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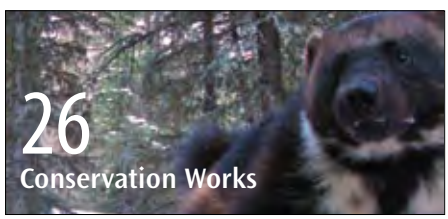

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Alberta Conservation Association
Conserving Alberta's Wild Side

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From the Editor

I'm a foodie at heart. To me, cookbooks are meant to be read like novels, taking time for the recipe to unfold, consuming the details, savouring the ingredients and imagining the mouth-watering conclusion. That's why knowing where my food comes from, and having some sort of control over it, gives me greater peace of mind. Whether it's picking up fresh, local, in season goods from the farmers' markets or harvesting from the garden or one of the Conservation Sites, there are plenty of opportunities to eat well.

In our gardens and at the markets there are the familiar finds, from the first fragrant cucumbers and delectable berries sweetened by the summer sun to the meaty squash that signals the arrival of fall. However, step onto a Conservation Site and be prepared to unearth the unexpected, like hazelnuts, cloud berries and comb's tooth mushroom. You may be surprised that when cooked, this forest treat has a texture that closely resembles calamari. *Really!* If you want to stick with what you know, berries in the wild typically look like their supermarket cousins and as you will find, there are plenty to indulge in (Easy Picks within Reach, page 8).

That's where fellow foodie and urbanite, Kevin Kossowan comes in. Kevin has been bucking the supermarket trend for a long time, choosing to embrace and create his own version of local food culture. Kevin joins us as our newest contributor to *Conservation Magazine* and his plan is to bring you closer to Alberta's wild food scene and how to get the most out of these ingredients (Backyard Bounty: Putting Wild Foods Back on the Table, page 7).

Fall has a way of revealing itself to us slowly—before we know it the leaves have changed colour, the sky is a little duller, days are shorter and the air is distinctly crisper. Yet, the landscape is as alive now as it is in the spring and summer. Some berries are at their peak this time of year and this is when hunting season begins. Organic, "free range" and hormone free produce, meat and fish are readily available from field and stream and continue to be when winter explodes onto the scene.

Whether you want to reinvent your pantry or just appreciate what nature has to offer, we enjoy sharing the opportunities and hearing back from you on Facebook and Twitter.

—Editor-in-Chief, Lisa Monsees

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
Learn how to identify edible mushrooms with help from the Alberta Mycological Society.

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

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Alberta Conservation Association

Conserving Alberta's Wild Side

www.ab-conservation.com

About Us. Since our inception as a non-profit in 1997, ACA has directed hundreds of millions of dollars towards thousands of conservation efforts across Alberta, from biological studies on the largest species to the securement of vast tracts of precious habitat.

Every dollar from fishing and hunting license sales and every partnership contributes to the conservation of Alberta's natural heritage. Together we are securing the future of countless species of fish and wildlife and the habitat they call home, while providing Albertans with access to a myriad of sustainable outdoor recreation activities.

We love the work we do. From the day-to-day reward of calling the beauty of Alberta's big backyard our "office" to working with Alberta's hunters, anglers and other conservation partners–we consider ourselves lucky to live and work in such a precious place.

We encourage you to find out more about our work and the partnerships that made it possible. Better still, go see for yourself by visiting any of the 700+ Conservation Sites out there for you to explore. Bring the family and spend an afternoon in the peace and wonder of Alberta's wild side. We're confident you'll think it's worth every penny.

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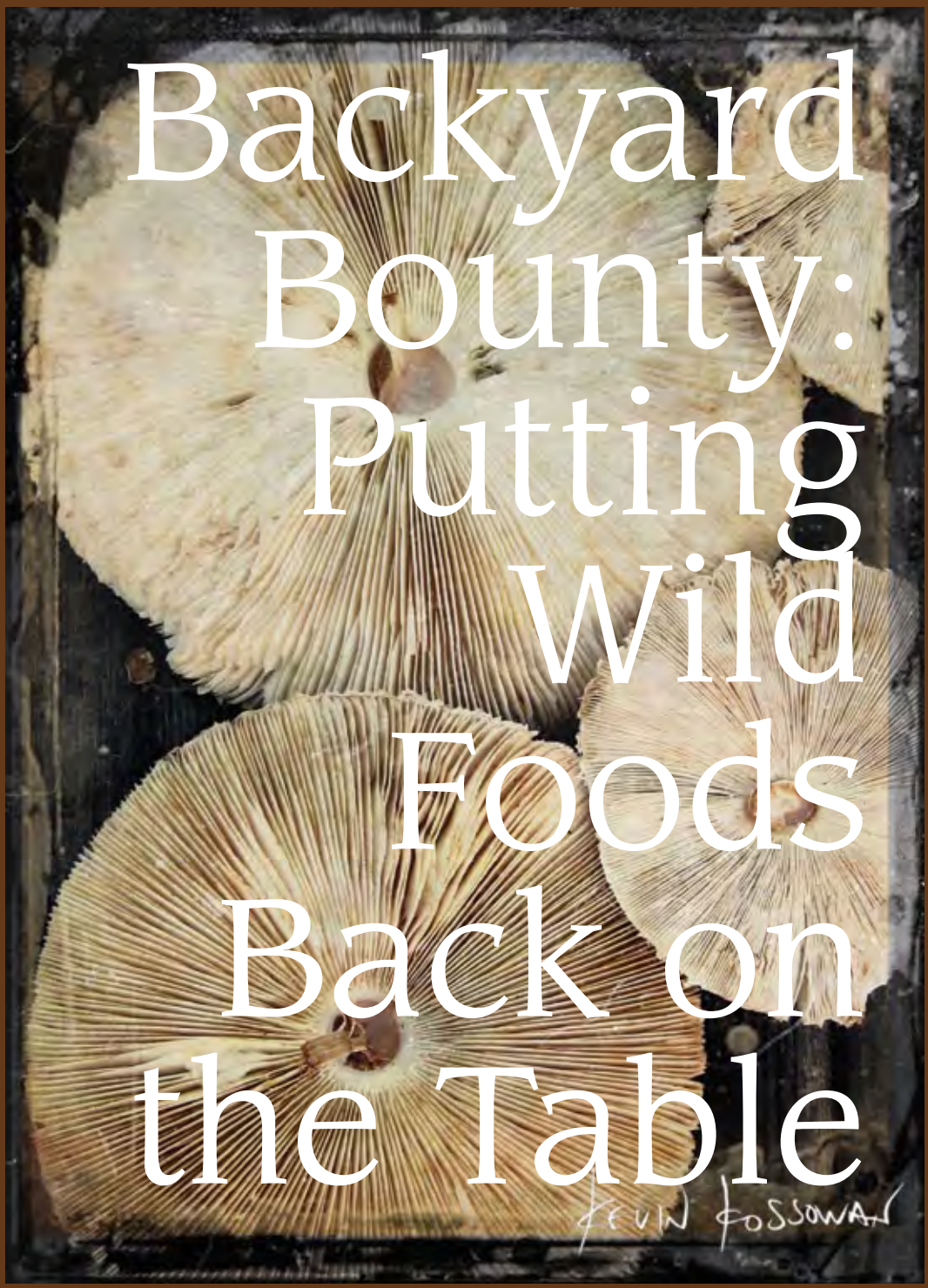
Backyard Bounty: Putting Wild Foods Back on the Table



shaggy parasol mushrooms

■ *by Kevin Kossowan*

Wild foods will regain a prominent and respected role in our regional food culture – because they're eventually going to define it. At least, I'm sure going to try to convince you that's the case.

