good progress!

Bill Samuel Receives Well-Earned Recognition

One of the founding members of the Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society recently received one of the top honours in his field. In August 2003, Dr. Bill Samuel was awarded the Distinguished Service Award (DSA) by the Wildlife Diseases Association (WDA). The organization is the primary international professional home and cohesive force to bind together wildlife health specialists worldwide. The group is most known for publishing the Journal of Wildlife Diseases ... as well as some pretty raucous fund-raising auctions. Dr Samuel has been a dedicated member of the organization since the mid 1960s and has contributed his time and tireless energy to furthering the aims and goals of the WDA throughout the intervening years. The Award also recognizes the considerable body of work that Bill provided to the scientific community as well as his superb teaching abilities.

Although his career began in the US, Bill came to the University of Alberta in 1969 to begin a post-doc with John Holmes. He never left. From his cluttered office on the 9th floor of the Biological Sciences Building, Bill has devoted endless hours to improving our knowledge regarding a wonderful array of parasites and diseases of wildlife. His dedication went so far as to include a personal investigation of mange in humans (I never did figure out if this was intentional or not!). And is it only coincidence that he has an abiding interest in parasites and diseases associated with hairloss in various species?

Far and away, Bill is most noted for his genuine interest in mentoring students and his endless enthusiasm in leading fresh-faced undergrads and less-than-know-it-all graduate students into the fascinating world of wildlife parasites and diseases. Bill can teach anyone who has a mind to listen and a will to learn. After more than 40 years at it, he is a master, or perhaps more correctly, a master professional. Most recently, he coordinated the cumulative disbursement of over \$1 million from the Alberta Conservation Association Challenge Grants in Biodiversity to fund graduate research projects, he is a driving force behind the Alberta Cooperative Conservation Research Unit (ACCRU), and a previous

recipient of the ACTWS William Rowan Award for Distinguished Service.

Kudos to Bill for a job well done and to the WDA for giving him the well-deserved international recognition.

M.J. Pybus

Provincial Wildlife Disease Specialist

and ongoing mentoree

Photo by Murray Lankester



Margo Pybus, Bill Samuel, Mark Drew

Feature Articles

South Jasper Woodland Caribou Recovery Project

By George Mercer, Jasper National Park

Woodland caribou occupy both the northern and southern portions of Jasper National Park. In the north, the A La Peche herd which summers in the park and winters in the foothills has been the subject of a long term monitoring program by the West Central Alberta Caribou Standing Committee. Although the subject of intensive work in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the South Jasper herd has received relatively little attention recently.

The South Jasper herd is the only herd in Alberta that remains almost exclusively within protected areas for the entire year. Occasional movements occur into the White Goat Wilderness Area in Alberta and Mount Robson Provincial Park in BC, but the herd spends most of the year within the confines of Jasper National Park. Despite being on protected lands and not exposed to the extensive landscape change thought to be affecting other Alberta herds, the South Jasper herd is declining. In the fifteen years from 1988 to 2003 the herd was reduced from approximately 200 to 100 animals.

Several factors have been identified that may be influencing the decline including a lack of high quality habitat, increased predation by wolves due to improved access into winter range, human disturbance and the effects of climate change.

In 2001, Jasper National Park began a multi-year project to assess factors affecting woodland caribou in the southern part of the park and to identify possible recovery options. Gaining better information about caribou and wolves is a key aspect of the program. Ten caribou and six wolves from three packs thought to use the caribou range will be radio collared over the next three to four years. GPS data collected from these animals will be used in conjunction with detailed human use, habitat and snow data to develop resource selection function (RSF) models intended to determine which factors have the greatest influence on woodland caribou. This information will be used to determine if there are factors that can be managed differently to improve the chances of recovering the South Jasper herd.

Operation Grassland Community: Land Stewardship at Work

By Lindsay Tomy, Research & Communications OGC

Operation Grassland Community (OGC) has been active in the Grassland Natural region since 1989. Currently our program boasts a membership of 240 landowners, managing over 23,000 ha. of native grassland and other wildlife habitats. Through our recruitment and partnership with landowners, we

recognize good stewards for maintaining healthy native prairie.

