

THE ALBERTA WILDLIFER

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ACTWS President's Report

Jason Fisher

As autumn colours pirouette casual circles outside my window, it is sometimes hard to maintain concentration on hierarchical statistical models, proposals and reports, reviewing papers, and all such duties with which wildlife professionals are tasked. Surely, there are better fields to satisfy a fetish for administration and writing, and more lu-

crative fields for those with a penchant for mathematics. The unifying thread among wildlife professionals, I believe, is a love for nature and a desire to be in it. My own mental ramblings lately led me to this tragically accurate internet meme:

I take some comfort in commiseration. Most biologists I know spend too much time at a computer and too little time outdoors with wildlife.

Far from a self-indulgent pout, the disconnection of wildlife professionals from wildlife is an alarming trend. Field biology skills should be a fundamental component of biology training. Observation is the heart of scientific inquiry; field observations lead us to ask questions, form hypotheses, and conduct research to find answers. For many biologists, early field experience stimulated



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Matt Adams

Long-toed salamanders: a recent graduate student's experience.

The long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum*) is one of only two salamander species found in Alberta. Salamanders are amphibians, like frogs, and have a similar body shape to lizards. Salamanders in the genus *Ambystoma* are also known as “mole salamanders” because they are seldom found above ground. Tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma mavortium*), the other salamander species found in Alberta, is also a member of this genus, although the two species barely overlap in range within the province.

Long-toed salamanders are one of the most common salamander species throughout the Pacific Northwest and are found in a diverse array of habitats ranging from arid systems in eastern Oregon and Idaho to the temperate rain forests of coastal British Columbia and Alaska. In Alberta, long-toed salamanders occur only along the Rocky Mountains and foothills and occupy both alpine and valley-bottom systems. The life history of long-toed salamanders is similar throughout its range, but the timing, or phenology, of breeding and overwintering activities can vary. Generally, breeding adult long-toed salamanders emerge from below-ground overwintering sites in the spring to make overland nighttime migrations en masse to an aquatic breeding site. Like many amphibians, long-toed salamanders are “pond-breeding”, which means they require a permanent to semi-permanent standing body of water in which to lay eggs, and for larvae to develop and metamorphose into terrestrial juveniles. After breeding and egg-laying activities have concluded, adults will migrate back into the terrestrial areas around their breeding site and remain there for the remainder of the warm months until cold winter temperatures drive them below ground, back to their overwintering sites. Larvae metamorphose into terrestrial juveniles later in the year and emerge from the water body to find their own foraging grounds and overwintering refuges.

I worked with long-toed salamanders in Waterton Lakes National Park in 2013 and 2014, focusing my research activities on the breeding population inhabiting Linnet Lake. This population had been studied by grad students two other times, beginning in 1993, and has experienced over a 60% population decline since then. The decline is thought to be caused by high road mortality and predation of aquatic larvae by fish in Linnet Lake. The installation of under-road tunnels in 2008, and fish removals in 2010 and 2011 were done with the hope of reversing the population decline, and one of the main goals of my research was to find out if these two mitigation actions had any measureable effect. Other goals of my research were to determine how well wildlife cameras worked for monitoring tunnel use by salamanders, find out what sorts of refuges salamanders use to overwinter, and investigate the orientation of migrating adults and dispersing juveniles with respect to the breeding site shoreline. I used a unique method of track-

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ing in my investigations, termed “PIT telemetry”, which is simply using a large portable radio frequency identification (RFID) antenna to relocate passive integrated transponder (PIT)-tagged salamanders in the field. I also used PIT tags to create mark-recapture population estimates as well as detect movement of tagged salamanders through some of the tunnels.

Essentially, I found: no evidence that the long-toed salamander population at Linnet Lake is recovering, and, in fact, the population may still be in decline; long-toed salamanders overwintered exclusively in rotten tree roots ($n = 10$), sometimes associated with a decaying tree stump; on average, cameras capture about 15% of salamanders passing through tunnels; and adult and juvenile salamanders orient non-randomly (and differently) during movements to and from breeding locations, which has implications for protecting terrestrial areas around breeding sites.

Salamanders are pretty cool critters! I would encourage any nature-lover to take a moment next time you're in the Rocky's to gently flip a log or two near a fishless wetland in the spring and see if you can spot one of these elusive amphibians. The results of my research are available in the form of a MSc. thesis through the University of Alberta libraries, and I can be reached by email at mrattins@ualberta.ca.



