

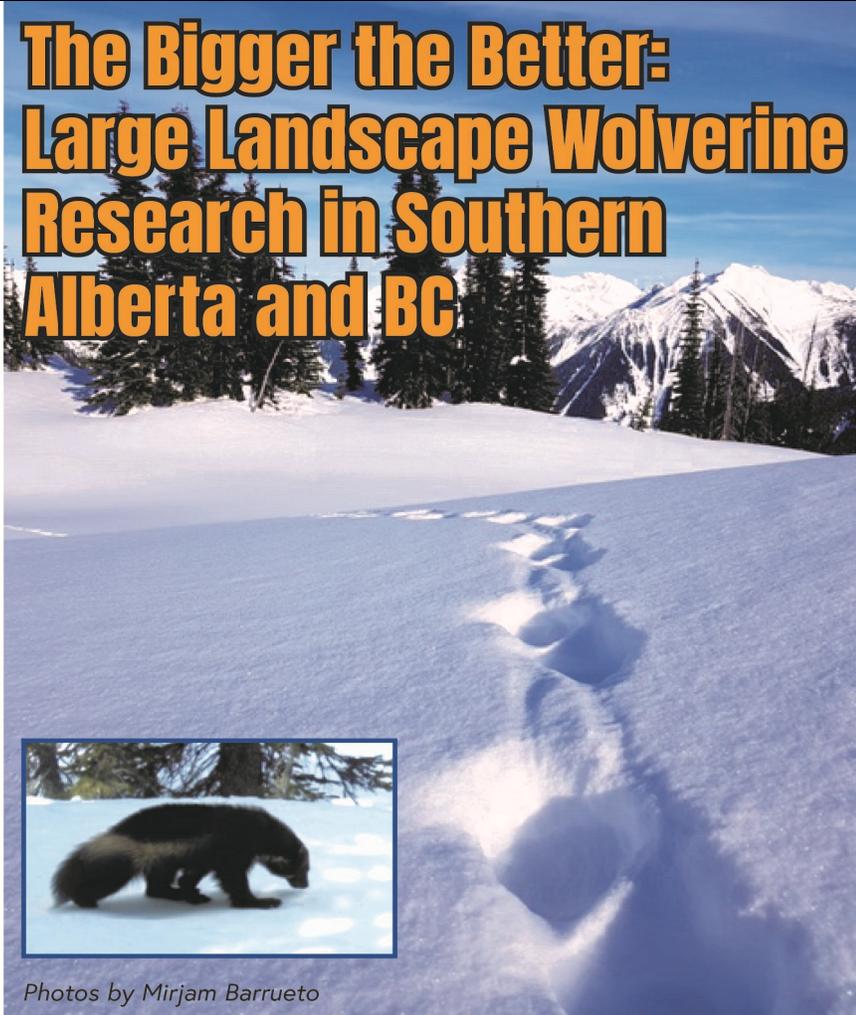


The Red Deer River Naturalist

EDITORS: MYRNA PEARMAN, SUSAN VAN DER HOEK, JUDY BOYD

NOVEMBER 2018

The Bigger the Better: Large Landscape Wolverine Research in Southern Alberta and BC



Photos by Mirjam Barrueto

Thursday,
November 22, 2018
Kerry Wood
Nature Centre
General Meeting/
Refreshments 7:30PM
Speaker 8:00PM

Mirjam Barrueto has become a wolverine researcher nearly by accident. Her first "real" biology job, after graduating with a MSc in Zoology from the University of British Columbia in 2009, was as a research technician monitoring wildlife crossing structures in Banff National Park. She did not know that her years of experience in mountain climbing, backcountry skiing and ultra-running would come in handy for the part of her job that the ad didn't say anything about: a three year non-invasive research project studying the genetic connectivity of wolverines across the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff and Yoho national parks.



Admission free and open to the public

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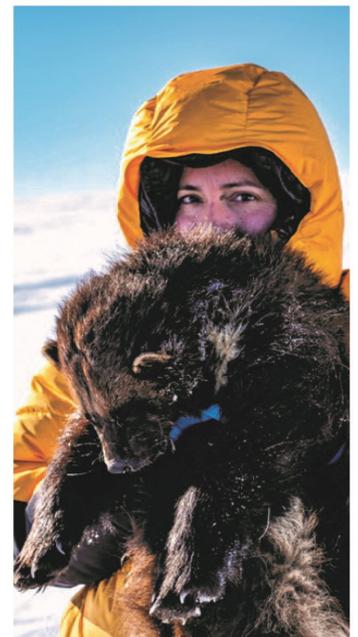


Red Deer River Naturalists



www.rdrn.ca

Ever since then she has been studying the interactions between highways, and large and small mammals, and the population ecology of wolverines in the Canadian Rockies. She has conducted fieldwork, analyzed data and written research publications. In 2017, she started a new project investigating the effects of landscape-scale human activities on female wolverines in the Canadian Rocky and Columbia Mountains. This project is a collaboration between the University of Calgary, where she is now a PhD student, Parks Canada, the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative, and the Helicopter and Cat Ski Industry in British Columbia.