I'm in my early thirties, am married with three kids, and when it comes to food, have recently become relevant in the Edmonton food scene because I do stuff that many people know makes sense or would like to do themselves, but generally don't do. And I write about it. I've written about the reinvention of my family's food culture since 2005 on my website www.kevinkossowan.com. My blog is intended to reflect my exploration of the regional food that surrounds me. That's it. It has unexpectedly resulted in developing influence (rightly or wrongly) at a grassroots level, in the farming community, and increasingly at a political level via my involvement in various food-related organizations.

Gardening is perhaps the most socially "normal" thing I do. Taking it in the direction of urban forest gardening with indigenous species of wild edibles and eradicating my city lawn in favour of a cacophony of food-producing polycultures? Not so normal. I also buy local, ethically-farmed meats and grains which is happily en vogue – but I buy meats by side and butcher them myself, and then cure, smoke, and dry cure them. I buy local organic flours by the 20 kilogram sack and bake all of my family's bread in a wood-fired oven built out of reclaimed urban brick. I grow the vast majority of the vegetables our family needs through the year and put them up for the winter in a root cellar I built for the job. I harvest, crush, and press over a thousand pounds of rescued urban apples each year to make apple wine of various sorts. I hunt, forage, and fish. Most of these things are outside the current urban norm.

Pan roasted calf moose loin atop rutabaga and carrot mash, with mashed potato, leek, and goat cheese, pan jus, with some acidulated cooked saskatoon.

It's odd to me that being so engaged in one's food is so odd. The fact is, what I'm doing is not new. I see it as *retro-gastronomy*: looking to how things were done before our food quality and subsequent health as a society veered into the ditch. I'm reverting. Doing what my great-grandparents did, and what my grandparents and many boomers knew as kids. I suppose it adds to the oddity that I do this within a five-minute drive from the downtown of this province's capital. *Urban retro-gastronomy…*

What got me started in all this craziness was more trips to Europe than I care to admit, adventuring through their head-spinningly diverse regional food scenes. I kept coming home wondering what defined my regional food culture. The Italians forage for the elusive white truffle. Scandinavians sip elderberry drinks. The French have a genius term that I'd love to flog except for the risk of getting dismissed as a pretentious foodie: *cuisine du terroir*. Food that speaks to place. What foods speak to being in Alberta?

So despite my love for locally farmed meats, grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, etc. – it's foods like highbush cranberry, saskatoons, Labrador tea, moose, and shaggy parasols that really dig in and speak to where I live. These are foods I can serve to guests from afar that will give them a unique sense of here. I also love that my regional food experience isn't Albertan in the sense that it's more localized than that. In the south of the province folks are lucky that my beloved pronghorn antelope is regional to them. The folks living among alpine streams and lakes can enviably indulge in trout. That regionality excites me. It's the kind of thing that folks in other countries embrace, celebrate, respect, and travel to experience. And I think it's that regionality that will eventually define what each of our regional cuisines becomes over the coming generations. It's going to be wild foods. You heard it here first.

In the coming issues, I hope to celebrate and advocate for some of the wild foods that have come to define the *cuisine du terroir* of my home. Various game meats, wild greens, wild fruits, wild fish, wild mushrooms and more end up in my kitchen on a regular basis, and I hope to offer some thoughts, tips, and ideas on how to best experience what our wild foods bring to the table. ■

WILD ON THE WEB
www.ab-conservation.com/guide
Bring home dinner from the field or stream.

Kevin's Fall TO DO LIST

July/August:

Harvest and jamming/canning/freezing of fruits – saskatoons, raspberries, strawberries, Evans cherries, etc.

Early September:

Watch for first frost – in come tomatoes, beans, squashes, cucumbers, other frost sensitive vegetables. Waterfowl hunting season starts in our area.

Mid-September:

Urban apple harvest starts (does start earlier though, and continues through mid-October). Immediate crush and press for cider, apple wine, etc., fermentation. Shaggy manes usually start appearing. Shaggy parasols appear periodically through to early November.

Late September:

Antelope butchery. Fruit wines in various stages of fermentation. Highbush cranberry harvest often starts, carrying into mid-October. More apple harvesting.

Early October:

Root vegetable harvest. Requires weather watching and is usually dictated by serious freezes or potentially lasting snow falls. Waiting rewarded by colder cellar conditions when harvest is in.

Mid-October:

Racking of fruit wines in preparation for secondary fermentation.

First week of November:

Calf moose hunt in our WMU, then butchery. Often this is the best time of year weather-wise to butcher at home. Pig and beef butchering frequently happen at this time too.

Mid-to late November:

If no snow, harvest begins of hardy greens like kales and arugula, and fall-planted cold hardy crops like spinach, mache, etc.

December:

Rest.

Easy Picks within Reach

by Paul Hvenegaard, ACA

Wild saskatoon berry
photo: Len Peleshok

Besides the many fishing and hunting prospects Conservation Sites provide, perhaps an overlooked harvest opportunity these sites offer is berry picking.

When the walleye have gone deep for the summer and most big game seasons are weeks away, I fill the gap with visits to my many local Conservation Sites (near Peace River) on a quest for wild fruit. Saskatoons, chokecherries and blueberries are my bread and butter fruit when it comes to processing.

Let me share with you some picking and processing basics. *The reward, you ask?* Sweet tasty jellies, jams, syrups and pie fillings to share with friends and enjoy over the long winter months.

Picking

It may sound obvious, but know the berries you are picking! If unsure, consult a field guide to help with identification. Saskatoons and chokecherries coexist in high moisture areas with good sun exposure, while blueberries thrive in well-drained, sandy soils.

Generally, wild berries bear a strong resemblance to their relatives we see in grocery stores, but are smaller in size. Ripe berries are those that almost fall off the stem as you pick them; avoid picking green or wilted fruit. Bigger berries tend to be the juiciest. For efficient picking, try hanging a small pail around your neck and use both hands to pick. Don't let harvested fruit overheat; try to get it into the fridge as soon as possible, or just get on with the processing.

Saskatoons are available from mid-July into August. As saskatoons wither away, chokecherries become ready for picking. Blueberries ripen later in the summer and can be picked from mid-August into early September.

Processing

When I get home with saskatoons, chokecherries or blueberries, the first thing I do is remove all the light chaff (dried leaves). My method is to pour berries from one pail to another in front of fan. The remaining undesirable items (e.g. small twigs) can just be picked out manually. If storing for the winter, this is the stage where they go into the freezer.

