

# CONSERVATION

FALL/WINTER 2007, VOLUME 9

The official publication of the Alberta Conservation Association



**When Nature Calls**  
Discover Alberta's  
Wild Side

**Birds of Four  
Seasons**  
The Grouse of Alberta

**In Pursuit of the  
Sharp-tail**  
Conserving a Heritage

**On the Cover**  
Drumming Up a Display

# Can a reclaimed oil sands mine make good habitat?

It's a fact – oil sands mining disturbs land. But not forever. Case in point: the reclamation areas on Suncor Energy's leases near Fort McMurray are choice real estate for the Canadian Toad, a species that may be at risk in Alberta. Suncor is also active in other projects that protect Alberta's environment. One example is the Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative, a partnership with the Alberta Conservation Association, which has led to the conservation of more than 950 acres of boreal forest in northern Alberta. By acquiring and managing ecologically significant habitat, this unique collaboration is protecting valuable land – now and for the future.

Ask a toad.



[www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com)

**2007 Emerald Award finalists as partners in the  
Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative.**



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# contents

David Fairless

5	<b>When Nature Calls</b> Discover Alberta's Wild Side	
7	<b>Partner Profile</b> Compton Petroleum Corporation	
8	<b>Birds of Four Seasons</b> The Grouse of Alberta	
13	<b>In Pursuit of the Sharp-tail</b> Conserving a Heritage	
17	<b>Partners in Habitat Development Program</b> Enhancing Upland Wildlife Habitat	
19	<b>Year-Round Fishing</b> ACA Aerated Lakes	
21	<b>On the Cover</b> Drumming Up a Display	
22	<b>Conservation in Action</b> With Jim Potter, ACA	
23	<b>Grant Eligible Conservation Fund</b> Application Timelines	
24	<b>Feature Creature</b> The Black Bear	



## Our Mission

ACA conserves, protects and enhances fish, wildlife and habitat for all Albertan's to enjoy, value and use.

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David Fairless

## From the Editor

As the seasons change and the year comes to an end, it is with childish enthusiasm that I like to recall the adventures that I embarked on, along with the wild and wonderful stories that friends and colleagues shared with me about their own adventures.

There are so many great opportunities in Alberta to enjoy the outdoors, but special spots are always a little harder to come by. Typically locations are guarded secrets, revealed cryptically and only occasionally accompanied with directions. We thought of you and anyone looking for an outdoor experience when we designed and launched a database of *Conservation Sites* on our website at [www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com) in September. In *When Nature Calls, Discover Alberta's Wild Side* you will find that there are many exciting adventures at your fingertips complete with property details, downloadable maps and directions. Just pack your gear, a lunch and a good township map - no decoder required!

We've gone to the birds this issue. It's the *On the Cover* photograph and story that got us excited about the grouse of Alberta, pheasants and their habitat. The work of ACA, the Alberta Grouse Technical Council and that of Pheasants Forever is making it possible to develop inventory techniques for land-use planning and to protect land for these fantastically beautiful birds.

In the spirit of our 10th anniversary, our member groups continue to share in the celebration by *Acknowledging 10 Years of Dedication to Conservation*. All but two of our member groups have been a part of ACA since inception in 1997- collectively we have we have achieved so much to be proud of.

Thank-you to Alberta hunters, anglers, our partners and landowners - your support makes it possible to "Conserve Alberta's Wild Side."

Happy adventures and happy holidays. — Lisa Monsees

**Letters to the Editor:** Address letters to *Conservation Magazine* Editor by e-mail, fax or mail. Include your name, address and daytime telephone. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.



*Celebrating*  
**10 YEARS OF CONSERVATION**

*Conservation Magazine*  
*Conserving Alberta's Wild Side*

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# Discover *Alberta's Wild Side*

by Eric Outram



**P**lanning a hunting trip? Want to catch a fish, photograph wildlife and wildflowers, take a hike, bird-watch, pick berries, or just get out of town for some fresh air, but don't know where to go? The Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has taken much of the guesswork out of discovering good places for outdoor adventures by developing a comprehensive database of its conservation sites. The sites are secured for the conservation, protection and enhancement of wildlife, fish and habitat and showcases a wide range of recreational opportunities for all Albertans to enjoy.

## **Nature Calls**

Start planning your outdoor experience by logging onto the Internet and going to the ACA website at [www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com). A quick click provides you with maps, profiles and driving directions that ensure bountiful opportunities to discover Alberta's wild side. There are 226 referenced properties to hunt on, 63 angling sites, and 256 locations where other activities such as wildlife viewing are encouraged.

There are many exciting opportunities close to Edmonton such as the Atim Creek property which is located between Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. This property consists of predominantly grassland areas with a small wooded portion adjacent to Atim Creek. The property supports ruffed grouse,

**There are 226 referenced properties to hunt on, 63 angling sites, and 256 locations where other activities such as wildlife viewing are encouraged.**

whitetail deer and many species of grassland songbirds. Foot access only is permitted. This type of low-impact access enables visitors to enjoy species of wildlife that they would not commonly see in the city.

If you are willing to travel a little farther, say 200 kilometres northeast of the city you will

find yourself at the Aspen Hills property, near Bonnyville. This property encompasses approximately 1,044 hectares and contains a mosaic of vegetation types. The forested area is predominantly mature aspen. Six fields seeded to forage are located on the property and one main wetland is located near the southern portion. Moose, whitetail and mule deer, and black bear are likely to be seen, and both ruffed and sharp-tailed grouse are also present. The southern portion of the property is also a favourite berry-picking destination.

Know anything about great blue herons? Take a 300-kilometre drive on Highway 2 north of Edmonton to the Hamlet of Faust where a small property on the edge of the community supports a great blue heron rookery.

Another great destination is the area adjacent to Beaverhill Lake, about an hour's drive east of Edmonton. The nine designated quarter-sections there provide excellent wildlife-viewing opportunities, especially during waterfowl migration periods.