WILDERNESS, WILDLIFE AND HUMAN-WILDLIFE INTERACTIONS: CHANGING THE PARADIGM • NOVEMBER 9 -10, 2018

The Cochrane Ecological Institute will be hosting this third annual conference at the Cochrane Ranchehouse in Cochrane. Check out www.ceinst.org for more details. Tickets can be purchased through www.facebook.com/CochraneEcological

NOVEMBER 9: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
NOVEMBER 10: SYMPOSIUM

GOSLING RAISED BY LOONS



Photos and Story by Bonnie Hall

The summer of 2018 brought an unusual occurrence to the southwest bay of Spring Lake, Alberta. On June 12, residents around the lake got their first sighting of a yellow gosling, instead of a brown loon chick!

Residents observed that the loon parents tried to teach the gosling to feed itself; however, the bone structure of geese prevents them from diving. The parents patiently took turns feeding the gosling throughout its life span of five weeks.

It was also interesting to watch the parents trying to teach the gosling typical loon behaviours—riding on the parents' backs, diving for food, and avoiding the shoreline. On several occasions, it was observed that the parents called the gosling back whenever it headed toward the shore. The communication between the two species—with the parents issuing a special “coo” sound—was also interesting to observe.

The gosling rode around on its parent's back and, as it grew

in size, its weight would force the “mother ship” deeper into the water. Since the gosling wasn't able to get to shore, it spent a considerable amount of time grooming and sleeping atop their backs. These were two very dedicated parents!



The last sighting of the gosling was on July 17. Sadly, on July 18, residents observed the adults searching in vain for their unusual offspring: they called for it, put their head under water looking for it, and even dove in a vain attempt to find it. They searched the entire bay in the morning and again in the afternoon. They swam side-by-side, calling incessantly. This behaviour continued while they circled the entire bay, as if they were conducting a type of funeral for their lost gosling.



ALL HANDS ON DECK!

Hands on Alberta is a call to action by ABMI for residents of Alberta to help collect biodiversity data across the province. The first-ever province-wide citizen science mission, held on October 27 and 28, was to document one of the more notable changes happening across our province this fall—the colour-changes of wild hares. This image, taken by Shirley Otway of Calgary, shows a White-tailed Jackrabbit changing to white from the bottom up.

We encourage RDRN members to join NatureLynx and to participate in future Citizen Science initiatives! <https://naturelynx.ca>



**RDRN Bird Focus Group Walk • October 20, 2018 • Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary •
11 Observers • 15 Bird Species • Host: Keith Kline**

Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Boreal Chickadee, Dark-eyed Junco, Black-billed Magpie, Widgeon, Downy Woodpecker, Canada Geese, American Robin, Western Grebe, Ring-billed Gull, Lesser Yellowlegs, Red-tailed Hawk, Blue Jay.

DR. SALLY STUART'S SEASONAL SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF ALBERTA:

COMMON LOONS

The Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) is the iconic Canadian bird that symbolizes wilderness and freedom. During the spring, loons occasionally fly over Cygnet Lake in the early hours of the morning, making their characteristic laughing tremolo. Unfortunately, Cygnet Lake is not suitable for loons because it is shallow and without fish. This spring, the search for loons took us to the banks of Lacombe Lake. At 10:50 PM on May 20, the magical loon wail, followed by a tremolo, drifted across the lake as we stood, recording the sound.

Loons are thought to mate for life, although apparently one in four will change partners each year. They live for about 20 years, returning to breed in Alberta as soon as the water is free of ice. According to Donald and Lillian Stokes, they require large summer territories (24 to 80 hectares) plus a good supply of fish. Due to a high wing load (ratio of wing area to body mass), they must run and flap for up to 400 m to get enough lift to become airborne.

Loons are graceful in the water, well adapted for diving because they have dense bones and because their legs are near the rear of the body.

They can sustain long dives at depths of up to 60 metres. In Britain, they are known as Great Northern Divers.

Common Loons require pristine lakes with superb water quality, and as such are a good indicator of environmental health. The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey (1981-2012) showed that mercury and high acidity (mostly from fossil fuel burning) have had a deleterious effect on these species.

Common Loons, which are extremely territorial and will sometimes fight to the death, produce an interesting range of vocalisations. Some sounds serve as long distance communication calls, carrying distances of several kilometres between the sending and receiving bird. The two calls most studied by scientists are the yodel and tremolo. Yodels are the most complex call, are distinctive for each male, and are thought to

be an “honest” signal of male quality. This call begins with an introductory syllable of three notes followed by a series of four repeated syllables. It is given if an intruder enters or even flies over another male’s territory. Birds in adjacent territories can recognise the calls of their neighbours. One study found that when a loon changed territory, perhaps to take over the female in the territory, or if it was displaced from his original territory, it also changed its yodel. The sonogram of the tremolo call recorded at Lacombe Lake showed that each call typically lasts about 0.7 seconds and is a series of short 0.1-second bursts, about five in each series, with a characteristic frequency of about 1600 Hz.