Preparation

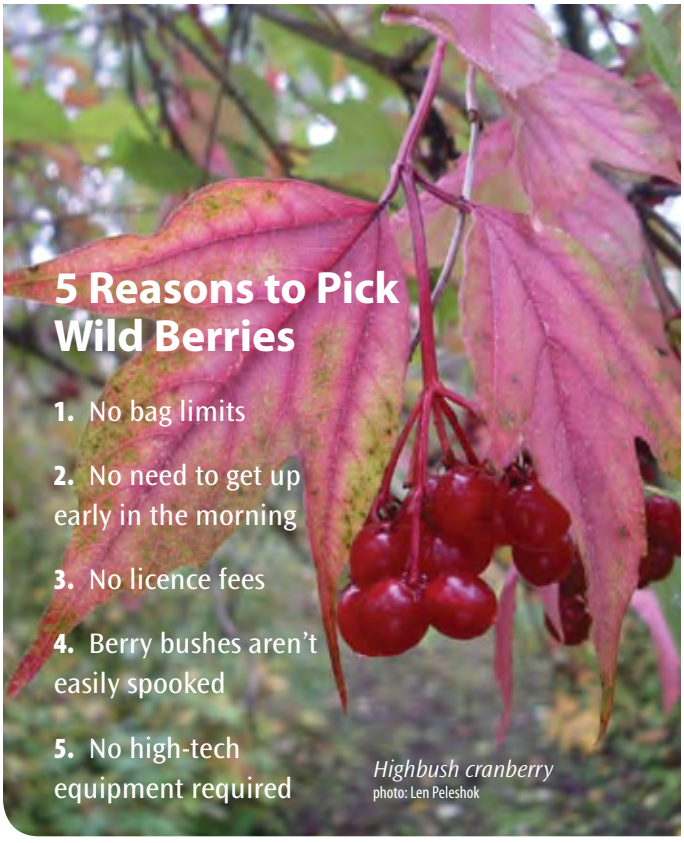
For jellies, it's all about the extracted juice. This is done by slow simmering about one gallon of crushed fruit over medium heat with the lid on. Stirring to avoid burning is okay, but it's important not to let the moisture boil off. After about 20 minutes the heat will have released the berry juices and everything goes into a jelly bag suspended over a bowl. The pure fruit juice can now be squeezed out of the bag and into a bowl, ready to be measured according to your preferred recipe.

For jams, the basic process is mashing. Using a potato masher, I usually crush about 10 cups of fruit at a time. Although berries will break open and release their juices during the cooking process, it's important to crush at least half the fruit beforehand. As with jelly, this mashed mixture is then measured according to the recipe into a large pot for cooking on a stove. Freezer jam recipes are an easy-to-prepare alternative – the prepared mash is simply stirred together with the rest of the ingredients and the finished jam is stored in the freezer.

So get out and harvest some of the abundant fruit within easy reach in Alberta. Whether making juice, jam, pie fillings, or syrups, plan a foraging adventure and pick some gorgeous berries. ■

WILD Saskatoon berries and jelly (top)
picked, preserved and photographed: Paul Hvenegaard

WILD ON THE WEB
www.ab-conservation.com/mag
Try some of Paul's favourite recipes for jams, jellies, syrups and pies.



Highbush cranberry
photo: Len Peleshok

ACA-staff-suggested berry picking Conservation Sites

You can search each Conservation Site by name on our website or the app, or refer to the reference table in the printed Guide (pages 4-6).

Saskatoons: Battle River Ridge, Eikerman, Fabris, Feltham, Greenwall, Lot 27 Uplands, Moltzahn, Stonhouse/Pope, Three Creeks, Two Hills, Wood Lake, Bulka, Schroeder, Spruce Coulee

Chokecherries: Feltham (also pincherries), Kerbes 2, Lot 27 Uplands, Silverberry (also halzenuts), Stonhouse/Pope, Three Creeks, Buffalo Lake Moraine, Schroeder

Lowbush Cranberries: Radar Hill and Dickson Dam 7 (also beaked hazelnuts)

Highbush Cranberries: Lunnford (on the northeast side), Greenwall, Spruce Coulee (the shady portions of the floodplain)

Blueberries: Deadwood Uplands, East Deadwood, Harmon Valley Uplands


Highbush cranberries ready for juicing
photo: Christine Peleshok

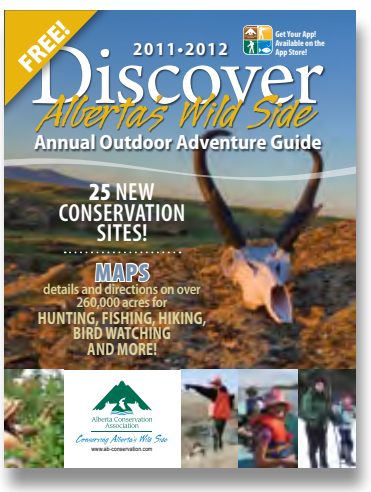
American widgeon
photo: Gordon Court

South Peavine

Who would suspect, as you bump down the dusty gravel road towards the South Peavine Conservation Site, that what lies ahead is a hunter's paradise and an outdoor enthusiast's haven?

Map Grid **C2** 48

■ *by Jenny Straub, ACA*



A droplet's dance

What makes this property special is its proximity to the South Heart River and the river's extensive tributary system. Consider for a moment the journey of a single drop of water. It begins on a rainy September afternoon, falling from the sky, landing on the edge of the tributary next to the South Peavine Conservation Site. Here, the gentle downhill topography safely guides the droplet into a stream associated with the tributary system.

Initially startling a young western sandpiper, it flows past a red-necked grebe and an American wigeon, and then narrowly avoids being consumed by a mighty bull moose, who has wandered down for his morning drink. Escaping to the safety in the middle of the stream, the droplet dodges the thirsty slurps of white-tailed deer, a black bear or two, and 30 or so coyotes lurking along the water's edge.

Gathering speed all the time, the little drop slides from the tributary into the South Heart River. Through Slave Lake it flows, heading east before being assimilated into the Athabasca River. As a part of this impressive water body, the humble droplet is eventually traveling north steadily until it's freed into the vortex of the Arctic Ocean. What an awesome journey for a tiny particle of water, whose humble beginnings were on the soils of the South Peavine Conservation Site.

Beyond the wetlands

Exploring the important hydrology of this place is fun, but the upland habitat is also worth a visit. Whether packing a rifle or a camera, there's plenty to see and do away from the wetlands. Of the site's 210 acres, 35 are hayland and the remainder is native boreal forest. From decadent aspen to towering spruce, there's more to it than meets the eye. A closer look at the forest's

understory reveals bunchberry, with their alluring and striking white petals surrounding tiny clusters of flowers, and woodland strawberries. The shrub layer is dominated by red osier dogwood, easily recognized by the bright red colour of the young stems, and the Canada buffaloberry.

Boreal basics

South Peavine Conservation Site falls in the boreal natural region located in the northern half of the province, ranging from north of Edmonton up to the Northwest Territories border. It is home to aspen, balsam poplar, spruce and pine trees. As important wildlife habitat, the region supports 48 species of mammals including northern flying squirrel, black bear, moose, caribou, and more than 245 bird species. The water systems of the boreal forest support 40 types of fish, including Artic grayling and bull trout, whose status is currently listed as *Sensitive*. From an economic, aesthetic and ecological perspective, the boreal natural region is invaluable. It has a huge impact on the world we live in and is worth conserving for our children and grandchildren. ■

Suncor Energy Foundation helped secure the South Peavine Conservation Site was secured as a part of Alberta Conservation Association's Corporate Partners in Conservation (CPIC) program. Established to provide corporate donors with the opportunity to be part of protecting Alberta's natural heritage, the CPIC program has been essential in facilitating industry's desire to implement land stewardship initiatives. Ducks Unlimited Canada and Alberta Fish and Game Association also partnered on this property in a collaborative effort to maintain Alberta's landscape integrity.

