

# THE ALBERTA WILDLIFER

VOLUME 24 ISSUE 1

JANUARY 11, 2013

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

Alberta and Canadian Section conference March 2013

\* How to register

\* Submit a paper or poster by Jan 18

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## ACTWS President's Report

Dave Hobson

Well, we're over the hump of those short days and long nights. It's 2013 and the world didn't end after all, whether it was Mayan prophecies or fiscal cliffs. Time to look ahead. March is coming and the annual conference is shaping up to be

to public land sales, especially native grasslands. Besides Ken, I'd also like to recognise the other members of the committee, Mark Boyce, Larry Roy, Lorne Fitch and Matthew Pyper. Lisa Wilkinson, who is



*"It seems like remoteness is no longer any protection for wildlife. The work of conserving healthy wildlife populations is far from complete."*

a good one. Make sure you book early; the information is on the website. Also, please consider putting your name forward for either a Director's position or for President-elect. I know you all are busy but the time demand is not large and the satisfaction of volunteering for a worth-while organization such as the ACTWS is great. Let me know if you're interested.

The Executive, these days, is working on developing a membership database that will help improve our ability to track our membership and provide timely notice when memberships have lapsed. The Conservation Committee, under Ken Crutchfield's leadership, has been busy. Recently they've provided comment regarding Bill 202, the private members bill trying to bring transparency

not only one of our newsletter editors but also is our Outreach Committee Chair, has also been busy with a species at risk beer labelling project which will bring awareness into homes and pubs.

While writing this report, I just received a newsbrief from the parent society. One of the items was the breaking of an ivory smuggling operation out of Canada. The ivory was from narwhals. It seems like remoteness is no longer any protection for wildlife. The work of conserving healthy wildlife populations is far from complete.

Keep working at it.

Dave



Read about wolverine research, page 4

Wildlife Society Conference—  
Alberta Chapter and Canadian  
Section  
March 8-10

Arthur R. Rodgers



(art.rodgers@ontario.ca)

Ontario Ministry of  
Natural Resources,  
Centre for Northern  
Forest Ecosystem  
Research



## Canadian Section Update

Since the Annual TWS meeting in Portland there has been a lot of progress made by the various Council sub-committees. President Kessler and her Executive Director Search Committee have continued to pursue a new Executive Director/CEO to replace Dr. Michael Hutchins who stepped down earlier this year and, with Council approval, expect to have someone in place in early 2013. The Publications Committee put forward recommendations for new Editors-in-Chief of both the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* and the *Journal of Wildlife Management* to replace Dr. Leonard Brennan, who took over as interim EIC of the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* after Dr. Warren Ballard passed away in January, and Dr. William Block whose term as EIC of the *Journal of Wildlife Management* is coming to an end. Council unanimously approved both recommendations and, if they accept, the new EICs will assume their positions in mid- to late-2013.

In response to member concerns raised at the Portland meeting, President Kessler appointed an *ad hoc* Committee on Deer Breeding. The issue has risen to the fore as several U.S. states have passed or proposed legislation that would permit deer breeding for hunting purposes – clearly not something that would be favoured by most wildlife professionals and TWS. The final 2012 issue of *The Wildlife Professional* will feature a cover story on deer breeding and farming in the U.S. Although high-fence “ranch style” hunting has been legally banned in Ontario, Manitoba and B.C, these operations have continued elsewhere in Canada and this is an opportunity to join our American colleagues in opposing these businesses that defy the concept of “fair chase” and threaten public ownership of wildlife and natural resources among several other important concerns such as spread of wildlife disease and genetic mixing. I have been asked to serve on this committee and provide a Canadian perspective. However, I cannot claim any expertise in this area and would greatly appreciate hearing from any Canadian members who have concerns and/or information about this issue in Canada.

Many of the TWS Awards committees are also gearing up for the annual round of nominations

and Council members have been asked to solicit recommendations from their Sections. I don't know why but it seems Canadians are reluctant to submit nominations for these awards. However, I do know that there are many Canadians who are deserving and that their accomplishments and contributions to the wildlife profession and TWS are every bit as noteworthy as many of the past recipients of these awards. At a minimum I'm sure we can find nominees for the Fellows Program, TWS Wildlife Publication Awards, Chapter and Student Chapter of the Year Awards, Student Chapter Advisor of the Year Award, Excellence in Wildlife Education Award and the Group Achievement Award. Nominations for these awards may be submitted to TWS by individual members, Sections, Chapters or Working Groups. And don't forget the newest TWS Distinguished Service Award that will be selected solely by the Canadian Section. If you would like to suggest a nominee for these or other TWS awards, or you would like assistance in preparing a nomination, please contact the Chair of the Canadian Section Awards Committee Mike Gillingham ([michael@unbc.ca](mailto:michael@unbc.ca)).

The Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society (CSTWS) is again undertaking an Electronic Education Series that will run monthly through March 2013. We already had two “webinars” with large numbers of attendants. Dr. Eric B. (Rick) Taylor, Department of Zoology, University of British Columbia talked about “Changes to the Fisheries Act: Implications for Fishes and Biodiversity Conservation”, and Joëlle Taillon, Département de biologie et Centre d'études nordiques, Université Laval presented “A Challenge for Conservation: Spatio-Temporal Changes in the Use of Calving Grounds by Migratory Caribou”. Titles, dates and times of upcoming webinars are available on the Canadian Section webpage: <http://joomla.wildlife.org/Canada/>. If you are interested in participating in the series, send an email to [csoftws@gmail.com](mailto:csoftws@gmail.com).

I hope you have started making plans to attend our Canadian Section AGM in Canmore, Alberta, 8-10 March 2013.

# Electronic Education Series Canadian Section News

To better serve the needs and interests of students and wildlife professionals across Canada, the Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society (CSTWS) is undertaking an Electronic Education Series. The intent of the series is to provide our members with opportunities to hear presentations by outstanding individuals in wildlife ecology and management. The sessions will include seminars, workshops and possibly panel discussions. The series is expected to run monthly beginning in early November, 2012 through March 2013.

The sessions will be easy to access and we will endeavour to keep them user-friendly. Once you have indicated your interest (see contact below), an email will be returned to you providing the speakers' presentation in pdf format and the step by step instructions for participation. At the time of the presentation, you simply call into the teleconference and follow along with the presenter on your computer. All that is required is a computer and a phone (preferably with a speaker).

***NEW! Listen to presentations by leading wildlife ecologists and managers on your own computer...***

The third presentation in the 2012-13 Electronic Education Series will be given by;

**Presenter: Dr. Mark S. Boyce**, Professor and Alberta Conservation Association Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB

**Date & Time: Friday, January 25, 2013, at 3 pm EST** (12 pm PST, 1 pm MST, 2 pm CST, 4 pm AST, 4:30 pm NST). **Duration:** 1 hour.

**Title: Selection functions: statistics, interpretations, and applications**

**Summary:** Recent statistical methods for quantifying resource selection have seen inconsistent interpretations and controversy over their appropriate use. I will review verbal and mathematical definitions of selection, use, preference, choice, and occupancy and their inter-relationships. Resource selection functions are usually estimated using logistic regression but the distinction between an RSF and the logistic regression model requires clarification. Probability of selection of a resource unit can be estimated using weighted distribution theory, yielding a quantity that differs from the probability of use, and is no longer constrained to a relative measure. Weighted distribution theory also provides opportunities to use a variety of model functions to characterize patterns of selection. If selection is a property inherent to an individual, models of probability of selection are invariant to changing availabilities of resource types in space and time. However, data used to estimate RSFs can be highly sensitive to availability of resource types. Understanding the process of model selection is important to understanding the utility of RSFs, which is why I caution against canned packages such as Maxent. I will illustrate how RSFs can have many important applications in wildlife management and conservation when properly implemented.

**Contact:** if you are interested in participating, send an email to [csoftws@gmail.com](mailto:csoftws@gmail.com).

The Electronic Education Series is free to CSTWS members. Non-members who sit in on the presentations are encouraged to support the series by joining the CSTWS (annual membership is only \$10) at <http://joomla.wildlife.org/Canada/>.

The Electronic Education Series is sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Centre for Northern Forest Ecosystem Research, Thunder Bay, Ontario.  
<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/CNFER/>



## Jason T. Fisher

Senior Research  
Scientist,  
Alberta Innovates –  
Technology Futures

[http://  
albertawolver-  
ine.com](http://albertawolverine.com)

[http://  
facebook.com/  
AlbertaWolverine](http://facebook.com/AlbertaWolverine)

# Wolverine Mysteries Revealed, One Hair at a Time.

Wolverines inspire people.

They emerged from the glacial landscapes of the early Pleistocene to span the vast tundra, boreal forests, and mountains of Eurasia and North America. Wolverines are icons of wilderness and untamable tenacity, inhabiting the imagination of popular culture and of wildlife biologists in pursuit of a good challenge.

Most wolverine stories commence with a toast to this enigmatic species as one of the least-known North American mammals. Fortunately, the past decade produced a 10-fold proliferation in wolverine research. A new challenge has arisen, revealed through painstaking research obdurately wrested from a half-dozen animals at a time: the wolverine story seems to change in each place you look. *Tenacity* is usually the laurel placed on wolverines' heads, but *inconsistency* might be more apt.