### Benefits of Land Conservation

Darren Dorge, Land Program Manager, provided some very specific information about the quantity of land represented in the database. *Conservation Sites* form the largest type of property with 2,582 quarter-sections (316,000 acres). There are also 39 properties purchased under the Habitat Securement program totalling 2,879 hectares (7,114 acres). The ACA is the largest partner in these initiatives, but it is not alone, as some of these properties are jointly held with other agencies and groups such as Alberta Fish & Game Association, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Quentin Bochar, 1st vice-president of the Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), recognizes the database as a tool with great benefit to recreational users. Quentin says that the database's usefulness comes from the fact that it is a detailed reference guide to the location of a property and the type of habitat found on it, and it lists any restrictions on its use. Directions to all the sites can be found with a click of your mouse.

As the population in the province increases and more people participate in outdoor recreation, securing habitat becomes more critical. Land securement benefits everyone by providing protection and access not only for hunting and fishing, but also for educational opportunities and the chance to appreciate first-hand our diverse environment. It is through the efforts of the ACA, and other stakeholders, that future generations of Albertans will be able to enjoy an array of outdoor activities. The number of sites is expected to grow as ACA continues to partner with other conservation organizations to include their properties under a unique, provincially recognized umbrella for *Conservation Sites*.

So, take advantage of this comprehensive and free resource to plan an adventure outdoors. Use your computer to find habitat close enough to home for a day trip, or plan a stopover on a longer journey. Jump in your car and see what natural Alberta has to offer. And leave your computer at home.

For more information on land securement and donations, please contact ACA toll free at 1-877-969-9091. ■



David Fairless



David Fairless



Shevenell Webb



David Fairless





Gordon Court

# Partner Profile

## Compton Petroleum Corporation Donation Enhances Browse in the Chain Lakes

**T**he Chain Lakes Moose Habitat Enhancement Program was created in the early 1980s by Alberta Fish and Wildlife through the former Buck for Wildlife Program.

Moose, deer and elk all require a balance of mature forest for escape and thermal cover within close proximity of rejuvenating trees and shrubs for browse. However, when browse become over-mature, they provide limited feed to the herbivores and without a natural fire cycle, human-caused disturbances such as logging or brush clearing recreate a rich source of browse.

During the early 1980s, the habitat condition in the Chain Lakes area was evaluated using various surveys and it was decided that mechanical clearing of 965 acres would be completed to improve browse for the moose and other wildlife species.

The Chain Lakes Moose Habitat Enhancement Program has proven itself as a valuable initiative and as a result has garnered the support of Alberta Conservation Association and the Public Lands, Forests and Fish and Wildlife Divisions of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

On October 16, 2007, Compton Petroleum Corporation continued their long-term commitment to environmental responsibility by presenting a \$30,000 cheque to Alberta Conservation Association to assist with enhancing browse in the Chain Lakes area. Compton previously supported Alberta Conservation Association in 2006 with a \$10,000 donation.

Kurtis Averill, Construction Superintendent at Compton believes this project is another great example of how energy companies are working to balance their projects

with environmental health. "A number of individuals and groups deserve a pat on the back for this initiative and Compton is proud to be a contributing sponsor," said Averill. "We hope to continue our support of programs like this in the future."

Mike Jokinen, Biologist for Alberta Conservation Association believes that this partnership has made a valuable impact, "due to the charitable donation Compton Petroleum provided towards this project," said Jokinen, "approximately 50 acres of valuable moose habitat was re-cleared in the Chain Lakes area during October 2007."

For more information about the Chain Lakes Moose Habitat Enhancement Program please visit: <http://www.comptonpetroleum.com> and to learn more about other programs the Alberta Conservation Association is involved in visit [www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com). ■



A close-up photograph of a quail, likely a California quail, perched on a rough, textured tree branch. The bird is facing slightly to the right, with its head turned towards the viewer. It has a prominent, spiky crest on its head. Its plumage is a mix of brown, tan, and white, with a distinct pattern of dark spots and streaks. The wings are spread out to the sides, showing the underside of the feathers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus natural setting with warm, earthy tones.

# Birds of Four Seasons

*by Kris Kendell*



More than 400 species of birds have been observed in Alberta. Yet, despite this diverse assemblage of species, only a few—like the ruffed grouse—are considered to indicate the coming of spring. As fresh green leaves burst from swollen buds and beloved spring flowers sprout from the brown forest floor, a subtle sound reverberates through the deciduous and mixed woodlands of Alberta. Almost as if it were an afterthought to the sweet, pleasing songs of familiar songbirds, a deep but muffled thumping *put put put purrrrr* sound can be heard. The sound is part of the spring courtship ritual of the male ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), and is created as he cups his wings while rapidly beating them against the air. As the spring days begin to lengthen, scattered “drumming” can be heard from the middle of March through the month of May; however, intermittent drumming may be heard from overzealous males until late summer.

Those who investigate the origin of this sound may find themselves approaching a “drumming log” used by the male to provide a better vantage point to establish a breeding territory to attract mates. Piles of droppings that look like little curved cylinders about the thickness of pencils, with a whitish coating on one end, quickly confirm the perch as the podium of choice by the male. Adorned with modest earth tones, the male “ruffy,” cloaked in his outstanding camouflage, is nowhere to be seen as he fades quietly and unnoticeably into the thick forest undergrowth.

There are only 19 species of grouse, including ptarmigan, found worldwide. Alberta, with seven species, has one of the most diverse groups of grouse species found anywhere in the world. Grouse and ptarmigan are ground-dwelling, chicken-sized birds that spend most of their lives in upland habitats. Their legs and feet are designed for running and scratching, while their short, rounded wings are tailored for brief but rapid flight. Unlike young songbirds that hatch blind, naked and helpless, grouse chicks are able to walk and feed themselves within hours of hatching and within a couple of weeks they are often beginning to fly.

Left: The ruffed grouse is Alberta's most abundant grouse and is found in deciduous and mixed forest areas throughout the province.

Hunting ring-necked pheasants along the Milk River Ridge Reservoir.

ACA manages some habitat in southern Alberta for upland game birds through its Conservation Sites. Search [www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com) for locations.