Conservation Site Getaway

GETAWAY AT A GLANCE

Property: South Peavine Conservation Site

Location: 28 km east of McLennan

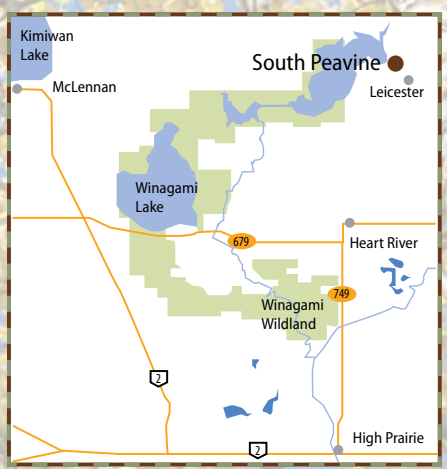
Highlights: A diverse landscape of wetlands, hayland, and forest

Go there if: You enjoy hunting, hiking, bird watching or outdoor photography

Highlights: South Peavine is in WMU 523 but is right on the border with WMU 544. The site's northern boundary is in fact the WMU boundary.

Restrictions: Foot access only, no open fires, no overnight camping

Partners: ACA, Alberta Fish & Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Suncor Energy Foundation



Take a trip

There are 27 Conservation Sites within 50 km of McLennan, including South Peavine. That's too many to visit in one day but provides plenty of reasons to come back and explore or respectfully harvest from Alberta's boreal forest.

Several Conservation Sites are relatively close by South Peavine and can be included in your day trip. Alternately, select one at a time and slowly take in what each site has to offer. Just 15 km southwest of South Peavine lies the East South Heart Conservation Site, also situated next to the South Heart River. Nearby, East Dollar Lake is stocked annually with rainbow trout by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and aerated by ACA for great fishing opportunities all year round. In the vicinity you'll also find a collection of five Winagami Conservation Sites totalling an extraordinary 2,973 acres made possible through a unique partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation.

Find out more about these sites.

1. Pick up the *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

2. Visit us online at www.ab-conservation.com/guide to download details and Google maps.

3. Get the free Alberta Outdoor Adventure Guide app available on iTunes. Use the proximity search from McLennan to see a complete list of sites in the area.

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
Watch the video. Suncor Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative in partnership with ACA.


Oyster mushroom


photos: Jenny Straub

UNDER THE WIRE.

PRESERVING PRONGHORN MIGRATION ROUTES

■ *by Paul F. Jones, ACA*

Few people in North America's more temperate regions realize that every year, pronghorn migrations occur right in their backyards. Before romanticizing the journey though, consider this: the more biologists learn about pronghorn migration, the clearer it becomes that human development has jeopardized their journey. Human habits like fences and roads are making migration a massive challenge, with dire consequences for the pronghorn.

photos: Paul Jones

Going the Distance

With advances in technology, especially the development of Global Positioning System (GPS) collars for ungulates, we have confirmed what many researchers previously believed: pronghorn can, and frequently do, move long distances. Recently featured on the National Geographic special, *Great Migrations*, is the case from Wyoming. For the past 6,000 years, pronghorn have been migrating annually from summer ranges in Grand Teton National Park to wintering areas in the Upper Green River Valley. It's a 560-kilometre round trip.

Once, pronghorn chose from six routes. Now, it's down to a single migration corridor. Housing developments, roads, energy extraction, fences—the impact on the remaining corridor has been significant, and the animals face two bottlenecks: Red Hills and Trappers Point. The Trappers Point bottleneck is so congested from traffic along Highway 191 and expanding development of ranchettes that migrating pronghorn are confined to an area less than 500 metres wide. If this pinch point was ever cut off, it would likely spell the end for these pronghorn.

Closer to home, we continue documenting significant pronghorn migrations. Approximately 40 percent of collared pronghorn in Alberta travelled more than 150 kilometres in one year, with one doe making the longest known journey of 830 kilometres. A similar pattern is emerging elsewhere. "Between January 2008 and February 2011, approximately a quarter to half of the collared animals in Montana and Saskatchewan migrated each year. The remaining collared animals were resident and moved a maximum of 50 kilometres between their summer and winter ranges," explains Andrew Jakes, a graduate student at the University of Calgary. "When we get severe winters like the last three years, more animals move. It's called a facultative migration," he continues. During a facultative migration, herd size increases from the usual 10 to 50 animals to between 100 and 1,000 animals. A 240-kilometre round trip turns into 560 kilometres. According to Jakes, "These movements are likely an evolutionary adaptive strategy pronghorn use to cope with conditions at the northern limit of their range."

Feeling the Pinch

Like in Wyoming, pronghorn in the Northern Sagebrush Steppe (NSS) of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana face an uphill battle when they take on their long distance migrations. Navigating across highways, around settlements and energy development, and under fence lines crisscrossing the prairie landscape is a challenge.

Take fences, for example. On the prairies, they're everywhere and serve several important functions: defining property boundaries; enclosing pastures to control domestic livestock and promoting range health; and running along roads to protect drivers from collisions with animals. But for pronghorn, fences restrict movement. Pronghorn don't jump fences—they prefer to crawl under the bottom wire instead. Where the bottom wire is too low, pronghorn will travel parallel to the fence, back and forth and

back and forth, looking for a suitable place to cross. Many have scarring along their backs and necks because of squeezing under the bottom barbed wire.

In Alberta we've documented a significant pinch point east and west of Medicine Hat. Pronghorn have difficulty crossing Highway 1 due to traffic and fence lines. A similar pattern is emerging for Montana, where Jakes has documented three pinch points: one along Highway 2 near the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge, one southwest of Glasgow near Faraason Park, and one near UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge. Jakes highlights that the pinch point near Bowdoin is especially critical for pronghorn movement. Three individually collared pronghorn over three separate years crossed there within 400 metres of each other.

