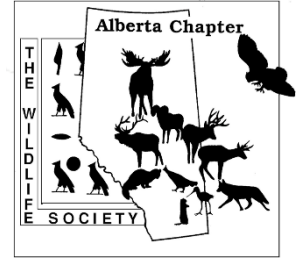


## Memorial



### Ian Ross<sup>1</sup>

Members of The Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society lost a fine colleague, contributor, and friend when Ian Ross was killed at the age of 44 in a light aircraft accident while radio tracking lions for the Laikipia Predator Project near Nanyuki, Kenya.

Born in Goderich, Ontario he was a true outdoorsman from the beginning, running a trapline even during high school. Ian graduated from the University of Guelph with an honours degree in Wildlife Biology in 1982 and began his field career working on a variety of wildlife species including snapping turtles and black bears. He soon headed west to Alberta looking for new challenges and for a short while was a beekeeper near Hythe in northwestern Alberta. This led to a job as a wildlife biologist with a small Calgary consulting firm where he had his first experiences with grizzly bears, studying the effects of industrial development southwest of Grande Prairie. Thus began an illustrious 20-yr career of research on large mammals, principally large carnivores in western Canada.

In the early 1980s Ian began work on the Sheep River Cougar Project with Orval Pall and Martin Jalkotzy. Many happy days were spent snow-tracking cougars for hundreds of kms up and down the foothills of Kananaskis Country. His joy working on the cougar project was prophetically cut short when his mentor, Orval Pall, died in a plane crash while radio-tracking bighorns in the Rockies in June 1986. However, the hook was set. Ian and Martin continued the Sheep River Project and the 14-yr project became the most intensive study of cougars in Canada and one of the longest running research projects on *Puma concolor* in North America. This work formed the basis of a new management plan for cougars in Alberta as well as the draft conservation strategy for large carnivores in Canada, a project initiated by World Wildlife Fund Canada.

Cougar attracted much attention and Ian used that attention to foster a thoughtful and effective wildlife conservation message to all those who came to his many public speaking engagements. His work on the cougar project received national radio recognition on CBC Morningside with Peter Gzowski and then Arthur Black of CBC Basic Black program followed along with Ian and Martin while they radio-collared a cougar. Several dubbed it some of the best radio they had ever heard.

Ian was the senior author on 9 papers in peer-reviewed journals and many technical reports. He regularly reviewed for peer-reviewed journals. In addition, he never forgot the importance of getting the message out to the public and wrote many popular articles on cougars; one of international note was published in Natural History magazine. Ian also rewrote the grizzly bear status report for COSEWIC, a meticulous document of current population density and distribution information on grizzlies across Canada. This document has national significance to the conservation the species.

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarship established by ACTWS in 1992 as the Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society Student Award. Renamed Ian Ross Memorial Scholarship in 2004.

Ian made significant contributions to many other research projects through his wildlife capture activities, something he did better than most other biologists, and in doing so assisted many graduate students with their research. Over his career, he captured over 100 cougars, 100 grizzly bears, 800 bighorn sheep, along with countless other black bears, moose, and mountain goats. He conducted his capture work using an exacting professional approach while retaining an empathy for the wildlife he was pursuing. His capture work was featured on Discovery Channel in a piece that showcased grizzly bears. Ian always had a tremendous positive impact on the projects and the people he worked with.

However, the environmental assessment process - endlessly mitigating and judging the significance of cumulative effects, was frustrating to Ian. Such work bound him to a desk and away from the fieldwork and research that he truly loved. He jumped at the chance to participate in the Liakipia Predator Project, a study of large African carnivores in central Kenya designed to find ways to allow for coexistence of hyenas, lions, leopards, and people in the agricultural matrix that exists outside national parks in most of southern Africa. Ian understood that if these predators were to survive in the long run they had to be able to exist outside of the national parks. His time was largely volunteered. Money was never really an issue: He was much more concerned with the conservation of wildlife and their habitats.

Ian Ross worked tirelessly for ACTWS. He served as President-Elect in 1996 and President in 1997. Following his time on the Executive, he served on various conservation and fundraising committees.

Ian spent his recreational time in wild places as much as possible. He and Sheri, his wife of 20 years, loved to hike the foothills of the Rockies west of Calgary, as well as far-flung locales, with return visits to the U.S. desert southwest, Canadian Arctic, Belize, and Africa. He loved to hunt elk, deer, and moose for his own table and enjoyed learning to fly fish in mountain lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. Yet he vigorously opposed the senseless trophy killing of wolves, bears, and cougars.

Two days before his death Ian was on top of the world having collared his first leopard. Many family members and friends were planning to visit him at the research station and he was busy organizing their visits in August. On the evening he died Ian was tracking a radio-collared lion from a light aircraft. Searchers located its wreckage the next morning. As he wished, Ian was cremated and his ashes dispersed in Kananaskis Country where he had spent so much time with his cougars. Ian Ross died at the peak of his career, doing what he loved.

*David Ross, Martin Jalkotzy and Jon Jorgenson*

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