Tremolos are made by both males and females in response to threats and thus signify distress, such as when something has occurred to alarm them (e.g., boats, other animals, people).



Other calls, produced by both sexes, include the wail and hoots (short, quiet calls given between individuals). Yodels, tremolos and wails are usually produced at night and the sound can travel about one to three kilometres from the vocalising bird, a distance that

can increase by at least one kilometre at night. Calls can also be affected by weather: loons call more when abiotic factors are favourable—when it is cold, there is a light wind, the barometric pressure is low, and when there is little to no rain. Such conditions can facilitate them communicating with loons from twice as many territories.

As you read this article, the loons will have all migrated for the winter. Studies in Minnesota and Wisconsin found that they migrated up to 2,526 kms, quite remarkable for birds which are so ungainly on land. Apparently 95% of the world population of Common Loons reside in Canada! Remember that they are extremely sensitive to disturbance, especially during the early part of the breeding season. For humans the message is simple: enjoy their vocalisations but keep your distance.

DR DAVID BIRD VISIT: The Red Deer River Naturalists teamed up with Kerry Wood Nature Centre and Ellis Bird Farm to host Dr. David Bird on an Alberta speaking tour. He delivered an interesting talk about bird nests and the story of the Canada Jay to a full house at Kerry Wood Nature Centre on October 16. This was a well-promoted and well-received event. Our thanks to Susan van der Hoek for arranging the refreshments and to Claudia Lipski for welcoming everyone as they arrived. Pictured here are (from left): Todd Nivens representing KWNC, Judy Boyd representing RDRN, Dr. Bird and Myrna Pearman representing EBF. EBF provided Dr. Bird with a special Canada Jay T shirt.



BIRD FOCUS: KEITH KLINE

All walks start at 1:30 PM

November 3: Powerline at 30 Ave & 22 St.
Meet at Vanier Dr. & 22nd St. Park on Vanier Dr.

November 10: South of Red Deer College.
Meet in the south west parking lot beside the weather station

November 17: McKenzie Trails. Meet in the parking lot near the shelter

November 24: Bower Woods. Meet in green space across the street from # 35 Selkirk Dr.

INSECT FOCUS: DON WALES

Wednesdays • KWNC

10:00 AM — 12:00 PM

November 21: Beetles

January 16, 2019: *Lepidoptera* and miscellaneous Orders

February 20, 2019: *Diptera*- the flies

March 20, 2019: *Hymenoptera*

April 17, 2019: Field trip and review

May 15, 2019: Field trip

WOLF SNARING CONCERNS

As per the following sample letter (from Myrna Pearman), concerned citizens are encouraged to raise the alarm about the Alberta government allowing snaring, especially before bears have entered hibernation. Minister Shannon Phillips can be contacted at AEP.Minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister - I am writing to you as a citizen who cares about the treatment and "management" of Alberta wildlife. Of specific concern at this time is the permitting of snaring this early in the season in WMUs where grizzly bears are still active. A resident near Cow Lake lives in one of the WMUs currently open for snaring. He has trail cam and photographic proof of—despite assurances by your department to the contrary—grizzly bear activity.

As you are no doubt aware, snaring is an unnecessary, archaic, ineffective, cruel and barbaric practice. I would like Canada to join some 85 other countries around the world and ban it outright. Until that happens, however, the least your government could do would be to ensure that the suffering of wolves (which can take three days to die) and unintended by-catch (especially grizzly bears) is minimized by not allowing snares to be set until all bears are hibernating, and then to compel all "trappers" to monitor their snares at least as often as is required for leg-hold traps.

Please do not respond by assuring me that snares are "lethal killing devices" and thus do not cause suffering - I and others have hundreds of images of animals that we can share with you - images that prove that creatures died slow and agonizing deaths in these devices. Surely you/we can do better.

JOIN US!

It's nearing that time of year when RDRN organizes a Board of Directors for 2019. We invite interested RDRN members to consider volunteering on the board. The RDRN board meets nine times a year. Board business is interesting and challenging. If you are interested in serving on the board and would like to share your talents with us, please contact us.

RDRN Vision: Ecological knowledge is the norm.

RDRN Mission: To educate and involve community in responsible stewardship.

RDRN Values: Hope, Wisdom, Joy.

Non-profit organizations are governed by boards of directors – volunteers who provide oversight and governance based on the non-profit's bylaws. These important members of your organization can come from a variety of backgrounds with one common interest – the mission of your organization. They provide leadership, fiscal oversight, governance, and strategic planning.

The Red Deer River Naturalists, the first natural history organization to be established in Alberta, was incorporated as a society in 1906. The objectives of the society are to foster an increased knowledge, understanding and appreciation of natural history, and to support conservation measures dealing with our environment, wildlife and natural resources.

Annual membership is \$15.00 for individuals and \$20.00 for families.

Regular meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of most months at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre, 6300-45 Ave., Red Deer, AB. Non-members are welcome. Members are encouraged to contribute to this newsletter. The deadline is the last Friday of the month.

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Photos, unless noted otherwise, by Myrna Pearman