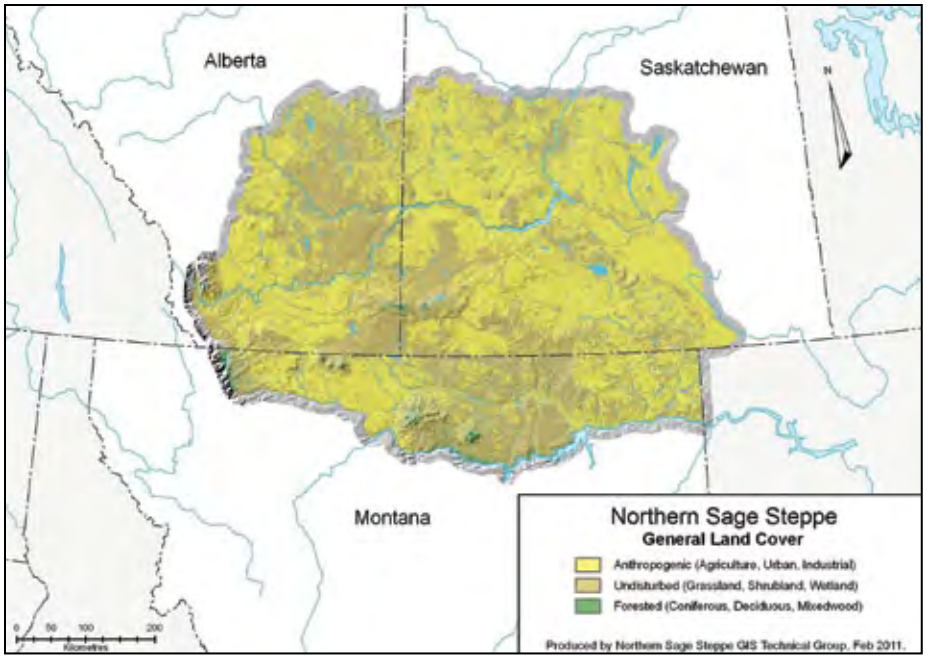
The data from Montana and Saskatchewan confirms what we've found from our collared animals in Alberta. Not only have we documented pinch points, we're also seeing how fences direct their movements. Jakes brings up the case of the fence line running from the Saskatchewan border south to Malta along Highway 191 as an example: "The fence line is approximately 88 kilometres long and is pretty much continuous except for a 4.8 kilometre stretch above the Milk River, but this small area accounted for 50 percent of all the crossings along Highway 191 by collared pronghorn. If the animals can't continue these facultative migrations the results would be catastrophic for pronghorn in the NSS."

And one needs only to look at this past winter to understand how catastrophic.

A wicked winter

Around the city of Medicine Hat the snow fell and accumulated and slowly over time became crusted with a layer of ice. For pronghorn that didn't migrate in the fall, the snow became a death trap as conditions became


photo: Paul Jones



The Northern Sagebrush Steppe encompasses parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana, north of the Missouri River. It covers an area of 334,979 km^2 and is dominated by native grass prairie and cultivated fields. It's unique because it contains silver sagebrush (*Artemisia cana*), an essential food source for pronghorn, as the dominant shrub instead of Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), which is more common across the pronghorn's range in North America.


photo: Joel Sartore

too inhospitable for them to survive. "Over the winter we had approximately 1,000 pronghorn stacked up on the north side of Highway 1 between Medicine Hat and the Saskatchewan border," says Dale Eslinger, senior wildlife biologist with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD), Fish and Wildlife Division. He continues, "By Christmas an estimated group of 600 had moved into the city limits of Medicine Hat, and they did not fare well. Potentially 200 animals died over the course of the winter from exposure, malnutrition and predation." Clearly, not being able to move proved costly for Alberta's pronghorn. We need to conserve migration corridors in the NSS to prevent the Medicine Hat situation from becoming a regular occurrence.

Fixing fences

Fortunately, not all is doom and gloom for the pronghorn. Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) has taken up the challenge. In 2009, with grants from Alberta Conservation Association's Grant Eligible Conservation Fund and the Minister's Special License Fund, AFGA started the Pronghorn Antelope Travel Corridor Enhancement Project. Project participants replace fences impermeable to pronghorn with more wildlife-friendly fences. "We're basically replacing the bottom barbed wire with double-stranded smooth wire and ensuring it's 45 centimetres above the ground to help pronghorn move more freely across the landscape. We've also begun removing page wire—a complete barrier to pronghorn movement—from the landscape and replacing it with a more wildlife-friendly fence," says T.J. Schwanky, AFGA wildlife projects coordinator.

Completing the fencing projects is no easy task, but AFGA is taking advantage of the organization's strength. "We use volunteers from the numerous AFGA clubs from across the province who are looking to give back to nature and participate in 'hands on' stewardship that benefits Alberta's wildlife," Schwanky says. He adds, "We even have a father and daughter from Whitecourt in the north inquiring about when the next fencing project is happening so they can come down and help out." And in 2010, a group of artists from the Aeolian Recreational Boundary Institute (arbi) out of Calgary volunteered their time and helped out on three projects.

So far, 120 kilometres of fence enhancement work has been completed across southern Alberta. With the overwhelming commitment of the AFGA volunteers, Schwanky is hoping the project turns into a long-term initiative.

Realistic research

AFGA can't do it all on their own though, and not all landowners can afford or have the time to replace their bottom barbed wire with double-stranded smooth. That's where the latest phase of the pronghorn research project comes in. "We've started testing a number of alternative fence enhancement ideas to see if they allow easier passage by pronghorn and would be a cheaper and effective smooth wire alternative for ranchers and conservation groups," says Layne Seward, biologist with Alberta Conservation Association. The project was started in the winter of 2010-11. ACA tested whether goat bars—a piece of PVC pipe with a slit cut lengthways down the pipe that catches the bottom wire and clips it to the wire above—effectively creates a larger gap between the wire and the ground and whether pronghorn would use these as crossing sites. We conducted the project with the support of Safari Club International—Northern Alberta Chapter, AFGA, Miistakis Institute and Canadian Forces Base Suffield.

We've got their back

"During the initial monitoring period we documented, using trail cameras, groups of pronghorn moving parallel to fences with only one successful crossing," states Seward. He continues, "Unfortunately, the weather turned bad and the study animals moved south, so we didn't get the sample of crossings by pronghorn to complete the analysis. But initial impressions are promising." The goat bars provide the added benefit of protecting their backs from the barbed wire when they cross under.

If these enhancements prove effective, landowners and conservation groups would only have to enhance small sections of their fence and not the entire fence line. ACA plans on repeating the experiment with the goat bars again this coming winter, and will explore partnering with a landowner as well. "We'd like to run trials on a ranch to see not only how pronghorn react to fence enhancements, but also domestic livestock," states Seward. ■

Landowners and Volunteers

If you're a landowner in pronghorn country and would like more information about this project, please contact Paul Jones at paul.jones@ab-conservation.com or (403) 382-4357.

Fence enhancement volunteers can contact T.J. Schwanky at tj-afga@shaw.ca.

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
See how pronghorn deal with obstacles as they try to move across the prairies.

The population data ACA and ASRD collects through annual Aerial Ungulate Surveys helps ASRD set pronghorn hunting limits each year. Following this past winter's severe weather, Alberta pronghorn populations are approximately 30 percent lower than the previous year. "Our population estimate is approximately 11,700 animals (not including pronghorn on Suffield military base), which is roughly 60 percent of our population goal," explains Kim Morton, senior wildlife biologist with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. "This will result in a significant reduction in recreational opportunities for Alberta's hunters this fall as we manage the population conservatively to allow time for the numbers to rebound," states Morton. "We are likely looking at less than 200 trophy licenses this year, which is down from the 1,271 available last year."

Fueled by Phantoms.

by Dr. Wayne Lynch

The pronghorn has performance to spare

Pronghorns believe in ghosts. Okay, I'll admit these sprightly sprinters probably don't see ghostly shapes floating over the prairies on moonless nights, nor has anyone ever reported groups of them circled around a sacred clump of sagebrush conducting a séance.

Still the biology of pronghorns today seems to be driven, in part, by threats from ghosts—ghosts of predators past.