In B.C., wolverines avoid recreation; in Idaho, they share spaces with skiers and off-roaders. They are dense in one Rockies landscape (for wolverines, “dense” is 6-7 / 1000 km<sup>2</sup>), but sparse or nonexistent next door. On continental scales, wolverine distribution correlates with late-winter snowpack for denning or food caching (the tantalizing “fridge hypothesis”), but this does not hold true at landscape scales. Wolverines avoid roads, but then one ambles through downtown Airdrie; one crosses I-5 a few times; and another famously appears in the oil sands excavations.

Wolverine mysteries do not easily reveal themselves, and there is nothing for it but to chip away at the rock until it cracks. For the last 10 years, members of the *Alberta Wolverine Working Group* have been surveying wolverine occurrence in the Rocky Mountains, across gradients of topography, vegetation, recreation, industrial development, and snowpack: from the Willmore Wilderness to Plateau Mountain, from Banff and Yoho to the upper

Foothills, at over 200 survey sites. In that decade, a few chips have fallen from the hard rock.

First, wolverines are tricky to detect. When we started, non-invasive methods for wolverine surveying did not exist, so we developed a combination of remote-camera surveying and hair-trapping now used in B.C. and Labrador and known as the “Alberta wrap”. Analysis has shown that cameras so deployed are 99% effective



at detecting wolverines when present. Hair-trapping – which provides precious genetic data on individual ID, gender, relatedness, and genetic diversity – is more of a waiting game. It takes a large meaty reward to lure a wolverine up a tree, and it takes time for some wolverines to warm to the idea. Hair-trapping is slow at the start of a winter, but after 3 months they sample 90% of the wolverines who encounter them – but detectability may vary in areas of perceived risk.

Second, wolverines share. In the Willmore Wilderness, some of the 26 individuals detected hit survey stations that spanned > 500 km<sup>2</sup> in three months of winter. Wolverine home-ranges are

# Wolverine Mysteries Revealed . . .continued

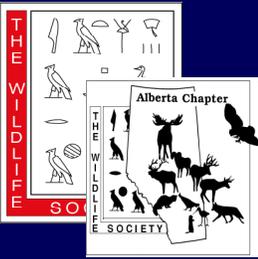
known to be large. What we didn't expect was a high degree of overlap, with as many as four wolverines - each with a different spatial range - detected at some sites. A few years later, wolverine telemetry from Idaho confirmed that wolverines tend toward sociality within extended family groups - a big surprise for an animal widely imagined a fiercely rugged individualist.

Third, Rocky Mountain wolverines don't stray far from the protected areas of the Front Ranges. Wolverine densities are about the same in Banff and the Willmore Wilderness, but wane rapidly east from those boundaries. Wolverine densities are iconic of the upper foothills of west-central Alberta, and the alpine and subalpine of Kananaskis country, but there may be as few as 2-3 wolverines per 1000 km<sup>2</sup> in these landscapes.

Fourth, wolverines in west-central Alberta select for rugged topography and avoid industrial footprint, such as seismic lines. Data from Banff and Kananaskis are suggesting the same, linking wolverine conservation to landscape management. The fifth and most important question has yet to be answered: Why? Wolverine densities are high here, but obviously not so in the flat boreal or arctic tundra. Seismic lines and roads appear to decrease habitat suitability, even though wolverines cross them readily. We have only scratched the surface of wolverine ecology, and have not yet begun to understand how wolverines fit into the species-scape of prey and predators in which they live. Wolverine densities continue to inspire, and to challenge.



Wolverine leaving hair samples.



**Call for  
papers  
deadline:**

**Jan 18!**

*Family Fun in the  
Mountains*

Canmore Geoscience  
Center

Canmore Nordic Cen-  
ter

Ski Norquay

Snowy Owl Dog Sled  
Tours

Canadian Rockies  
Adventure Centre

## 2013 JOINT MEETING OF THE ALBERTA CHAPTER & CANADIAN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

8-10 March 2013

Canmore, Alberta, Canada

*Wildlife Professionals and Students Welcome!*

### Meeting Schedule

**Friday, 8 March 2013**  
Public Speaking Workshop  
Student Conclave  
Second Canadian Quiz Bowl

**Saturday, 9 March 2013**  
Plenary Session & Open  
Papers  
Awards Banquet & Auction

**Sunday, 10 March 2013**  
Business Meetings  
Open Paper Sessions  
Student Awards

**Location:** Radisson Hotel and Conference Center, 511 Bow Valley Trail, Canmore, AB.  
**Reserve rooms** at reduced rate (\$129) until **6 February 2013**. See websites for details and promotion code.

**Registration:** Take advantage of early-bird and pre-registration discounts by completing and returning the registration form with full payment (in Canadian funds only) by **1 February 2013 (Early Bird) or February 22, 2013 (Late-Registration)**. On-site registration will be available at the conference; however, pre-registration is encouraged to guarantee a Saturday night banquet ticket.