Matt Adams holding a western toad (*Anaxyrus boreas*) and tiger salamander (*Ambystoma mavortium*) captured while searching for long-toed salamanders at night.

Photo by Matt Adams



A long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum*) encountering a plastic barrier designed to prevent salamanders from reaching the road surface and funnel them towards tunnel entrances. Photo by Matt Adams



Art Rodgers

Canadian Section Representative's Report

Art Rodgers, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (art.rodgers@ontario.ca)

Thank you, thank you, thank you to Merlin Shoesmith, Don Sexton, Rick Baydack, Erin McCance, Dennis Brannen and the many, many other members of the Arrangements Committee for the TWS 22nd Annual Conference in Winnipeg for making it one of the most successful meetings of all time! The Conference Program was overloaded with two plenaries, the IGNITE! Session, 10 concurrent sessions that included 21 Symposia and 36 Contributed Paper and Poster sessions, 23 Working Group Meetings, 9 pre-conference Workshops and 4 local field trips (all of which were totally sold out), and much, much more. As if that weren't enough, more than 1,554 people attended the conference; exceeding last year's turnout, and included more than 300 Canadians (those lemurs are going to have a tough time doing better than that in Raleigh next year!). All of this bodes well for the wildlife profession in Canada and makes me very proud to be your representative on TWS Council. Thank you.

I also want to thank Mark Boyce, Dee Patriquin, Darren Sleep, Dennis Brannen, Meagan Hainstock, C-Jae Breiter, Stephen Petersen and all of those folks who helped organize the Canadian Section/Manitoba Chapter Reception. There was an overwhelming turnout of more than 200 people, continuing our Canadian tradition of making this one of the most well-attended receptions at the annual conference. And once again, thanks to Lotek Wireless Inc., especially Oana Bantus and Mario Henriques, for their continued sponsorship and support of our reception at the annual conference – we really couldn't afford it without their help – thanks!

It was very gratifying to see Canadians honoured with TWS Awards during the conference. Tom Nudds was the recipient of the TWS Special Recognition Service Award and Lu Carbyn received a TWS Distinguished Service Award. Both have had outstanding careers and advanced our knowledge of wildlife science both nationally and internationally while serving the needs of TWS, and especially students, at all levels of the organization. Congratulations to both of you and thanks for your lifetime contributions to the wildlife profession and TWS.

It was also great to see the participation of Canadian students in the annual Quiz Bowl. Teams from the University of Winnipeg, University of Northern British Columbia and Lakehead University competed against 15 other teams from the U.S. You all did very well and it was especially rewarding to see Lakehead University make it to the final round against perennial favorite Humboldt State – that is an amazing feat, which proves Canadian students can compete against the big American schools – way to go!!

As we move into winter, it's time to start thinking about nominating someone or some group for TWS Awards. As I have indicated many times, I'm sure we can find Canadian 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 TWS Distinguished Service Award that will be selected 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

Call for 2016 ACTWS Award Nominations

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

Nominations can be made by any ACTWS member.

Nominees are normally residents of Alberta or have made a significant contribution in Alberta.

Awards will be presented at the 2016 ACTWS conference.

Nominations are valid for up to 3 years.

Outreach Award

This award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to Alberta's fish and wildlife through effective and excellent communication to the public.

Publication Award

These awards recognize wildlife professionals for outstanding written contributions in **technical** or **popular** publications.

Kristina Norstrom 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.

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.

Please submit an award nomination letter via email including:

Nomination Award category (e.g. Outreach or Rowan)

Candidates name and title

Justification for the award

C.V. /resume of the nominee

Submit nominations to John Paczkowski - John.Paczkowski@gov.ab.ca

Deadline Monday February 1, 2016

Conservation Affairs Committee

Committee members include: Mark Boyce, Ken Crutchfield (Chair), Kristie Derkson, Lorne Fitch, Matthew Pyper, Larry Roy