Todd Zimmerling



Some people may refer to grouse as partridges or pheasants; however, true partridges and pheasants are not native to Alberta, having been introduced from other parts of the world. The ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) and gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*) are “naturalized citizens” of Alberta’s agricultural prairie and parkland regions. Merriam’s wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), also an exotic species, has been successfully established in the Cypress Hills and the Porcupine Hills of southern Alberta. These game birds are not as well adapted to Alberta’s extreme climate as are native grouse and ptarmigan. Winter is a stressful time for most wildlife in Alberta. However, grouse tend to tough it out and do not make dramatic, long-distance migrations as many other bird species do; instead, they find shelter from winter extremes and often snow-roost, as snow provides a very effective barrier against severe cold. Native grouse



Hungarian partridge photo by David Fairless.

have physical adaptations to help them remain active, such as the thick feathering that covers their nostrils and, completely or partially, their legs. Naturalized game birds lack such feathers.

Grouse have a lot to offer us, both socially and recreationally. Grouse are often pursued by seasoned birders and avid naturalists alike. Many species allow close approach; this apparent tameness reveals an unwavering confidence in their plumage that blends perfectly with the surrounding habitat. Their elaborate and often flamboyant breeding displays, intended to attract mates, are both entertaining and captivating. Approach too close, however, and you may experience first-hand their habit of exploding from their roost or cover. Their hasty and explosive departure offers a challenging wing shot. This, coupled with the excellent eating quality of many species, has led to the popularity of upland game bird hunting. A good bird dog is often invaluable in pointing out concealed birds and finding downed birds in heavy cover. To many hunters, this dog work is an added pleasure of hunting these birds on glorious autumn days.



Spruce grouse photo by Gerald Romanchuk.





Sharp-tailed grouse photo by David Fairless.

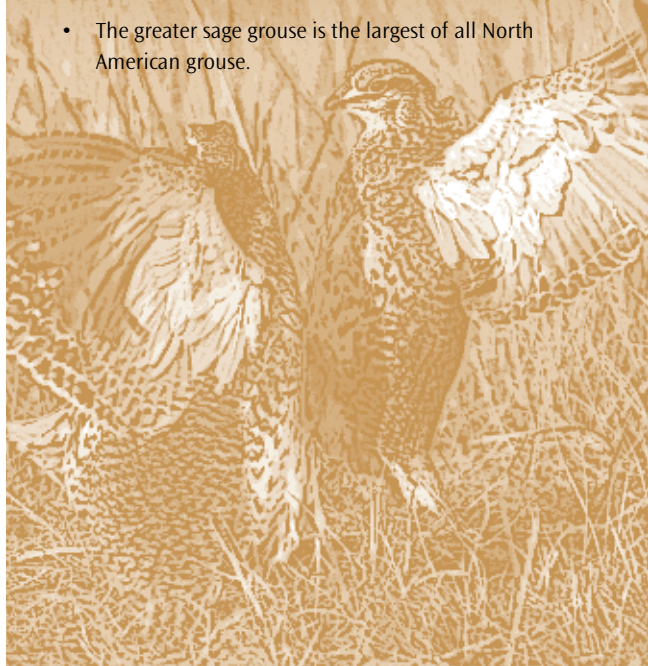
All native grouse in Alberta are under pressure from the loss and degradation of suitable habitat that provides adequate food and cover for them. The Alberta Conservation Association and the Alberta Grouse Technical Council (AGTC) have recently developed a Grouse of Alberta poster. The purpose of the poster is to increase awareness of grouse amongst Albertans, and of the conservation issues facing the birds.

Copies of the Grouse of Alberta poster can be obtained at no cost by contacting Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Information Centre: 1-877-944-0313 (toll-free); [srd.infocent@gov.ab.ca](mailto:srd.infocent@gov.ab.ca) ■



## ► Did you know?

- The greater prairie chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) is an extirpated species in the province, having disappeared completely during the early 1960s.
- Ptarmigan, as well as some grouse, “snow-roost”; they plunge or dig into fluffy snow to keep warm and evade predators. Temperatures within the snow-roost may be up to 23 C warmer than the outside winter air temperatures.
- Grouse are primarily herbivores, feeding mainly on leaves, buds, stems, and seeds of various plants. This plant material is stored in large quantities within the bird’s “crop,” which is an enlargement of its gullet, for later digestion. The spruce grouse’s crop can store up to 10% of the bird’s body weight in food.
- Ruffed grouse nests are occasionally parasitized by ring-necked pheasants or wild turkeys that lay eggs in their nests.
- The willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) is the only grouse species in the world in which the male is regularly involved in parental care of the young chicks.
- Prairie grouse, such as the sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) and greater sage grouse, perform spring courtship displays on communal “dancing grounds” called leks.
- Although many male greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) may display at a lek, only one or two males are chosen by a majority of the females for mating.
- The greater sage grouse is the largest of all North American grouse.





David Fairless

# Acknowledging 10 Years of Dedication to Conservation

## Federation of Alberta Naturalists: *Founding Member Group*



The Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) wishes to congratulate the ACA on ten very successful years!

FAN is pleased to be a part of this beneficial partnership of groups interested in furthering the goals of wildlife and fish conservation, and habitat preservation. It is vital to engage all Albertans in this very important job.

FAN is grateful for the funding assistance that several of its projects have received. These include the Living by Water project, which educates landowners; several Important Bird Areas (IBA) projects; identifying the IBA's; establishing stewardship groups and protection; and now a pilot project on population success in IBAs. This pilot is a first in the world, so we are very anxious to see how it works out!

FAN's second Bird Atlas, which monitors bird populations in this province is now published, again with ACA assistance. This gives us very important information on what is happening and can guide research into areas where it is most needed.

ACA's programs and research are even more vitally important now, with industry expanding into all corners of the province. Keep up the great science and valuable partnerships. Conserving wildlife and fish species, populations, and habitat preservation are more important now than ever before, due to the vast number of pressures on to all species and habitats in the province.