### FRIDAY, 8 MARCH 2013

**Public speaking workshop:** *Talking to People: making presentations effective, memorable and enjoyable.* Ever been in front of a group and wish you were not? Come get tips from the renowned Albertan laureate Lorne Fitch in a 1-day workshop - improve your public speaking skills and learn to enjoy those once frightening events!! **Enrollment is limited, so sign-up early.** For more details see the conference website.

**Student Conclave:** University of Alberta Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society is hosting the Second Annual Student Conclave. A range of training workshops are planned, as well as social networking opportunities. For more information see the conference website.

**Second Annual Canadian Section Student Quiz Bowl.** Starting at 7pm student groups will challenge each other to become the 2013 Quiz Bowl winners, and be pitted against a select team of professionals for a last fun-round. For more information, contact Marci Trana ([marcitrana@gmail.com](mailto:marcitrana@gmail.com)).

**SATURDAY, 9 MARCH 2013**  
**PLENNARY SESSION & PANEL DISCUSSION**

**Citizen Science:**

***Citizen Science: can it lead to more with less in today's economy?***

*Bill Hunt, Parks Canada*

***Starting up a citizens' group for science: Alpine pika and climate change***

*Jessie Whittington, Parks Canada*

***A student's perspective on citizen science: the benefits of a long-term beaver survey.***

*Glynnis Hood, Morgyn Ramsay & Nick Yarmey, University Alberta- Augustana*

***Wolves and volunteers in Wisconsin: long-term tracking is leading us where?***

*Jane Wiedenhoef, WI Dept. Natural Resources*

***Moving into the digital age: A moose App for citizen science with hunters***

*Mark Boyce, University of Alberta*

***Developing better analytical metrics for data collected by citizen scientists.***

*Gregory Breed, Harvard University*

*...and more*

**Papers and Posters:** Work on wildlife management, research, monitoring, and new techniques, are always of interest. **Open paper sessions** will run Saturday afternoon to noon of Sunday. A \$100 prize will be awarded to the best graduate and undergraduate student (oral) paper. The poster session will be on March 9 and a \$100 prize also will be awarded to the best graduate and undergraduate student poster. ***See the Call for Papers and Posters and abstract submission guidelines on the website. Deadline: January 18.***

**Evening Awards Banquet, Speaker, Auction & Dancing**

A short Banquet talk will be given by **Dr. Wini Kessler, President of The Wildlife Society** on *Canadians in The Wildlife Society: Challenges and Opportunities*. The silent and live auction fundraiser is always a highlight. Proceeds go entirely to support TWS students. Large- and small-ticket items, custom-made goods, and new purchases or used items will all be gratefully appreciated. For more information see the conference website or contact: Hugh Wollis: [Hugh.Wollis@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Hugh.Wollis@gov.ab.ca) or Lisa Wilkinson: [Lisa.Wilkinson@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Lisa.Wilkinson@gov.ab.ca).

Also come and enjoy the tunes of **High Point Bluegrass Band** (starring the infamous Lee Foote). During the evening there will be an open microphone and jam session so bring your instruments and join in on the fun!

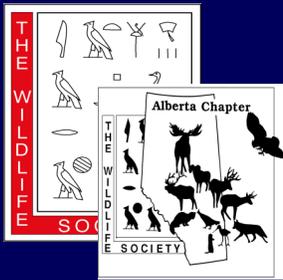
**SUNDAY, 10 MARCH 2013**

Rise early to attend the **Canadian Session business meeting** at 8:30 am. **Open paper sessions** continue at 10 am. Presentations to the winners of the **Best Student Paper** and **Poster Awards** and **Photo Contest** winners announced at end of final session. The **Alberta Chapter business meeting** starts at 1:30 pm.

**Corporate Donations to Support the Conference:** Corporate donations have contributed significantly to the quality of past TWS meetings. Thank you for your support! If you or your employer can make a financial donation this year, please make cheques payable to **Alberta Chapter, The Wildlife Society** and mail to **ACTWS, Box 4990, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6E 5G8**. Donations received before **22 February 2013** will be recognized in the printed conference materials, conference website, and at the awards banquet.



**Don't miss out!**  
**Register today**



“...designed for individuals already engaged in extension, awareness or education...”

## Workshop—ACTWS Meeting, March 8

**Talking to People- The art and science of making presentations effective, memorable and enjoyable.**

Advocating for wildlife often means needing to speak in public, but despite their passion to conserving wildlife conservation, many folks avoid public speaking due to the stress. BUT *it does not have to be stressful!* If you understand the reasons for public speaking stress, and if you keep just a few guiding principles in mind, speaking in public will soon become an energizing and satisfying experience. This 1-day workshop (~7 hrs) is tailored for people in natural resource management occupations who interact with the agricultural community, conservation groups and with other resource professionals. It is designed for individuals already engaged in extension, awareness or education activities, those who need to communicate more effectively, and those who wish to become more comfortable in presentation venues. Participants will leave the workshop with an expanded skill set to deliver presentations. Limited space: Sign-up on ACTWS website. **Cost:** \$125 and includes course materials and 2 coffee breaks.