Chairman's Rant – Opportunity.....it really comes to mind, especially in the month of November around Remembrance Day. It is a time we acknowledge the contribution of Canadians who step forward to safeguard our rights, values and interests. It is because of their personal commitment that other Canadians might have an opportunity to continue to enjoy a range of interests. While not everyone is prepared or expected to stand in harm's way for the benefit of their fellow citizens, there is an expectation that safeguarding rights, values and interests is a citizenship duty, albeit in different forms than taking up arms. To that end a wildlife professional has a citizenship duty to represent and address wildlife management interests. The *Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society* is similar to other like minded professional groups, however it distinguishes itself as being more than a gathering vehicle. Set out in ACTWS's mandate is knowledge sharing and advocacy. I am singling out ACTWS members on their citizenship/professional duty to represent wildlife interests in a public way. The steps to formulating and finalizing a ACTWS position can be very onerous to ensure the Executive honors the interests of its members. However, the door is very open for ACTWS members to take on advocacy in a shorter and more timely way than a chapter led initiative. The most recent discussion reported in the media about the value, merit, morality of bounties to kill wolves provides a good example of a public discourse that should attract members' attention. In this instance the ACTWS outlined a position in October of 2013 that stopped short of advocating the prohibition of bounties, in favor of acknowledging the limitations of bounties to be an effective and/or desirable wildlife management tool and respecting the role of the provincial regulatory manager to set the limit. There are numerous wildlife management issues warranting public discourse and members are encouraged to step forward as a duty of being a citizen and wildlife professional. ACTWS members are encouraged to ensure wildlife management science is front and center as the public weighs options related to wildlife management.

ACTWS members are encouraged to share their experiences in advocating wildlife management issues by sharing them with the "Conservation Committee" and/ or the ACTWS newsletter, website, TWITTER, FACEBOOK.

Committee attention has been focused on the following subjects.

Ken Crutchfield

"To that end a wildlife professional has a citizenship duty to represent and address wildlife management interests. "

Actions Underway

Alberta Grazing Leases – Alberta’s Auditor General identified in his March 2015 report a section dealing with the “Environment and Parks – Managing Grazing Leases” pg. 15-24 (<http://www.oag.ab.ca/webfiles/reports/OAG%20March%202015%20Report.pdf>). This portion of the OAG report received little media attention yet it is not an insignificant finding. Essentially it mirrors concerns that were the basis of a 1999 Bill to ensure access/use fees paid by resource developers accessing public lands leased to private interests would be paid to the Government of Alberta. Bill 31 (1999) was never proclaimed so the arrangements continued unabated and some might say worsened by the GOA decision to modify the process for leaseholders to exchange leases. The OAG estimated that grazing leaseholders gain more than the \$25 M/annually. In addition to the gain these leaseholders receive from the below market annual lease rental set by the province, it was pointed out that they also negotiate agreements with industry operators that provide financial compensation well in excess of the amount necessary to address any impairment of grazing. Leaseholders also retain the privilege to hold and sell grazing lease rights as if it were personal property. Bottom line, the GOA, by omission or choice, is forgoing its responsibility to secure proper value for public land it holds and manages in trust for Albertans. It could be argued that had the province properly discharged its responsibility to secure appropriate and market based value from users of public lands leased for grazing, then many of the costs associated with their proper management (environmental, agricultural, recreational) would have been off-set, wholly or substantially. There is a discussion underway within the Conservation Affairs Committee to formulate a transmittal letter for the ACTWS Executive to the Minister of Environment and Parks, Finance and Executive Council, calling on the GOA to address the shortcomings identified by the OAG by e-examining Bill 31 with the intent to put in place new legislation and processes to secure benefits to Albertans.

Service to the Community

Alberta Game Management Advisory Group – ACTWS reps -Larry Roy & Evie Merrill

Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee – ACTWS reps - Doug Collister – Kirby Smith – <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/species-at-risk/default.aspx>

Alberta Pacific Local Advisory Committee – ACTWS rep -_Kristie Derksen –

“Mitsubishi sold ALPAC to another Japanese company, Hokuetsu Kishu Paper, which doesn't seem to have an effect on day to day operations of the mill, the land advisory group or the overall FMA.

A Rainforest Alliance audit went through in 2015 and ALPAC passed with just a few minor infractions that are being dealt with and ALPAC will be re-certified.

The spring field trip this year consisted of a trip out to see some research plots for various treatments for their poplar tree improvement program.