**Sandra Foss**, President  
Federation of Alberta Naturalists

## Pheasants Forever: *Member since January 2006*



Congratulations to ACA as it celebrates its tenth anniversary. Our Calgary Chapter has benefitted from ACA as a partner in our Partners in Habitat Development program (PHD) for eight of those ten years. The PHD program assists private landowners and the public to access lands with the development of wildlife habitat on their lands, including buffer strips and shelterbelt plantings, irrigation pivot corner development, and fencing and construction projects in southern Alberta.

The PHD program is entering its tenth year of operation in 2007. After completion of this year's program, we will have completed projects on 351 sites. Work performed on these sites include planting 595,906 trees and shrubs; seeding 640 acres with blends of grass designed to provide maximum cover for upland birds and other wildlife; fencing off 130 square kilometres of natural and potential habitat areas from livestock to promote growth and development and improve nesting success; installing 78 irrigation deliveries or drip tape systems to provide water to ensure the success of projects. Expenditures on these habitat projects over the ten years will approximate \$3.4 million and ACA has contributed approximately 5% as a valued partner. The PHD program has been nominated for several prestigious environmental awards.

We look forward to partnering with ACA over the next ten years.

**Ward McLean**, President  
Pheasants Forever Alberta Council  
Pheasants Forever Calgary Chapter



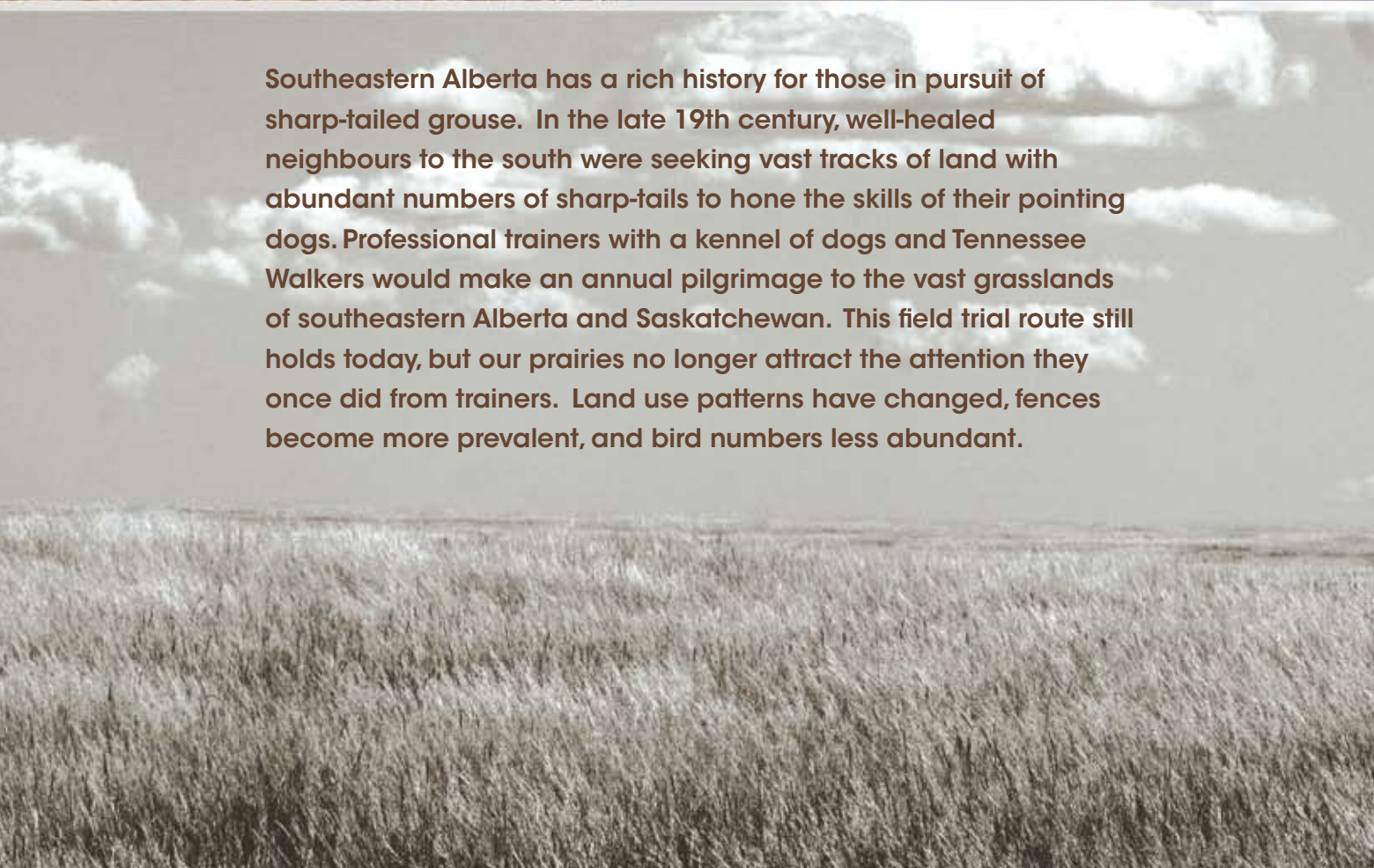


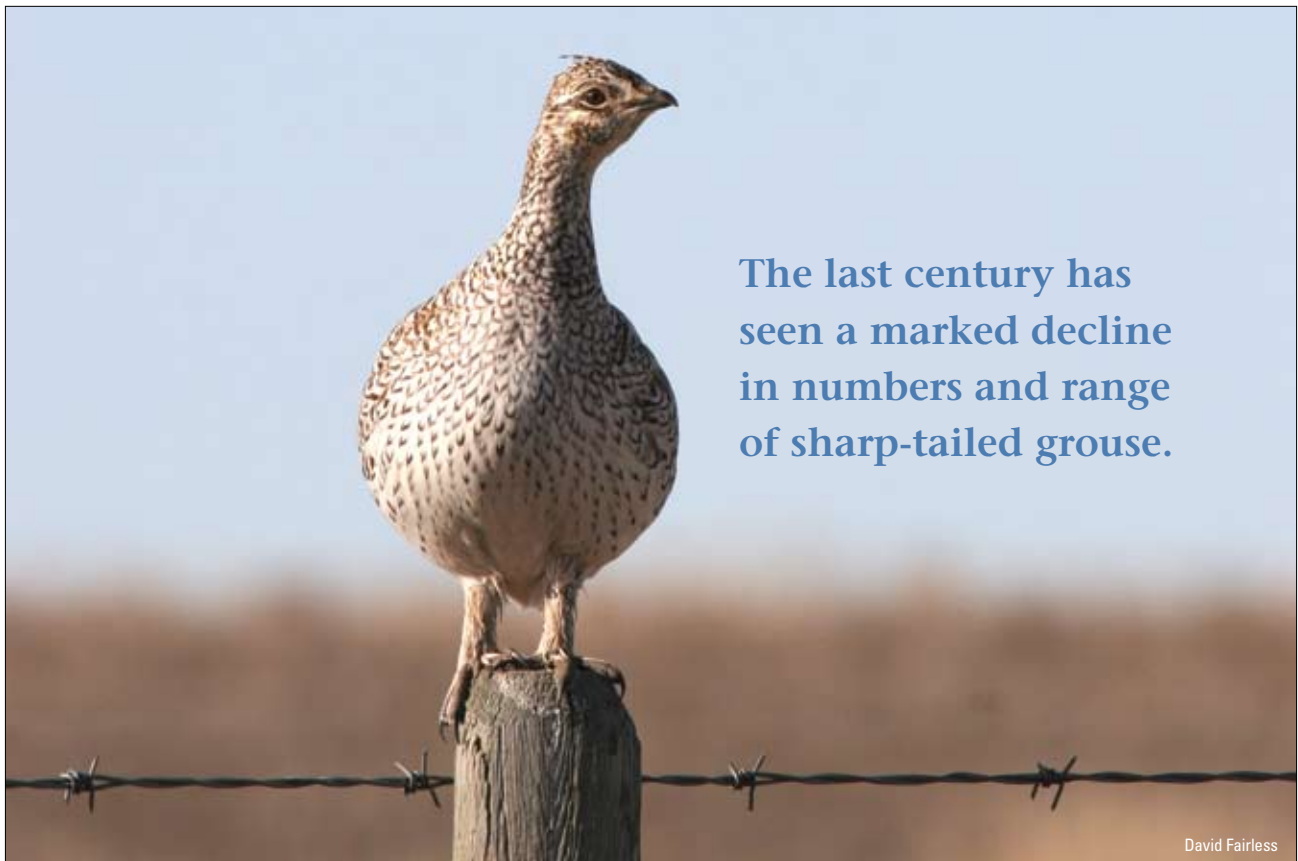
# In Pursuit of the Sharp-tail

*by Doug Manzer*

David Fairless

Southeastern Alberta has a rich history for those in pursuit of sharp-tailed grouse. In the late 19th century, well-healed neighbours to the south were seeking vast tracks of land with abundant numbers of sharp-tails to hone the skills of their pointing dogs. Professional trainers with a kennel of dogs and Tennessee Walkers would make an annual pilgrimage to the vast grasslands of southeastern Alberta and Saskatchewan. This field trial route still holds today, but our prairies no longer attract the attention they once did from trainers. Land use patterns have changed, fences become more prevalent, and bird numbers less abundant.





The last century has seen a marked decline in numbers and range of sharp-tailed grouse.

David Fairless

The apex of the October sun had passed as we leaned against the tailgate. Our dogs had done their bit covering ground and hitting the likely spots, but cover was unusually sparse after the drought-like conditions of the past two years. The few sharp-tailed grouse we had put up did not hold, flushing well before a point could be grounded.