### Topics covered include:

- The purpose and value of presentations, types- all presentations are not equal
- Presentation anatomy - The parts of the presentation body
- Before the presentation - Negotiating your way through an invitation to speak
- Think about the end as you begin - What do you want them to remember?
- After the end, there is a beginning - Listening starts with a good opening
- Humor- Presentation grease and glue
- Things that begin and end have a middle - Substance without overwhelming them
- Your voice and the rest of you - Impressions aid communication
- The finale -bring them home, prompters - speaker crutches, the set up - Calming yourself
- Questions - Opportunity to expand
- What to avoid? Holes on the presentation road
- Visual aids - Seeing is believing, photography basics, you can't show it if you don't take it
- Final words - Reflect, remember and reinforce
- Evaluation/ feedback

**About the Instructor:** Lorne Fitch is well known for his work with the Cows and Fish program in Alberta. Now retired from his government position, he works on a part-time basis with Cows and Fish and sits on the boards of five provincial and national conservation organizations. Public outreach has been a dominant theme of Lorne's career and he has helped develop the ecological literacy of Albertans through his professional life and through various publications for the general public. Much of Lorne's career has involved communication, a tool he has used to develop partnerships with land owners, government agencies and conservation organizations, and he is passionate about the role of effective communication in natural resource management. This communication course is based on his professional experience and a desire to mentor others in these essential skills.

# Call for Award Nominations

## I. Publication Award

- This new award will recognize wildlife professionals for outstanding written contributions in the publication categories of technical and popular.
- Recent publications include the Fish, Fur and Feathers (book), ACA Discover Guide to Outdoor Adventure (magazine) and Cougar kill rate and prey composition in a multiprey system (article).

## 2. Dedicated Service Award

- Presented to an Alberta Chapter member who actively and unselfishly contributes their time and resources to further the aims and objectives of the Chapter. This award acknowledges members whose contributions far exceed the expectations of being a member and capture the spirit and essence of dedication to the Chapter.

## 3. William Rowan Distinguished Service Award

- This most prestigious chapter award is presented to an Alberta wildlife biologist who has made outstanding cumulative contributions to the management and conservation of wildlife and their habitats.

***Recognize someone for their extra special contribution.  
Consider nominating a colleague today.***

**Award nominations due: 1 February of each year**

**For more information, contact the ACTWS Award Coordinator:**

**Shevenell Webb (shevenellm@yahoo.com)**

## Job Posting

**Area Wildlife Biologist,** Natural Resources 9

**Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, High Prairie.** Are you ready to design, develop, deliver and manage the Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat programs in the Lesser Slave Area? Do you have what it takes? You will operate with a high degree of independence, working toward ensuring the sustainability of wildlife populations and their habitats and addressing all wildlife program interests related to allocation, conservation, and integrated resource management in the Area. Your solid leadership, supervision, interpersonal, communication, problem solving, and negotiating skills will serve you well in dealing with other professionals, aboriginal communities, stakeholders, industry, and the public in both individual and team situations.

**Closing Date: Open until suitable candidate selected. Job ID #1015237**

For details, please visit: <http://chr.alberta.ca/benefits/northern-allowance/55th-parallel.htm>

by  
**Laura  
 MacPherson  
 and  
 Curtis  
 Stambaugh**

## Red-sided Garter Snake Relocation to an Artificial Hibernaculum

Although garter snakes are widespread throughout their range, there is a concern among biologists that there has been a gradual decline in localized garter snake populations across Alberta. In most cases, declines are likely a result of landowners and industrial operators damaging and/or destroying snake hibernacula. Either accidental or intentional, the consequence of disturbing, damaging, and/or destroying hibernacula through these human-snake interactions often results in direct snake mortality.

Since snakes are unable to regulate their own body temperature to survive the extreme winter temperatures, northern garter snake populations will often migrate between summer grounds to communal den sites where they hibernate in large numbers. Hibernacula are often found in pits, crevices, cobble/gravel deposits, rocky outcrops, sinkholes and occasionally in man-made structures. Similar to many other snake species, they tend to exhibit strong fidelity to a specific hibernaculum site. Therefore, the availability of appropriate dens that provide adequate protection from freezing temperatures is likely one of the most important limiting factors of northern garter snake distributions.