And a 5 year update on biodiversity report is coming soon to be reviewed by the Land Advisory Group”...Kristie

Alberta Fisheries Management Round Table – ACTWS rep – Ken Crutchfield – (<http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/fisheries-management/alberta-fisheries-management-roundtable.aspx>)

October 17th meeting Edmonton –Alberta Environment and Parks is proposing to change the format and membership of the Round Table to be more of a sounding board for AEP policy development. <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/fisheries-management/documents/FisheriesPolicyComm-TermsRef-2015.pdf>)

North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance – ACTWS rep – Ken Crutchfield – significant work is being undertaken within the watershed with particular emphasis on following through on an implementation plan for watershed management on the North Saskatchewan River watershed. Key projects include the start-up of the 3 year Vermilion River Watershed and Restoration Project funded under grants from Alberta and Canada. NSWA continues to support the work of the Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership as well as the work of the lake management groups associated with Lake Wabamun, Mayatan and Jackfish. Opportunities abound for ACTWS members to get involved. Check out <https://www.nswa.ab.ca/>

Stirring in the Background

Bison Transfer into Banff National Park –Members are encouraged to review background material: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/banff/plan/gestion-management/bison.aspx> Not much to report at this time so it would be useful to have a member step forward to act as a liaison on this matter and feed info to members. Lu Carbyn has set out some issues on the matter which were raised at the March 2015 conference. He has also indicated a willingness to work with other members on furthering the discussion.

Bounties – discussion continues as noted in earlier newsletters on about the merit and utility as a wildlife tool. <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-management/documents/WildlifeMgmtPlan-Wolves-Dec1991.pdf>

TWS Policy and Position Statements – members are encouraged to read up on existing policy resources (<http://wildlife.org/get-involved/policy/policyresources/>) and position statements (<http://wildlife.org/position-statements/>)

Canada Species at Risk Act – “...any SARA related public consultation opportunities are highlighted in the Public Registry. In addition, industry and individuals are invited to participate in the wide variety of public consultations through notices published in Canada's official parliamentary journal, the [Canada Gazette](#).” ACTWS members are encouraged to get involved. Check out the current listing of consultations: http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/involved/consultation/default_e.cfm

Alberta Wetland Policy – released in September 2013, the Wetland Policy is now being implemented in the “White” (settled area) of the province with full implementation by 2016. Members are encouraged to learn more about the policy and its implementation. To learn more: <http://aep.alberta.ca/water/programs-and-services/wetlands/alberta-wetland-policy-implementation.aspx>

Alberta Government is in early stages of updating 1982 Fish and Wildlife

Policy for Alberta – (<http://esrd.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/fisheries-management/documents/FishWildlifePolicyAlberta-1982A.pdf>) – members are reminded of the GOA intent to revisit and update the 1982 policy. Status of update unknown.

Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PFRA) land conversion – there has been on-going dialogue in Saskatchewan and Manitoba over the conversion of lands previously held and managed by the federal agency responsible for PFRA lands to provincial jurisdiction.

ACTWS members have previously been alerted to efforts by various conservation organizations to raise the profile for continuing management of these lands for wildlife conservation attributes. On April 17th the Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society sent a letter to the Manitoba Premier outlining its concern and recommendation for the management of these PFRA lands in Manitoba. ACTWS members can view the letter on the ACTWS website.

ACTWS members are encouraged to come forward and become involved. Opportunities exist to either act as a Chapter representative on a consultative committee and/or becoming involved in the development of Chapter position statements. Bottom line....the intent is to show the communities that ACTWS members live and work in that as wildlife professionals we adhere to the notion that good wildlife science is integral to better decision making and sharing that knowledge is important to effective wildlife management.

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Canadian Section Representative's Report

individual members, Sections, Chapters or Working Groups. And don't forget the TWS Distinguished Service Award that will be selected 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 Awards Chair, Evelyn Merrill (emerrill@ualberta.ca), me, or any member of the Executive as soon as possible for further information. Many of the Awards have a **February 15** deadline but some are not due until **March 15**, so don't hesitate to get working on your nominations **NOW** and let's make sure our Canadian colleagues get the recognition they deserve! See the list of awards and nomination details at <http://wildlife.org/get-involved/awards/>.

As always, if you have any concerns or ideas about how TWS can better serve your needs, please let me know – my "Inbox" is always open. For now, enjoy the turning of the leaves and the first snows of winter. Cheers.

President's Message continued....

our interest in wildlife sciences, and led us to our chosen careers. All of us seek that deeper connection with nature.