We loaded the dogs and drove 20 kilometres to our next stop for our last hunt of the day. With more than 10 sections of native prairie in one block, this area had great potential to produce birds. It was evident that the landowner had balanced cattle numbers with the available moisture over the years, as the grass showed well even after growing old in the drought-stricken area. Annual precipitation levels may average 30-36 centimetres, but this is a deceptive target to match with cattle numbers. Most years tend to see closer to 6-15-23 centimetres of moisture, while only an occasional year has much greater rainfall that brings the arithmetic average up. Managing grass for a typical year, rather than an arithmetic average, produces cows and grouse.

The afternoon wind was picking up with a steady breeze from the northwest as we released the dogs across the wind. Spotty patches of snowberry were lightly scattered among the tufts of native grass. North-facing slopes held wolf willow, which earlier in the day may have provided refuge for sharp-tails seeking to avoid the direct October sun. The dogs ran well ahead, independent and showing remarkable poise after the frustrations earlier in the day.

Every dog has telltale signs of making game. Danner checked his pace as he crossed a flat between two knolls. He eased into the wind with caution, and struck a pose with head stretched forward and tail 60 degrees aft. I quickened my pace to close the gap, and I gave a low-volume whistle while passing on his left side, letting him know I was moving in to flush our bird. The explosion erupted to my right and forward, and by the time I mounted the light-framed Berretta and touched the forward trigger, the torpedo-shaped quarry was 30 metres away and gaining distance. The report was muffled by the wind, so it was with some surprise that I watched the bird cartwheel and drop to

the ground. The dog cheated with a quick bunny hop and began to whine. I returned to his side for the release, and he quickly found the bird and nuzzled it, but didn't pick up.

We finished off the day with a find by Buz silhouetted against the waning sun. Now, at nearly 24 months, Bruce's setter was finding grace along with ground-gaining pace. As we moved past to flush, three sharp-tails burst from the edge of a snowberry shrub and rocketed into flight. They accelerated with pounding beats that gained deceptive speed, rocking from side to side in the elusive flight that has evolved to enable the birds to evade airborne predators. But they were not fast enough to avoid the pellets, and the middle bird, then the left one, fell to earth.

As I reflect back on that day, I'm reminded of the contrast in quality of the habitat between the early and late hunts. The more sparsely covered grasslands from earlier in the day held a few birds, but the grass had not fared well. Nesting habitat for the following May would be very limited,



making a hen's chance of survival and bringing up a brood unlikely. Conversely, grass cover in the area hunted later in the day was more homogeneous, with a vast expanse of nesting cover making detection by predators less likely. For grouse and many other ground dwelling birds, the final nail in the coffin generally comes from a predator. Poor habitat conditions can make detection by predators more likely, thus reducing the odds of survival for the birds.