Relocating animals is a wildlife management strategy that has been used to remove animals from danger, restore populations or establish new populations. In addition to conservation-related motives, animals are often relocated to avoid human-wildlife conflicts of perceived 'pest' or 'problem' species such as snakes. For snake species, relocation efforts have focused on moving animals to another suitable hibernaculum site (natural or man-made) (e.g. Gillingham and Carpenter 1978, Macmillan 1995, Takats 2002). Artificially constructed hibernacula have been used with varying degrees of success. A variety of materials and construction methods have been used to create underground snake overwintering dens (e.g. Goris 1971, Gillingham and Carpenter 1978). If constructed properly, artificially constructed hibernacula can be a viable option for relocating snakes to a different area (Shoemaker et al. 2009).

In Whitecourt, Alberta, a red-sided garter snake den located beneath an abandoned building may be damaged or destroyed if the building is demolished and the site reclaimed in the near future. This project explored the feasibility of translocating red-sided garter snakes from the Whitecourt den site to an artificially created den outside of High Prairie, Alberta. Since animal relocations tend to have higher



Inserting pit tag.

success rates when habitats are alike between the source and release sites, the chosen relocation site in High Prairie was within known red-sided garter snake range and the quantity and quality of habitat and prey densities were assumed to be comparable to that of the Whitecourt site.

In the fall of 2011, we trapped, PIT tagged, weighed (g), measured (cm) and relocated 147 snakes (of an estimated 508 snakes) to the artificially constructed hibernaculum outside of High Prairie. To ensure that snakes acclimatized and remained at the relocation site, we built an enclosure surrounding the hibernaculum. We also took the precautionary step of supplemental feeding the snakes while isolated within the enclosure to maintain body condition prior to over-wintering. Snakes were observed consuming supplied minnows and frogs.

The first snakes were observed outside the hibernaculum on the inside of the

# Red-sided Garter Snake Relocation to an Artificial Hibernaculum . . .continued

enclosure on May 1, 2012. From May 8 – June 1, 2012 emerging snakes were released outside of the enclosure. Of the snakes that overwintered in the hibernaculum, the known survival rate was 71%. Although staffing limitations prevented us from keeping the traps open into June, it is anticipated that more snakes (~ 5) left the hibernaculum after the traps were pulled. If this is the case, we anticipate that the overwinter survival rate would be closer to 75%.

Of the snakes that emerged in the spring, 51% returned to the High Prairie hibernaculum in the fall of 2012. If the timing of snake movements follows trends from last year, we anticipate that snakes will continue to return to the hibernaculum to the end of October. Of interest, on average, female red-sided garter snakes grew 12.6 cm (min: 3 cm, max 21 cm) and males 8.0 cm (min: 1 cm, 22 cm) during the year spent at High Prairie.

In the first year, relocated snakes demonstrated the ability to effectively use the man-made hibernaculum at the High Prairie release site. Since snakes survived the first overwintering period at the artificial hibernaculum and many returned in the fall, we anticipate that snakes will behave and move in patterns typical of resident snakes. Most importantly, the long-term success of this project will be determined if relocated snakes and their young produce a viable, self-sustaining population.

This relocation project was driven by the fact that Fish and Wildlife biologists believed that approximately 500 red-sided garter snakes and their hibernaculum were at risk of displacement (or worse) at the Whitecourt site. This project however, is not a substitute for addressing the source reason that required this form of mitigation. Relocating snakes does not deal with the larger issue of improved habitat protection, preventative measures and public education. That said, human structures (eg, house foundations, crawl spaces, etc.) have long been known to attract snakes as over-wintering sites and long-term protection of localized populations may require mitigative intervention techniques such as these. Finally, we found that the majority of snakes emerged from the dens in May, after the time period (September 1 through April 30) that snake dens are protected under the Alberta *Wildlife Act*. As a result, revisions to *Wildlife Act* are being evaluated that would afford year-round protection of hibernacula.

For more information about this project feel free to contact Laura MacPherson ([laura.macpherson@gov.ab.ca](mailto:laura.macpherson@gov.ab.ca)) or Curtis Stambaugh ([curtis.stambaugh@gov.ab.ca](mailto:curtis.stambaugh@gov.ab.ca))



Snake at artificial hibernaculum.

# Christmas Bird Count by Jan Ficht



## The History \*

Prior to the turn of the century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt": They would choose sides and go afield with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census"—that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them.

So began the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Thanks to the inspiration of Frank M. Chapman and the enthusiasm of twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

\*excerpt from Audubon.org

## Current

This year marks the 113<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count carried out across all 10 provinces and 2 territories in Canada and of course across the United States. In 2011/2012 there were 412 registered CBC's in Canada with 8635 observers who recorded 301 species and 3,943,480 individual birds (Cannings, R.J. 2012). There were probably many more CBC's in Canadian communities because not all counts are registered with Audubon.