With the advent of increasingly non-invasive technologies to study wildlife, students and wildlife professionals are becoming progressively further removed from field biology. Remote cameras, satellite collars, acoustic recording devices, and other technology have markedly increased our knowledge of wildlife species, but come at the cost of removing us from firsthand contact with those species and their environments. Many undergraduates never get to experience a field course, and some graduate students emerge with a remarkable ability to conduct statistical analyses but have neither felt nor smelled their study species.

This emerging problem has been dubbed "the extinction of field biology skills" and has entered the popular media¹. Warren et al. (2015) suggest that field biology skills have been distinctly unappreciated, and that educators "have been

guilty of formalising a gross undervaluing of the complexities involved in field biology". The problem starts with education², but it does not end there. As more of wildlife professionals' duties shift to planning, regulation, supervision, and administration, the opportunities for field experiences - for which they entered the field in the first place - have diminished greatly. The decline of field biology skills is a serious detriment to the wildlife profession.

Undergraduate education offers a few solutions, by way of field courses.

Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre (<http://www.bamfieldmsc.com/>), supported by Universities of Alberta and Calgary) offers intensive field courses on marine and terrestrial ecology designed to provide those vital, hands-on experiences with wildlife that spur both passion and self-reliant, confident inquiry. I had the honour of teaching a course this summer, and I saw firsthand the dramatic effect it had on students. (I also saw plenty of pinnipeds and whales, and those help).

For wildlife professionals

long past an undergraduate education, there are fewer available remedies. However, ACTWS could help conserve endangered field biology skills. There are many wildlife professionals still engage periodically (even regularly!) in field work, and seek volunteers to help with large workloads for short periods of time.

Whether it be netting and collaring large mammals, bird banding and call surveying, amphibian surveying, or even checking camera traps and acoustic recorders, there are people looking for help, and people aching to get into the field with no opportunity to do so.

I propose a *Field Biology Skills Exchange Program*, wherein ACTWS would help pair field biology opportunities with wildlife professionals eager to expand their skill sets. Field studies seeking help would register with us; we could host their profile on the webpage, list their needs, location, and times needed. Wildlife professionals seeking opportunities to help could also register with us, listing their skills and

President's Message continued....

availability on the webpage. We could help these two connect for mutual benefit. The challenges to implementation are the usual ones: time and resources. We would need ACTWS members to volunteer to help us design and then implement the program. If you think this a worthwhile endeavour and would like to help, please let us know.

Eric Berne wrote, "*The moment a little boy is concerned with which is a jay and which is a sparrow, he can no longer see the birds or hear them sing*"³. I couldn't agree less; understanding the marvellous complexity of nature and the intricate workings of species in their homes inspires us to

see and hear the birds with greater clarity, and to borrow from them a greater knowledge of all of nature. If we work together, if we share our expertise and our experience, maybe our field biology skills can survive, so the next generation will hear with even greater clarity.

¹<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/opinion/save-field-biology-skills-from-extinction-risk/2018721.article>

²http://www.field-studies-council.org/media/268869/2002_biology_fieldwork_is_it_heading_for_extinction.pdf

³Eric Berne was a Canadian psychiatrist interested in social interactions. His most famous work was *Games People Play*, with excellent titles such as "Let's You and Him Fight", and "Now I've Got You, You SOB".



Nailing dead beaver to a tree. Who wouldn't want to do that?



**2016 CONFERENCE & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
ALBERTA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**

**4-6 March 2016
Drumheller, Alberta, Canada
Badlands Community Facility**

**Evolution in a rapidly changing environment:
Can lessons from the past direct future wildlife conservation?**

*How can understanding past extinctions provide context for
current conservation issues in the Anthropocene?*

How are wildlife evolving within our rapidly changing environment, and how does this understanding inform our expectations for the future?

*How are wildlife management/conservation organizations adapting
to modern challenges, or how should they be?*

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Jennie Moore

Director of Sustainable Development and Environmental Stewardship
British Columbia Institute of Technology

Draft Meeting Sched-

Friday, 4 March 2016	Saturday, 5 March 2016	Sunday, 6 March 2016
0900 - 2100	0900-2400	0900-1600
Field Trips	Plenary Session	Concurrent Sessions
Workshops	Keynote Address	Poster Sessions
Student Conclave	Concurrent Sessions	Student Awards
Annual General Meeting	Banquet & Dancing	Grande Finale

Early registration deadline: 15 January 2016



FIRST Call for Papers and Posters

Deadline: 15 January 2016

You are invited to submit titles and abstracts for oral and poster presentations at the 2016 ACTWS Conference and Annual General Meeting. Presentation on all aspects of wildlife are welcome; from plants to animals and ecosystems, including management, research, monitoring, species biology, and new techniques.