◀ photo: Maria Didkowsky

Turbo-charged prairie racer

The pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) is the fastest mammal in North America. Pundits claim this sagebrush speedster lopes easily at 50 km/h, cruises at 70 km/h, and can sprint at 90 km/h for several minutes making leaps over six metres long. Compare that to a race horse that gallops along at 55 km/h or a white-tailed deer on the run, that bounds away at 40 km/h. A cheetah, the fastest mammal on the planet, can sprint only slightly faster than a pronghorn, attaining speeds up to 110 km/h, but the cheetah must stop running after 300 to 400 metres to prevent its body from lethally overheating. The cheetah also needs to rest for 30 to 40 minutes afterwards to recover. The pronghorn, like the toy bunny on television commercials, just keeps on going.

Perhaps more interesting to consider is *why* the pronghorn is such a speedster? Dr. John Byers, Idaho biologist and veteran pronghorn researcher, argues that pronghorns are fast because of conditions that existed in the past.

For thousands of years the only large predators on the prairies have been grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*), wolves (*Canis lupus*) and coyotes (*Canis latrans*). In the late 1800s, when grizzlies and wolves freely roamed the prairies, these predators may have killed adult pronghorns occasionally, but neither would have regularly preyed on these speed demons, as evidenced by the rarity of such events in Yellowstone National Park where all three animals live today.

What about coyotes then? Well, coyotes do kill pronghorn fawns. In fact, in Alberta coyotes are the number one predator for newborn fawns, killing 45 percent of them in the first two months of their lives. But coyotes rarely kill adult pronghorns except when they are injured, sick or mired in deep snow.

Did you know?

Performance-tuned aerobic engine. The pronghorn is able to attain feats of speed and endurance because of a suite of physical attributes. A large diameter windpipe, twice as wide as that of a human, carries oxygen to its lungs three times as large as those of a goat of comparable body weight. From its large lungs, a larger blood volume absorbs the oxygen, which is then pumped to the pronghorn's muscles and brain by a super-sized heart. The result is a marathon mammal that can process five times more oxygen than a typical mammal, and three times more than the fastest human runner.

photos: © Dr. Wayne Lynch

photo: Maria Didkowsky

photo: © Dr. Wayne Lynch

Evolutionary extras

Besides speed, other seemingly unnecessary anti-predator strategies persist in today's pronghorns. For much of the year, especially in winter, pronghorns live in groups. In Alberta, exceptional groups of 1,000 animals have been reported, but 30 to 40 is more usual. Herding leads to frequent social interactions, which can drain energy with no apparent secondary benefit. Both male and female pronghorns maintain a strict hierarchy, and individuals frequently exercise their rank by intimidating subordinates and displacing them from bedding and feeding areas. Today, the main purpose of these encounters seems to be the simple exercise of power and rank. In the past, however, such a hierarchy would have kept high-ranking individuals in the centre of a herd where they were safest from attack. Subordinates would have been relegated to the vulnerable periphery. Since dangerous predators no longer prowl the prairies, pronghorns no longer need the eyes of neighbours to help them detect such danger, nor do they need to hide in the middle of a herd to lessen their chances of being targeted. It seems winter aggregations offer disadvantages with no apparent benefits. Once again the spectres of the ghosts of predators past continue to influence the lives of pronghorns.

The idea that animals may retain behaviours for generations beyond their apparent usefulness makes the study of wildlife an exciting detective story, often unexpectedly rich in complexity, intrigue, and surprises.

High-octane diet

Pronghorns epitomize the prairies. Author Gary Turbak wrote that a prairie without pronghorns was like a night sky without the moon and the stars. He also commented that pronghorns have sagebrush in their blood. This association with sagebrush is more than a figurative one. The nutrients gleaned from these aromatic shrubs literally course through a pronghorn's veins, and never more so than in winter.

From spring to early autumn, grasses and forbs comprise a large proportion of a pronghorn's diet. But it's during the challenging months of winter that pronghorns are most nutritionally stressed and most dependent upon sagebrush to fuel their inner fires. In different areas of Alberta, sagebrush (*Artemisia cana*) comprises 70 to 90 percent of the animals' winter diet, and with good reason. Wind-battered sagebrush contains life-giving levels of protein and fat, substantially more than that which occurs in withered prairie grasses, snowberry, common juniper and rose bushes.

If sagebrush is such a nutritious food, why is it not eaten by rabbits, elk, bison or deer? It seems that evolution has endowed the pronghorn (as well as the sage grouse) with the ability to digest the aromatic oils that characterize different species of sage. The pronghorn can now add another quality to its lengthy resume of attributes: intestinal fortitude. ■

Dr. Lynch is a popular guest lecturer and an award-winning science writer. His books and photography cover a wide range of subjects, including the biology of owls, penguins and northern bears; arctic, boreal and grassland ecology; and the lives of prairie birds and mountain wildlife.

Four million and counting…

The pronghorn has been racing over the prairies of North America for nearly four million years. Up until 10,000 years ago, there were many fleet-footed predators hot on its heels. There was the American lion (*Panthera leo atrox*), a larger and faster version of the tawny cat that now rules the plains of Africa, and the predatory American hunting hyena (*Chasmaporthetes ossifragus*), armed with bone-crushing teeth and the lengthy limbs of a sprinter. Also, there was the giant short-faced bear (*Arctodus simus*) that stood as tall as a human's shoulders, ran as fast as a horse, and thrived on meat. But it was two species of cheetahs, the American cheetah (*Acinonyx trumani*) and Studer's cheetah (*Acinonyx studeri*), that were most specialized to chase and kill hoofed prey the size of pronghorns, and it seems their memory still haunts the prairies today. All of these rapacious predators disappeared by 10,000 years ago, part of the great wave of extinctions.

illustration: Michael Rothman

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ICE FISHING

Outdoor Tips with Brad Fenson

If you live in Alberta where we have five or six months of winter each year, you better find something you enjoy doing outdoors or you'll go stir-crazy. My passion is ice fishing—I spend as many days as I can on the ice.

Here are some tips to get you started.

When to go

As winter progresses towards spring, we see more and more daylight hours. And that means the fish start moving around and get more active. That's my favourite time to be on the ice.

How to land more fish

Using a good quality rod and reel combination will help you land more fish. Together, the rod and reel work like a shock absorber, which helps keep the line tight. If you've read the *Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations*, you know that Alberta has barbless hook regulations. That makes fishing more challenging, especially when fishing with a hand line, where keeping the line tight is difficult. Any slack line while you're reeling in a fish, and that hook will back out of its mouth—the fish just has to turn its head. Of course you should match up the rod with a good quality reel with a drag system, just in case you catch that big one. That way the fish can run with your line and it won't break.

Something else to consider is specialized lines. There are lines formulated specifically for ice fishing that stay supple even in cold weather, and they also have some stretch. The stretch works like a shock absorber as well to help pull the hook in place. And should the line catch on the edge of the ice, that stretch gives some leeway so it doesn't break on you.

Wishing for walleye

Walleye are often found in deeper water, so don't go with a special formula line. Instead choose a specific braid because there's zero stretch in it. When you're fishing deep water, feeling those subtle bites is tough. The no-stretch line helps telegraph that message back up to your rod. My walleye rod is more sensitive as well—the tip flexes a lot more—so I can feel any movement or touching on the hook, even 30 feet under the ice. Together with a drag system on your reel, the zero-stretch braided line will help you land those walleyes.