Cannings, R.J. 2012. *American Birds* 112; 8-9

## An example of a Canadian Christmas Bird Count

Christmas Bird Counts have been conducted annually in Edson and district since 1980. These counts have not been registered with Audubon since about 1998 but the data is provided to the Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Management office in Edson each year. The volunteer observers are heavily weighted to rural residents mostly watching feeders and the area covered by driving routes varies considerably from year to year but always covers some portion of heavily traveled roads. The information collected does provide some interesting long term trends. The best example is the increase in over wintering bald eagles which is probably occurring in much of Alberta.

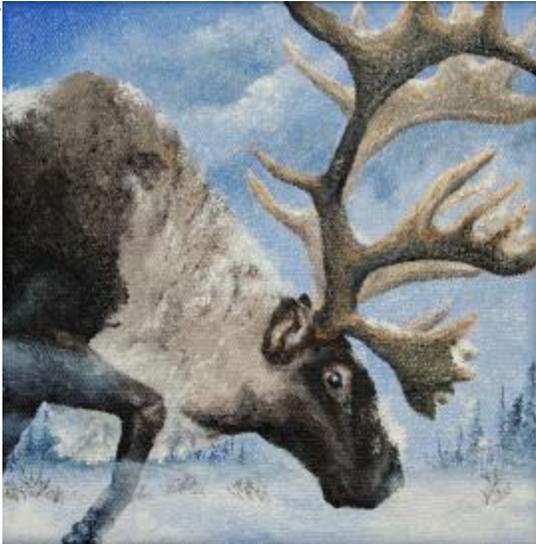
For the first 20 years of Edson's Christmas Bird Count (1980 to 1999), a total of six Bald Eagles were observed. In the next 13 years (2000 to 2012), thirty-one were observed; most seen feeding on road killed deer or moose. As deer, elk and moose populations have increased in the Edson area over the past 3 decades there has been a corresponding increase in road killed animals. Bald Eagles are scavengers as well as birds of prey and with this new and relatively reliable food source their numbers have increased and our yearly counts reflect this.



People involved in the Edson area CBC's enjoy the opportunity each year to count the birds that stay with us through the winter. There are always lots of comments about which birds refused to show themselves on count days and expressions of anticipation for next year's count. Half the fun of being a CBC coordinator is talking to people about their enthusiasm for birds.

Jan Ficht, Peers, AB

# Species at Risk Beer Labels - Almost Ready!



“Enduring Hardship”

Jason Kamin  
Oil Painting

Bull Trout

Nils Anderson  
Water Colour Painting

Here are the winners of our inaugural beer label contest:

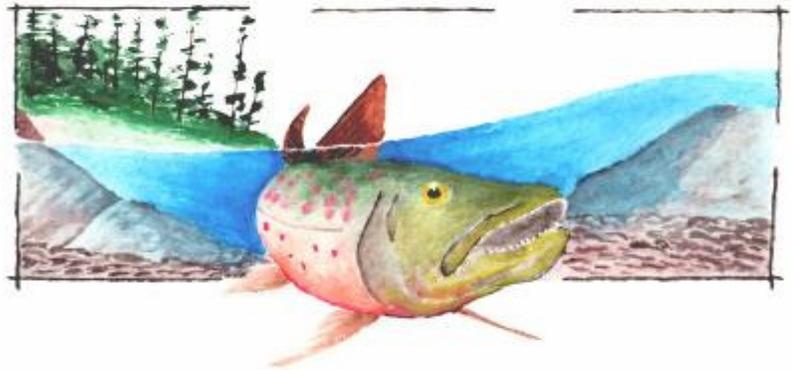
Woodland Caribou: Jason Kamin  
Bull Trout: Nils Anderson

Thank you to Jason and Nils for donating their artwork towards raising awareness about species at risk in Alberta. And thank you to the other entrants, the quality of submissions was high and it was a difficult decision. We hope to continue with this campaign in the future, featuring other species at risk.

The amber ale is being produced by Alley Kat Brewery, Edmonton. If everything goes accordingly to plan, the beer will be ready by March, and it may be available at the AGM in Canmore.

The beer will be available at the Sherbrooke Liquor Store, Edmonton, and they have offered to let us have a percentage of the proceeds to go towards a species at risk conservation fund. (We arranged to start with Sherbrooke for this pilot launch.)

We are looking to expand sales into other parts of the province and would be happy to hear from anyone with contacts or suggestions.  
Mark.edwards@gov.ab.ca



## Bits and Bites

By now everyone has heard that Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development have merged. There are lots of changes on the horizon and the reorganization is ongoing. The newsletter will report on updates as they become available. Stay tuned for a full report.



### Mystery Photo

Name the species of owl

Answer on last page.