Presentations will be **12 minutes** in length (plus 3 minutes for questions). Guidelines for oral and poster presentations will be posted on the website (actws.ca).

STUDENTS: ACTWS gives away > \$10,000 each year in scholarships, travel grants, and presentation awards. **Submit your travel grant application with your abstract!** (details will be posted at www.actws.ca/conference).

Abstracts must be submitted online at: www.actws.ca/conference/conference-presentations. The following information should be provided:

1. Lead author name, affiliation, mailing address, phone number(s), and e-mail address.
2. Names and affiliations of additional authors
3. Title of abstract
4. ABSTRACT: Distillation of the purpose, methods, results and conclusions, **250 words max.** (Please note that *all abstracts are printed in the program booklet*—the abstract you will submit will be the final that is printed in the program booklet).

Please note: An automated **confirmation email** should be received upon submission of the abstract. If you do not receive confirmation, or have other questions, please email abstracts@actws.ca or contact Cole Burton at director3@actws.ca.

Notification: Authors will be advised of the final decision on their abstract by 1 February 2016.



Bharal or blue sheep

Dave Hobson

Mountains and Tigers: A little bit of India beyond the crowds.



After saving 10% of my salary for the last 5 years, I finally earned a 6 mo. leave of absence from my job this spring. I was to learn afterwards that many of my co-workers weren't expecting me to return.

I had contemplated returning to Africa or going back to Asia. With the Himalaya beckoning, I chose Asia. I had last been in Asia way back in 1982 when I spent several months wandering about South-east Asia. This time I set my sights on northern India and the Himalaya. At the ripe old age of 60, I figured I'd better do my high altitude trekking while I can.

The city of Leh, in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir State, sits above the Indus River at an altitude of 3525m or about 11,500 ft. at the western end of the Tibetan Plateau. Almost everywhere else from there is down. Ladakh is in the rain shadow of the Himalaya and has a cold desert climate. Flying in to Leh gives you a grand panoramic view of the mountains stretching away to the north.

After spending some time acclimating in the ragged old town of Leh, I focused on 3 areas to visit. First was the Nubra Valley to the north which I, and 2 Israeli fellows I had just met, accessed via an Indian version of a jeep. The road took us up a long, narrow, switchbacking road over the high pass of Kardung La. Although the pass is signed as being 18,380 ft. high, Wikipedia insists it's only 17,582 ft. high. To put that into perspective, Mount Robson is 12,972 ft. high. Even though a sign at the pass warned us against staying longer than 20 minutes, we ended up stuck at the top in a traffic jam (there was a festival going on in Leh the next day) for over 2 hours. We suffered from altitude headaches during the descent into the Nubra Valley which was at a pain relieving altitude of 10,000 ft.

While staying at a homestay in the town of Hundar amidst the barchan sand dunes of the Shyok River valley, we rode Bactrian Camels. It was a scene that would have been intimately familiar to Marco Polo should he have stepped out of his grave.

The next stop was Pangong Tso, a saline lake that crosses into Tibet and lies within the Chang Thang Wildlife Reserve. Here, amidst the barren sands, I saw herds of the wild equine called the kiang also known as the Tibetan wild ass.

When it came to wildlife in Ladakh, nothing beat my solo hike along the Markha Valley

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in Hemis High Altitude National Park. Although this is a popular trail during the summer, in May there are almost no trekkers to be seen. The 2 high passes, Kanda La (15,977 ft.) and Gongmaru La (16,830 ft.) were still blanketed in snow as well as prayer flags.

Along this trail I saw bharal or blue sheep and I was hoping to see argali but the closest I came to them was a head at a homestay along the way. The Himalayan marmot were common as well as the large-eared pika.

Birds were in abundance also. The ubiquitous black-billed magpie reminded me of home but there were many exotic species. chukar partridges were, perhaps, the most common bird I saw but the colourful passerines really drew my attention.