Have fun!

If you have a chance, go out ice fishing this winter. Take your family, your friends, the kids down the street—anyone who's up for an adventure, really—and make a day of it.

For more of Brad's Outdoor Tips, check out *Let's Go Outdoors TV*. Find out more about the show on page 27. ■

Brad Fenson is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys hunting, fishing and unique adventures. His passion for the outdoors pushes him into the field for approximately 100 days or more each year. He has traveled across North America hunting and fishing and along the trail he collects incredible photographs and story ideas from unique locations.

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
No angler should be without the *Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations*. Find out where to get it.

New Angler Know-how: 5 Pointers

■ *by Elize Smit, ACA*

Every angler has their tried and true methods, and they vary widely. Some fish only with a rod. Others insist a hand-line is all you need. Regardless, here are some suggestions for prospective anglers.

1. If you're just starting out, there's no need to spend a lot of money on fancy equipment. Go to a hardware store and pick up a couple of paint sticks. They're the perfect length. Then hit up your local fishing store and buy some fishing line (one angler suggested Spiderwire, but talk to store staff who will be able to make a recommendation based on the kind of fishing you're planning to do) and make a few hand-lines. The entire setup will cost you a few dollars. If you're taking kids, the added bonus of making your own gear is that it'll keep them entertained.

2. Know the fish you're after – it'll determine the kind of auger, bait, and lure you'll need.

3. For perch, you want to use a four-inch auger because the fish will come straight up the hole. That's a good thing, as it will help decrease the number of fish you lose. If you go with a 10-inch hole the fish will come up in a spiral, often causing your hook to catch just under the ice. The result is a lost fish. However, if you're targeting bigger game fish like northern pike or walleye, a 10-inch hole is required so the fish fits through it.

4. Unless you're in it just for the experience, don't go when there's a big pressure front moving in (any big change in weather) – the fish sense the pressure change and catching them is much harder.

5. If you're not familiar with the lake, look for previously cut holes. Often they're snow-covered. Start there.

A final word

When it comes to ice fishing, experience is the best teacher. If you can, track down an experienced angler and get some advice from them. Better yet, go with him or her on a few ice fishing trips and watch and learn. Aside from wanting the comfort of someone who knows if the ice is safe, having the wisdom of an experienced angler on hand is priceless. They've dealt with the many different scenarios and know what works on which lake, and if you're lucky, may even share their special ice fishing heaven where the fish always bite. ■

FISH GROWING BIGGER

■ *by Kevin Fitzsimmons, ACA*

Did you know Alberta has the highest angler to lake ratio in the country?

FAST FACTS:

- We sport around 300 anglers per lake. Compare that to 2.0 and 2.3 anglers per lake for Saskatchewan and Ontario, respectively.
- We have an estimated 300,000 active anglers and, excluding the Maritime provinces, the least amount of freshwater (*Sullivan 2003*).
- Alberta has around 800 lakes and 1,500 streams with self-sustaining populations of fish.

Naturally, this leads to high pressure on lakes and streams, and on native species whose statuses are uncertain.

Particularly near major centres, there is a demand to create, maintain, and enhance lake angling. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) stock and aerate lakes each year to meet the demand. Many of these lakes are put-and-take, because winter- and summerkills happen frequently.

Aeration maintains dissolved oxygen levels in stocked lakes, helping stocked trout survive throughout the year. In short, fish live longer and grow larger. At existing ACA-aerated lakes, dissolved oxygen levels are maintained by surface aeration in the winter and mechanical de-stratification in the summer and early fall. Along with the stocking program, aeration leads to new and enhanced angling opportunities in Alberta. ■

Don't forget:

An ice scoop—you'll know why once you've augered the hole.

A five gallon pail—not only does it make a nifty seat, but it's also handy to put the fish in at the end of the day.

A shovel—it's good for getting the vehicle out if you get stuck and it's also good for clearing a place for your tents if you're using them.

Fish finder

Experienced anglers often have favourite lakes they return to year after year, but even experienced anglers get the itch to try something new. ACA aerates 18 lakes in the province, and 16 are aerated throughout the winter.
Why not give them a try?

WILD ON THE WEB
www.ab-conservation.com/guide
A complete list of aerated and stocked lakes is available online, in the *Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide* and iPhone app.

Safety Basics

■ *by Kevin Fitzsimmons, ACA*

There are many factors that influence the strength and safety of ice. These include water depth, fluctuation in water level and rapid fluctuations in air temperature. Consider taking an ice safety and rescue course if you plan on spending considerable time on frozen water bodies. In the meantime, here are some things you should look for to ensure your ice fishing trip is safe and fun.

- Look for clear blue ice. It's the strongest. 10 cm of clear blue ice is needed to walk on. White ice is roughly half as strong as clear blue ice.
- Wear a personal flotation device (PFD).
- Assess ice thickness. Drill test holes with your ice auger at numerous locations. Don't rely on information from a single test hole.
- Wear highly visible exterior layers of clothing and dress appropriately for conditions (warm base layers, wind and waterproof outer layers, toque, mittens and warm, waterproof footwear).
- Carry a whistle to alert others.
- Know your vehicle. A snowmobile (less than 500 kg) needs at least 18 cm of clear, good quality ice. A light truck (gross vehicle weight (GVW) less than 5,000 kg) needs at least 38 cm of ice. Vehicle speeds should not exceed 25 km/h.
- Observe thin ice signs. Stay back from open water at aerated sites (or any water body). These areas can have much thinner ice than the rest of the lake.
- Stay away from springs and streams entering or leaving lakes.
- Kick up and out with your legs if you break through. Roll or crawl away from the open water to distribute your weight.
- Carry ice picks for self-rescue and know how to use them.
- Keep a rope or throw bag handy to rescue others if they fall in.

To stay safe in the field, ACA staff is required to take an ice safety course.

photo: Jason Blackburn

Expect the Unexpected:

Ice Fishing with Kids

Do you remember the first time you went ice fishing? Maybe you were little, getting up super early and being bundled up in multiple layers of long underwear, shirts, sweaters and a jacket with gloves and a scarf and a toque and two pairs of socks and boots to complete the picture. You looked and moved like a mini Michelin Man. But, going fishing was such an exciting prospect that none of the inconveniences mattered.

Whatever your first ice fishing experience was, even if all you remember is not catching anything and having frozen toes, it's a once in a lifetime memory.

Since Alberta Conservation Association staff is nothing if not adventurous, it stands to reason they'd take their kids fishing as soon as possible. While the fishing's not always good, fun and great memories are usually in large supply. Read their personal experiences for some ideas on how to keep the little ones satisfied.

Spencer Dorge and Logan Amos ice fishing at Lees Lake. Conservation Site Grid F3 #21

photo: Darren Dorge

Vern Peters, Claire Peters and Caleb Peters
photo: Sue Peters

Tip up!