The last century has seen a marked decline in numbers and range of sharp-tailed grouse. The vast expansion of agriculture has subtly led to the loss of much of their prime habitat, with more than 43% of native grassland lost in Alberta alone.

Due to their cryptic nature, a challenging aspect of sharp-tail conservation is simply

detecting changes in population numbers before it's too late. Traditional approaches have included counting individuals on dancing grounds, also known as leks, and summing these counts to detect trends over years. Unfortunately, counts of males on leks can vary from day to day, and the tallies become more misleading once females start to attend. A further confounding issue is not knowing how many leks were missed from the inventory that would have contributed to the count. On the whole, simple counts of males on leks have been disappointing measures of population trends.

Alberta Conservation Association has set about tackling this issue by developing an approach for detecting habitat that is important for sharp-tail breeding activity. This inventory mapping tool will

identify the likelihood of lek occurrence at a broad regional scale, and provide a measure of habitat value and its abundance. We completed our second field season of data collection this past spring on a 5,000 square kilometres study site in southeastern Alberta. Model development is progressing well, and we are currently refining plans to develop this tool to provide estimates of lek density. Assuming we succeed, estimates of lek density will serve as a proxy indicator for population growth trends over time and broad spatial areas. The approach still requires ground efforts to detect leks, but the sampling design is more efficient than traditional approaches, and the results have more relevance for the scales commonly used for land-use planning. These inventory data are the basic ingredients for detecting problems and recovery in the remaining grasslands of Alberta. ■



**Due to their cryptic nature, a challenging aspect of sharp-tail conservation is simply detecting changes in population numbers before it's too late.**

## ► Levy Increase Proposal

We have requested an increase to the ACA levy component of hunting and angling licenses to offset the inflationary pressures which have occurred in the last 10 years. ACA depends on levy revenues to meet its delegated responsibilities to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) under the negotiated Program Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding.

Since ACA's inception in 1997, the only increase in levy revenue has come from a 3% increase on angling licenses in 2003/04. At the same time, cumulative inflation in the last 10 years is 22%. The revenue will ensure ACA can continue to maintain and improve current Fisheries, Wildlife, Land, Human Interaction (Report A Poacher, Predator Compensation and Shot Livestock) and Crop Damage Control programs.

### **As an example, this is what the increase will mean:**

Whitetail and mule deer - \$3.20

Elk - \$1.20

Moose - \$3.20

Black bear - 40 cents

Game bird - 34 cents

Fishing license - \$2.66.

For more information visit [www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com) or call toll free 1-877-969-9091.





David Fairless

## Acknowledging 10 Years of Dedication to Conservation

### Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta: *Founding Member Group*



On behalf of the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta Organization, I would like to extend our congratulations to the Alberta Conservation Association on their 10th anniversary.

As Alberta's original conservationists and stewards of the forest, and one of the founding member groups of the ACA, we are delighted to see this organization reach this significant milestone!

We recognize the value of the efforts (of all the founding and current member groups) contributed toward conservation.

In closing, may the Great Spirit watch over this diverse and dynamic group to work together toward a common conservation goal with benefits to all Albertans.

In the spirit of cooperation,

**Grand Chief Arthur Noskey**  
Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta

### Trout Unlimited Canada: *Founding Member Group*



Congratulations to the Alberta Conservation Association on the organization's 10th Anniversary!

As a founding member, Trout Unlimited Canada has been proud to be associated with the ACA as the successor organization for the Buck for Wildlife Fund. The ACA has continued the spirit of the Buck for Wildlife Fund by carrying out substantive conservation work to benefit Alberta's fish and wildlife resources and habitats. As well the ACA, as a non-government agency, has been able to build a spirit of collaboration and cooperation with a variety of stakeholders ranging from governments, community groups, NGO's, universities and colleges, industry, anglers, hunters, and the public.

For those of us who were involved in the Buck for Wildlife programs, we have been very conscious of the history that precedes the creation of the ACA. Alberta's hunters and anglers were the driving forces behind the establishment of the Buck for Wildlife programs. By lobbying for and demonstrating a willingness to pay special levies to provide financial support for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources, hunter and anglers led the way in delivering a strong conservation message to the provincial government and the people of the Alberta.

In a provincial economy that has been booming over the past ten years, the ACA has been constantly challenged to do more with increasingly limited financial resources. This will undoubtedly continue to be a major challenge for the future as well. We are confident the ACA, its member groups, and staff will demonstrate the resiliency to rise to these challenges and to continue to deliver programs and projects that will benefit Alberta's anglers and hunters and Albertans in general.

Once again, congratulations on your 10th Anniversary.

Best regards,

**Doug Cressman**, CEO  
Trout Unlimited Canada





# The Partners in Habitat Development Program

*by Pheasants Forever Calgary Chapter*



Roger Hill

**This is the tenth year of operation involving more than 350 landowner participants who voluntarily set aside acres of valuable agricultural farmland and ranchland for habitat development as well as water and soil conservation.**

**T**he Partners in Habitat Development program (PHD), a Pheasants Forever Calgary Chapter (PFC) initiative, was founded in 1998 at a meeting of representatives from PFC and the Eastern Irrigation District (EID). What emerged from that meeting, and what has evolved over the past decade is a grass-roots initiative that will forever change upland wildlife habitat preservation in southern Alberta. The PHD program is dedicated to the redevelopment and enhancement of habitat throughout the cultivated regions of southern Alberta. It operates primarily on private land, but also on a number of public and irrigated lands. Fifteen core partners have been assisting the PHD program to meet or exceed its goals.

The PHD program was initially conceived as a five-year pilot project to be completed at the end of 2002. What started out as a project involving a handful of farmers in 1998 has steadily grown into a highly regarded habitat conservation program. This is the tenth year of operation involving more than 350 landowner participants who voluntarily set aside acres of valuable agricultural farmland

and ranchland for habitat development, as well as water and soil conservation.