Equal to the wildlife were the cultural experiences. Most of these Himalayan valleys are not accessible by road and the ancient skills of pony, donkey and yak packing still provides the lifeline of supplies to the villages along the way. Fields are worked with handmade, yak drawn plows and irrigated via long narrow canals that originate far upstream where the water level is above the level of the fields. Wool and traditional clothing is still made locally although western clothes are also common. The trails themselves, built up in many places with high, dry stone foundations and hugging the steep slopes, have been used for centuries, funnelling traffic onto the ancient silk and tea routes into China. I get the impression that, should our global civilization collapse, beyond wondering what ever happened to the trekkers, the villagers of the high Himalaya might not even notice.

Reluctantly leaving Ladakh, I flew back to Delhi and hired a driver to take me the 200 km. to the town of Ramnagar along the southern foothills of the Himalaya. It was a wild 6 hour drive through Indian traffic. In Indian traffic, both here and in Ladakh, I had to accept my loss of control and give myself up to fate and whatever might come.

Ramnagar sits at the entrance to the Jim Corbett National Park and Tiger Reserve. Here, I hired a driver/guide and his open jeep for a two day safari in the park. My guide was very knowledgeable and could name the birds from their song. The park is largely a temperate deciduous forest, hot and humid at the beginning of the summer monsoon season when I was travelling. In the centre lies a grassland savannah, very reminiscent of places in southern Africa.

Of course, the big hope is to see a tiger. Leopards also range through the park and they were a close second. The first day we saw lots of birds, too many species to remember as the guide flung out their names as we drove along. No little brown jobs in this forest it almost seemed. The birds were colourful and flashy as they whipped across the road and through the trees. Few stopped for a decent photo.

There were herds of wild Asian elephants, chital deer, sambar deer and kakar (barking) deer along with jackals, rhesus macaques and hanuman langurs. The park is a biologist dream come true.

Along a river we saw the critically endangered (IUCN) crocodilian called the gharial. These fish eaters basked on the shore with their mouths agape. Once widespread throughout the watersheds in India, Nepal and Burma, they are now restricted to only 2% of their former range and have declined from an estimated 10,000 to only 200 – 300 breeding pairs left in the world.

That first day of the safari we heard tigers, their low growls coming from the dense forest, but we didn't see them. The guide warned me that we might not see any. However, on the second day, amidst the tall grasses, we glimpsed a tiger. With its head raised above the grass, it was focused on a herd of Chital or Spotted Deer. Before long a crowd of jeeps had gathered and we all watched for 2 hours as the tiger slowly stalked the herd. Sometimes moving unseen in the grass, sometimes stopped, head raised, watching the deer. Finally, suddenly, the deer scattered and a few minutes later we caught sight of the tiger moving away, unsuccessful. With the action over, the herd of jeeps also scattered. One thing that



Indian pond heron

Continued.....

caught my attention was the white spots on the black back of the tiger's ears. What was the value, I wondered, that led to the evolution of the spots. Any suggestions out there?

Happy to have seen a tiger and one hunting to boot, I was not disappointed when it was time to head back to Ramnagar. But the excitement was not yet over. On the road out, the driver heard something and braked. Backing up we found another tiger in a stand of trees not far off the road. This one was lying down with its jaws firmly gripped on the throat of a chital buck. The deer was still kicking weakly. Even the driver, with 15 years of guiding behind him, couldn't hold back his excitement. The tiger, watching us, kept its grip. Finally, after about 15 minutes, when the kicking stopped, it rose, grabbed a new hold on the throat and dragged the deer away to cover behind some trees. I could imagine the thought going through its mind "oh for Christ sake, can't a guy kill something in peace around here!" And this time, we watched without the crowd, it was just the two of us.

A few days later, I flew out of India. Ahead of me was a month and a half of Vietnam and Cambodia. But that's another story.



A tiger bites down on a chital deer in Jim Corbett National Park, India



A herd of wild Asian elephants in Jim Corbett National Park, India

Continued.....



A Ladakhi child and his trophy argali in Hemmis High Altitude National Park, India

An Indian pita in Jim Corbett National Park, India



Curious about that other primate
A juvenile rhesus macaque in Jim Corbett National Park, India



Prairie Conservation and
Endangered Species Conference
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan | February 16-18 2016

The Prairie Conservation Award

The *Prairie Conservation Award* is granted to a deserving recipient from each of the three Prairie Provinces once every three years in recognition of significant long-term contributions to native habitat or species at risk conservation.

Individuals from any walk of life, organizations or Aboriginal groups can be nominated for this award.