Many may be familiar with our annual monitoring of Burrowing Owls through our landowner census of more than 200 farmers and ranchers. We also provide a very broad series of extension materials as part of our “*Landowner’s Toolkit Series*”. Fact sheet topics range from *Conservation Easements*, and *Oil and Gas Development to Best Management Practices for Grassland Birds* and *The Species at Risk Act*. This year OGC undertook a new initiative, working with landowners to create management plans for their Burrowing Owl habitat.

Over the years as fewer and fewer of our members are reporting nesting Burrowing Owl pairs, we wanted to find out what landowners who had owls were doing right. Our goal was to better assess what type of habitat was being used for nesting, and perhaps offer some insight to those who haven’t seen owls recently. This pilot project was spurred by the fact that many of our members say they haven’t changed their land use practices, but still continue to have a landscape devoid of Burrowing Owls.

In the spring and summer of 2003 we had 25 landowners participate in Burrowing Owl Management Plans who had active nests this year, or activity in 2002 or 2001. In total 18 nests were found on the lands of 10 landowners. Specific information was collected around the nest site or last year’s burrow such as; land use, availability of roosts, distances to wetlands, distance to prey habitat, cattle grazing (timing and stocking rates), ground squirrel and badger activity, and the availability of predator perches.

Reports were then made as a reference tool specific for each landowner called “*Your Burrowing Owl Management Plan*”, which included photos of their nest site and owls. The report outlined the purpose of such a project, and the many suspected reasons for the decline. It also highlighted Burrowing Owl facts, their life cycle, and finally a section entitled “*Your Burrowing Owl Habitat*”. This final section indicated what Burrowing Owls need, what your habitat is like and recommendations. It was all tied together with a complimentary air photo delineating various habitats available to owls.

The reports were very well received by landowners and we couldn’t have asked for better cooperation. Many vowed to read them cover-to-cover, and have. They seemed to really appreciate that the

report was specific to their farm/ranch. For most landowners, we were able to increase their awareness of the specific habitat needs of Burrowing Owls, and give them new ideas of locations to search in the spring, as well as how to maintain existing breeding areas.

Photo by Lindsay Tomy



Burrowing Owl pair

Upcoming Events

7th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference.

February 26-29, 2004 / Calgary, Alberta.

For more information:

<http://www.albertawilderness.ca/PCESC/>

Species at Risk 2004: Pathways to Recovery.

March 2 – 6, 2004 / Victoria, B.C.

For more information:

<http://www.speciesatrisk2004.ca/>

5th Certification Watch Conference: The Frontiers of Forest Certification.

March 28 – April 2, 2004 / Vancouver, B.C.

For more information:

<http://www.certificationwatchconference.org/>

24th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment: Impact Assessment for Industrial Development: Whose business is it.

April 26 – 29, 2004 / Vancouver, B.C.

For more information:

http://www.iaia.org/annual-meeting/IAIA04/Conf_main_page2/Conference_main_index.htm

12th Annual Scientific Conference of the International Boreal Forest Research Association: Climate Disturbance Interactions in Boreal Forest Ecosystems.

May 3 – 7, 2004 / Fairbanks, Alaska.

For more information:

<http://www.lter.uaf.edu/ibfra/default.cfm>

International Conference on Economics of Sustainable Forest Management.

May 17 – 19, 2004 / Savannah, Georgia.

For more information:

http://www.forestry.utoronto.ca/socio_economic/icesfm/main.htm

Monitoring the Effectiveness of Biological Conservation.

November 1 – 5, 2004 / Vancouver, B.C.

For more information:

<http://www.fcsn.bc.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=conferences.display&conference=monitoring&CFID=1624629&CFTOKEN=8606630>

Recently Published

Please send any references of recently published articles to dave.hobson@gov.ab.ca. Articles of interest include those authored by ACTWS members on Alberta wildlife.

Gonzalez Voyer, A., K. G. Smith and M. Festa-Bianchet. 2003. Dynamics of hunted and unhunted mountain goat *Oreamnos americanus* populations. *Wild. Biol.* 9: 213-218.