**Ken  
Crutchfield**

Chair,  
Conservation  
Committee

# Conservation Committee Report

October 2012 marked a transition in Chair of the Conservation Committee. After more than 12 years Blair Rippin turned over Chairmanship reins. However, Blair has agreed to remain a continuing member of the Committee albeit with reduced demands on his time. Other members of the committee include: Mark Boyce, Larry Roy, Matthew Pyper, Lorne Fitch and Tammy McMillan. **Additional members are welcome to join!**

Currently ACTWS has representation on 4 external committees: **Alberta Pacific Forest Industry (Alpac) Landscape Advisory Group (LAG)**- Blair Rippin; **Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division Regulation Change Advisory Group** – Evelyn Merrill, Larry Roy; **Alberta Committee on Species-At-Risk – Doug Collister**; **Alberta Fisheries Management Round Table** – Ken Crutchfield. To ACTWS MEMBERS.....likely there are a variety of other groups where it would be beneficial to the member as well as the Chapter to raise the public profile of ACTWS as a professional yet objective voice for competent fish and wildlife management. If you are aware of any instances which might benefit from ACTWS representation and you want to be that person!..... contact me. It is intended that subsequent newsletters will have an update on committee work as events dictate.

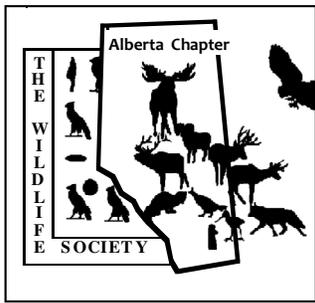
Substantive regulatory changes to environmental legislation, e.g., Fisheries Act, Canadian Environ-

mental Assessment Act, Navigable Waters Protection Act etc at the federal and provincial levels have been a flashpoint for many groups including ACTWS. Further changes are anticipated to statutes as well as regulations that will change management to a wide array of environmental programs among others, e.g., Species at Risk etc. Clouding the issue has been the absence of information on the changes as well as a reluctance of legislators to properly account for the changes. This is contributing to public frustration. The best public example at the moment are the public demonstrations associated with changes to the Navigable Waters Protection and Indian Acts. On the provincial front erasure of the Fish and Wildlife Division as an organization and legislative entity along with the consolidation of two departments, i.e., Alberta Environment and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, are harbingers of more changes to come. Expect to see more information on how ACTWS is responding to these changes. Buried in the smoke generated by these larger organizational and legislative issues was the Government of Alberta decision to transfer large blocks of southern Alberta public lands back to municipalities. This effectively removed control over use of these lands to the municipal government. At the same time the Alberta legislature was considering a private members Bill tabled by Dr. Neil Brown, **Bill 202 Public Lands (Grasslands Preservation) Amendment Act, 2012**. Bill 202 which would have required a more open and transparent appraisal of public lands in southern Alberta being considered for sale and or transfer. As of press time ACTWS has not received a response to its call for changes to operational procedures if not the legislative change outlined in Bill 202.

The Conservation Committee will be examining options to better inform, engage and support ACTWS membership involvement in issues involving fish and wildlife management, e.g., ACTWS website notifications, Twitter etc . Suggestions from the membership are welcome!

Ken Crutchfield





## Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society

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Don't forget we are also  
on Facebook



## Upcoming Events

### Prairie Conservation Forum Conference

Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum & Alberta Society of Professional Biologists “Engaging People in Conservation”

Red Deer, AB – February 19-22, 2013

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

### ACTWS/CSTWS Joint Conference



### Society for Northwestern Vertebrate Biology

Squamish, B.C. April 9-12

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

### 26th International Congress for Conservation Biology

(ICCB) Baltimore, MD USA - July 21-25, 2013

<http://www.conbio.org/mini-sites/iccb-2013>

### The Wildlife Society, 20th Annual Conference

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 5-9, 2013

## Electronic Education Series

**January 25, 2013** Dr. Mark S. Boyce,

**Resource Selection Functions**

**February 15, 2012** Dr. C. Scott Findlay,

**Canada's Species at Risk Act, 10 Years Later**

**March 23, 2012** Dr. Thomas (Tom) Nudds,

**Adaptive Management**

## Footnotes from the Editor



This week, the results of a study about water quality around the tar sands was released with wide media coverage. It corroborates what Dr. David Schindler has been saying for years—activities in the tar sands are unequivocally polluting water (up to 90 km away).

And the response from the government?

More intensive monitoring is the solution. Of course, this isn't a solution. It is a way to continue the current pace of development.

Over the last decade I have seen the ACTWS take on an increasing role in advocating for conservation issues. There is much work to be done, and thanks to those who keep trying. LW

### Mystery photo:

Northern Pygmy owl

This little owl eats insects, small mammals, frogs, and birds. It sometimes catches birds that outweigh it.