Five criteria are used in the evaluation of nominations for the *Prairie Conservation Award*:

- 1) Relationship of achievements to the conservation or understanding of native habitat or endangered species within the Prairies Ecozone.
- 2) Demonstration of exceptional commitment or innovation (above and beyond normal livelihood expectations).
- 3) Demonstration of enduring commitment.
- 4) Significance of the accomplishment in terms of results.
- 5) Extent to which granting of an award to this nominee will help native habitat conservation and endangered species efforts within the Prairies Ecozone.

Apply by preparing a nomination letter and resume, and submit to the provincial contact outlined on the website.

For further information contact:
awards.pcesc@gmail.com
or visit the conference website.

www.pcesc.ca

Prairie - It's a Happening Place!

Exploring the status, trends, threats, and issues surrounding prairie and endangered species conservation, the protection and conservation of prairie and species, the restoration and recovery of prairie and species and connecting and motivating people to wonder, care, and act.

Important dates to remember:

**Application and Proposal
Submission Deadline:**
November 30, 2015

**Award Winners
Announced:**
January 01, 2016

PCESC 2013 recipients of The Prairie Conservation Award:
Ken and Nora Balog (Alberta, ranchers)
Gary Seib (Saskatchewan, Nature Saskatchewan)
and John Morgan (Manitoba, conservation entrepreneur).



Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan | February 16-18 2016

Young Professional Stewardship Grant

The *Young Professional Stewardship Grant* was developed to promote future involvement to achieve success with prairie conservation and endangered species management. The *Young Professional Stewardship Grant* is for professionals, ranchers, farmers or aspiring conservationists between the ages of 18-30 who live and/or work in Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba.

Up to three (3) individual grants awarded totaling \$7500.00 (\$2500.00 each); 80% will be received upon proposal award and the remaining 20% will be delivered upon project completion after the final report has been submitted.

CRITERIA:

- Must focus on “*Engaging People in Conservation*”
- Community involvement/extension component
- Must be innovative
- Must include / identify socio-economic benefits
- Must be conducted in the native grasslands, rangeland, or parkland regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba

You can apply by filling out an application found on the website and submitting it to:
awards.pcesc@gmail.com

For further information contact:
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Important dates to remember:

**Application and Proposal
Submission Deadline:**
November 30, 2015

Grant Winners Announced:
January 01, 2016

Grant Agreement Executed:
March 31, 2016

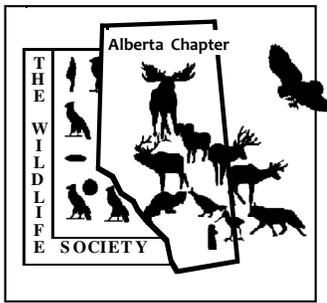
Interim Report:
December 31, 2016

Project Completion:
Prior to October 31, 2017

Final Report Submitted:
December 31, 2017

PCESC 2013 recipients of the Stewardship Grant:

Prairie and Parkland Habitat Education for Youth (Friends of Birds Hill Park Inc.),
Influences and Impact of the Social Landscape in Grizzly Bear Conservation (The University of Alberta)
and Engaging Rural Landowners in Conserving Habitat for Species at Risk (Nature Saskatchewan).



Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society

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Don't forget we are also
on Facebook



Footnotes from the Editor

Whoa...what a great plenary session topic and what a great location for the next ACTWS AGM and Conference. My Dad used to take me to Drumheller all the time to fossil hunt when I was a child. My thanks to Matt Adams for his contribution on salamanders and to Samantha Morris-Yasinski for the upcoming events. Dave

Upcoming Events

Alberta Wilderness Association 2015 Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture
November 20, 2015

Calgary, Alberta

<http://albertawilderness.ca/lecture>

Alberta Ecotrust Environmental Gathering:
“Change the Climate”

February 25-27, 2016

Calgary, Alberta

<http://albertaecotrust.com/2014/first-annual-environmental-gathering/>

2016 ACTWS Conference: Badlands Spectacular
March 4-6, 2016

Drumheller, AB

<http://www.actws.ca/conference/>

11th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference

February 16-18, 2016

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

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

5th International Conference on Biodiversity
March 10-12, 2016

Madrid, Spain

<http://biodiversity.conferenceseries.com/>

International Conference on Pollution & Sustainable Environment

April 25-26, 2016

Dubai, UAE

<http://pollutioncontrol.conferenceseries.com/>