By its fourth year of operation in the EID, the PHD program had garnered recognition and interest from other irrigation districts and their landowners. In spring 2001, it was decided to expand the PHD program to include all of southern Alberta's Irrigation Districts, and a business plan was developed for a second five-year phase of the program. In 2002, the new phase was received enthusiastically, and it resulted in the PHD's expansion into the St. Mary River, Bow River, Western, and Raymond irrigation districts. In spring 2004, the Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District joined the program. The goal of PHD is to include all 13 irrigation districts in southern Alberta, representing a total of 1.4 million acres. Within these districts, the program currently operates in the major communities of Strathmore, Brooks, Medicine Hat, Vauxhall, Lethbridge, and Raymond.

The PHD program is administered by six staff members—the Wildlife Projects Manager

of the Eastern Irrigation District and five Wildlife Habitat Technicians—who meet with landowners, design habitat projects, and implement the projects with the assistance of seasonal planting crews. PHD assists landowners with weeding, watering, and mowing for up to three years to establish trees and shrubs.

In the 10 years of its operation, PHD has implemented 350 projects on sites ranging from five to 300 acres located on irrigation rights-of-way, pivot corners, idle farmland, and in riparian areas. Work performed on these sites includes: planting 595,906 trees and shrubs (in multi-row shelterbelts that are subsequently surrounded by a plastic or fabric mulch to aid in moisture retention and weed control); seeding 640 acres with blends

of grass designed to provide maximum cover for upland birds and other wildlife; fencing off 130 square kilometres of natural

**The funded projects aim at ensuring southern Alberta's wildlife populations will increase; they have already positively influenced over 35,000 acres of upland wildlife habitat.**

and potential habitat areas from livestock to promote growth and development and to improve nesting success; and the

installation of 78 irrigation deliveries or drip tape systems to provide water to ensure the success of projects. Expenditures on these habitat projects over the ten years will approximate \$3.4 million. The funded projects aim at ensuring southern Alberta's wildlife populations will increase; they have already positively influenced over 35,000 acres of upland wildlife habitat. PHD was aptly named because without the various partners in the program who contribute cash or in-kind services, it would not be the success it has been.

In 2005, the PHD program was recognized both provincially and nationally for its outstanding contribution to the environment. The Alberta Foundation for Environmental Excellence ranked Partners



Pheasants Forever

**Core partners:** Alberta Conservation Association; Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture; Alberta Sustainable Resource Development; Bow River Irrigation District; Brooks and District Fish and Game Association; County of Newell No. 4; Ducks Unlimited Canada; Eastern Irrigation District; Pheasants Forever, Calgary Chapter; Pheasants Forever, Lethbridge Chapter; Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration; Raymond Irrigation District; St. Mary River Irrigation District and Western Irrigation District. Pheasants Forever, Calgary Chapter is the largest contributor.



in Habitat Development as a finalist for its 2005 Emerald Awards in the Community Group category. Nationally, the Canadian Environment Awards, established by Canadian Geographic and the Government of Canada recognized Rick Martin, Senior Project Advisor for the PHD program based in Brooks, for excellence in environmental leadership. From the original 140 nominees from across the country, Rick received the Silver Award. ■



Pheasants Forever

### Ring-necked Pheasant Spring Crowing Counts

Crowing count surveys are used throughout North America to monitor pheasant population trends. PHD staff has conducted these surveys since 1998.

During a survey, staff count the number of pheasants heard crowing during a two-minute period at one-mile intervals along linear transects. Counts are conducted on early mornings during April and May.

Results from recent years have indicated an increase in pheasant populations. This information was used to support the two-week extension of the pheasant hunting season in 2006.

## Year-round Fishing ACA Aerated Lakes

David Fairless



In Northwestern Alberta:

Water Body	Location	Size (ha)	Winter Angling
Cecil Thompson Pond	SW 23-83-21 W5	0.8	Yes
Cummings Lake	SE 10-82-03 W6	26.9	Yes
East Dollar Lake	NW 08-73-21 W5	5.6	Yes
Figure Eight Lake	NE 20-84-25 W5	38.6	Yes
Moonshine Lake	SW 32-79-08 W6	30.8	Yes
Spring Lake	SE 23-75-11 W6	32.1	Yes
Sulphur Lake	NW 07-89-02 W6	53.4	Yes
Swan Lake	13-70-26 W5 18-70-25 W5	139.9	Yes

In Southern Alberta:

Water Body	Location	Size (ha)	Winter Angling
Boehlke's Pond	31-35-15 W4	9.2	Yes
Hansen's Reservoir	29-38-3 W5	5.7	Yes

In the East Slopes of Alberta's Rocky Mountains:

Water Body	Location	Size (ha)	Winter Angling
Beaver Lake	E 16-35-06 W5	31.0	No
Coleman Fish & Game Pond	SW 24-08-05 W5	3.4	Yes
Ironside Pond	SW 07-38-07 W5	3.3	No
Millers Lake	SW 08-53-19 W5	35.6	Yes
Mitchell Lake	NE 25-37-08 W5	18.0	Yes

To learn more about Lake Aeration or to make a donation to this project, please contact: Kevin Gardiner, ACA: (780) 845-8265.



David Fairless



Gordon Court

## Acknowledging 10 Years of Dedication to Conservation

### **The Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association: Member since September 2005**



The Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) and the 3,000 members wish to congratulate the ACA on a decade of conservation service to Albertans. AHEIA has only recently been involved as a member organization; however, our volunteer instructors share a passion for wildlife and fish with all ACA member groups. This passion includes a determination that wildlife, fish and wild places will enjoy a secure place in Alberta's future.

AHEIA is optimistic about the future because of all the success realized by the many conservation organizations of the past. Fish, wildlife and wild places are provincial treasures and will continue to be valued by Albertans. The future will be a great challenge and the ACA is positioned to have a significant role in solving problems and issues that impact our wild resources.

Yours in Conservation,

**Robert A. Gruszecki**, President

### **The Alberta Professional Outfitters Society: Founding Member Group**



The Alberta Professional Outfitters Society fully supports the Alberta Conservation Association in its mission to conserve, protect, and enhance our natural biological resources. As our province continues its remarkable development, it is more important than ever that the conservation sector be proactive and effective.

On behalf of all the members of the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society I would like to congratulate the Board and Staff of the Alberta Conservation Association on the occasion of their tenth anniversary.

Sincerely,

**Bob Byers**, President  
Alberta Professional Outfitters Society





# ON THE COVER

by Gordon Court



**G**rouse are among my favourite birds to photograph. They show a wide range of behaviours; many are ridiculously tame, and all are simply gorgeous.

For most Albertans familiar with the out-of-doors, the drumming locations (usually a rotten log) of ruffed grouse are easy to find. Moreover, the displays of drumming grouse are an attractive photographic subject and many wildlife photographers have set up near drumming logs to catch the action.

So it was for me, in the spring of 2005, when I set up a blind near the drumming log of this adult male ruffed grouse. Every morning the bird would come in, drum a couple of times, and leave. I was getting photos of drumming, but saw none of the famous posturing involving display of the ruff and tail fan. I spoke to another photographer who suggested that placing a mounted ruffed grouse hen on top of the blind might serve to “get him in the mood.”

The next day, stuffed grouse in hand, I approached the blind to find my subject standing on his log, as still as a statue. I surmised that he was “frozen” in response to my approach. However, after I’d sat in the blind for half an hour, he hadn’t moved anything

but an eyelid. When I flashed the decoy, he responded with a single, ultra-slow blink, but moved not a feather. Frustrated, I stepped out of the blind and put the decoy directly on his log. Back in the blind, I waited another 40 minutes, but the grouse remained motionless.

I began to feel guilty about perhaps stressing the bird out with all my tinkering, so I left the blind to retrieve the decoy and pack up. As I lifted the decoy, the grouse exploded into flight, just as a large goshawk grazed the side of my head in hot pursuit of my photographic subject. The hawk had been waiting in the tree directly above my blind—that explained the grouse’s frigid demeanour! The two birds tore through the forest in an ancient contest of pure speed and manoeuvrability. I quickly lost sight of them both, but wagered that the grouse had drummed his last.

The next morning I went back to the blind to check on the bird and was surprised, after a few minutes, to hear him walking through the dried leaves as he approached the log. Once there, without any artificial coaxing from me, he began a full-on display of his magnificent plumage that lasted more than 20 minutes. It was as if his brush with mortality had ramped up his desire to drum and display. I enjoyed photographing this newly inspired bird and, to this day, haven’t seen a drumming log show to match his! ■





# Conservation in Action

with **Jim Potter**

by *Lisa Monsees*



If it's possible to be born a conservationist, then Jim Potter was. A dedicated conservationist from within, his natural curiosity was encouraged by his greatest mentor, his mother, and by the environment in which he was raised. His early childhood years were spent on a small farm on the Pine Lake Moraine where trapping, hunting, fishing, and the wild country were a way of life. It is here, at 10 years of age, that he constructed the first of more than 3,000 nest boxes.

Even at a young age when he was wandering around putting up blue bird boxes and later nest boxes, Jim understood the value and necessity of what he was doing. It became his goal and commitment to make a difference. Realizing education and knowledge were the key to conserving habitat, Jim informed interested land managers about the habitat requirements of some of the lesser known species of flora and fauna. With this in mind, he initiated the Cavity Nesting Species project and now, with the support of the ACA, DUC, and various other partners such as Windsor Plywood, Jim delivers presentations to various youth groups, Fish and Game

organizations, and other interested parties throughout Alberta.

Jim credits his fortune—doing what he loves as a career—to another great mentor, Jim Allen of Fish and Wildlife. Jim began working with Mr. Allen as a Wildlife Technician in



1987 and was the coordinator for the Crop Damage Control program of which he continues to be part of, now with ACA.

He has served on the board of directors of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Red Deer River Naturalists, and the Red Deer Fish and Game Association, and was a Bighorn

Award recipient in 2005. Currently, he is a director with the Alberta Donkey and Mule Club and enjoys yearly pack trips to the hinterlands of the Alberta Rockies. Jim attributes ACA, its mission and its employees for strengthening and inspiring his desire to make a difference.

Recently, he placed a conservation easement on a quarter-section of his land that's situated on a portion of Chapman Lake. He considers this his greatest achievement because it can be passed on to future generations of Albertans and the enjoyment of wildlife.

Jim believes that if you give a child or an adult the ability to Wander, Observe, and Wonder (WOW!) in native habitat, their natural curiosity will take over. His never-ending devotion to engaging young people in the value of their natural surroundings will surely make a difference in the future management of our provinces natural resources.

"Work with nature, you can't improve on it." Jim Potter, ACA Resource Technician. ■





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**Grant Eligible Conservation Fund Annual Cycle Dates**

- December 15, 2007 - Website posting of the guidelines and application forms
- January 1 to 31, 2008 - Window to receive completed applications
- February 2008 - Proposal review committee adjudication meeting
- March 2008 - Notification of applicants as to funding status
- April 2008 through March 2009 - Projects begins



For more information visit us at  
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## Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)

The black bear is the smallest of the three species of North American bears. Adult male black bears generally weigh between 100 and 150 kg, with females weighing between 70 – 100 kg. The heaviest known black bear was recorded in North Carolina and weighed 399 kg.

Recognized as excellent swimmers and tree climbers, black bears are also capable of running at speeds of 45 km/hr for short distances. The black bear's diet includes meat and insects, but the majority of their diet is plant material such as berries and grass. As they prepare to spend the winter months in their dens, an adult bear can consume up to 20,000 calories per day which is comparable to eating 37 fast food hamburgers. Once in their dens, black bears may go more than 200 days without eating or drinking. Bears are long-lived up to 30 years and are not fully grown until 5 to 6 years of age.

Canadian trappers have long had the distinction of providing the British monarchs regimental guards with prized black bearskins which are tailored into hats. Sentries can be seen guarding Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London adorned in bright red scarlet tunics proudly topped with Canadian black bearskin fur hats that weigh about 1 kg.

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