Outdoor adventures with kids sometimes take interesting twists and turns. I remember one ice fishing trip with my kids when they were six and four years old. We arrived to find that we couldn't park very close to the lake, and found ourselves hiking (stumbling and sliding) through the snowy trees down to the lake. The holes in the ice were eventually made, with only one slip into the water—four-year-olds can't resist checking out a big hole! The tip-ups were set, and the waiting began. Even a patient kid only sits motionless at an ice fishing hole for maybe 10 minutes. Fortunately, we knew from previous trips that "entertainment" was important: shovels, a puck, and a hockey stick. My daughter thought yelling "Tip up!" and watching Daddy run, when the rods hadn't moved at all, was real entertainment. By the end of the afternoon, we'd walked to the other side of the lake looking at cracks in the ice, played ice hockey, and built a big wall of snow blocks to protect us from the wind while we ate our snacks. But we didn't catch a single fish. The kids didn't seem to notice.

—Sue Peters, Species-at-Risk Biologist

Robert Anderson and daughter, Marin, with her first fish.

photo: Kingsley Knust

A mysterious lake

The first time I took my daughter ice fishing, she was three. We were trying to find a lake where there were reports of great brook trout fishing. We found a lake that sort of (barely) matched the description, but couldn't figure out why there was no one else there. We drilled some holes, I pulled my daughter around the lake on a toboggan, and she eventually made her first ice-fishing catch—a tiny perch—which we proudly photographed. If I remember correctly, she caught it on her very own *Dora The Explorer* fishing rod, which she'd received from Santa Claus that previous Christmas at an ACA family Christmas party. It wasn't until the next day I learned that we were definitely at the wrong lake, but it really didn't matter because we'd had a great experience anyway.

—Robert Anderson, Biologist

Three men and some babies…

The spring of 2010 found three veteran fisheries biologists guiding "our" three kids Tani, 4, Toby, 2, and Grady, 2, on their first ice fishing adventure. We headed out to Heritage Lake in Morinville, an ACA-stocked pond, because it was close to home and we knew there were both trout and yellow perch there, perfect for the kids. We gave more toboggan rides than we could count, drilled at least 15 holes looking for fish, and changed two diapers on the ice! Though we didn't catch any fish, our reward was a beautiful day and awesome memories shared with friends and family.

—Brendan Ganton, Fisheries Biologist & Dad with assistance from Troy Furukawa, Fisheries Biologist & Dad and Shane Wood, Honourary Uncle

Perch and pike for everyone!

It was a nice day late in the winter and the six of us arranged to go to a recently popular lake for yellow perch and northern pike. We were there mostly for the perch though. I'd been at the lake a few times already that winter, and had good success each time, so we headed to the same general area I always go.

With my power auger, I made several holes in a line perpendicular to the shore-line, trying to locate fish and the slight drop-off. Once we found the spot, up went the portable ice shack over a couple of pre-drilled holes. My friend and his kids tried the shack right away, but he soon had to get bait and joined me outside for a bit. A lull in our conversation was broken by a young lady screaming at the top of her lungs, "I can see fish, Dad – there's one right there!!!" I'm sure every angler on the lake heard her. If I remember correctly, the young lady in question out-fished her big brother, much to her delight and his chagrin.

We ate snacks, napped, drank hot chocolate and played "retrieve everything" with my dog, Simon. Between all of us we caught over 30 perch, which we kept, and a dozen pike, which we released. All in all, a great day.

—Dave Jackson, Senior Technician

Dakota Broatch

photo: Dave Jackson

From left to right: Jayce Broatch, Cam Broatch, Dakota Broatch, Rhiannon Broatch, David Jackson and Simon (who's a little camera shy).

photo: Frank Cardinal

CONSERVATION WORKS

The wolverine (*Gulo gulo)* is an icon of the Canadian wilderness. Rarely seen, it treats the Rocky Mountains as minor obstacles and ranges far and wide in the northern boreal forest. Commonly associated with remote areas with low human disturbance, we know relatively little about this elusive species. This winter, working with volunteers from Alberta Trappers' Association, we hope to begin gathering important wolverine data: how these animals move throughout the landscape, the types of habitats they're associated with, how their distribution has changed in the past, and how it might be affected in the future.

Alberta Conservation Association
Conserving Alberta's Wild Side
www.ab-conservation.com

Michael Short's LET'S GO OUTDOORS TV The Trailer

■ *by Ariana Tourneur*

STARRING: Veteran outdoor enthusiast Michael Short, backed by fresh-on-the-scene pair Evan and Elma.

SUMMARY: We all know Alberta is synonymous with picturesque prairie landscapes, uninhabited, lush wilderness, and naturally, the rough 'n tough Rockies. But do you know the insider tips and tricks to enjoy every bit of our breathtaking province to its fullest potential? News reporter turned outdoor expert Michael Short, with the help of his bold and bubbly sidekicks Evan and Elma, is on a mission to deliver the best and most adventurous of our bountiful outdoors.

WE SAY: Whether you're an experienced outdoorsman who fillets his catch one-handed and blindfolded or a newbie who has yet to escape suburban lockdown, *Let's Go Outdoors TV* brings the need-to-know, to you and everyone in between.

Refreshingly, Short has decided to do one thing, and do it well. He sticks to a formulaic "news" format show because it *works*. Combing through heaps of outdoor information and endeavors, he uncovers news relevant to Albertans. "There is something that is missing in our news today—we don't get this niche," emphasizes Short. "I want to highlight what may not be considered mainstream right now, but it's what we have the right to know as Albertans." He promises there's nothing else like it. We have to agree.

The show isn't all seriousness—far from it—and certainly not just another news program. Instead of telling us where to go or what to do, Short *shows* us. "It's about making the outdoors accessible to everyone," he says. And maybe

the best way to learn is to watch someone else experience it all first —for her very first time.

Meet Elma, one of two fresh faces passionate about reaching out to a younger generation (note: the *future* of Alberta's outdoors). As the inquisitive girl next door/outdoor newbie, Elma earnestly invites us to follow along. Her series of adventures begins with a bang, literally, as we join her for her first time learning to properly handle and shoot a gun. From there, the unexpected continues to escalate for her, and we get to go along for the ride. Short provides a much-needed dose of real-life ideas to inspire anyone's next outdoor adventure.

Not only does the show deliver a plethora of outdoor information alongside unexpected twists, it also acts as a platform for groups engaged in the outdoors to share their message. "Not enough Albertans are actively participating in the enjoyment of our outdoors, and particularly its future," says Short, "*but*…they do care." With 30+ years as a reporter behind him, Short feels compelled to fill them in, honestly and with integrity. "There's been a lot of work by committed people—and it's their turn to finally shine," remarks Short. "The best part? It's something we can all be proud of."

Alberta's outdoor news, combined with laughs and real-life adventure means we've made room for a new kind of outdoor show. Michael's slant on the outdoors makes it easy for us to get out and enjoy. What else can we look forward to in future episodes? "High-altitude adventure, mountain rescues, winter camping, wolverine studies, bait sites, walleye work...I could go on!" chuckles Short. Whatever it might be, you'll get an outdoor fix before you even step outside. ■

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
Watch the trailer.

Our Score: A must-see!!!

Rated: For everyone!

Running Time: 30 minutes

Genre: Alberta/Outdoors

Premiere: February 2012

Regular Time Slot: Sunday evenings

Unique advertising opportunities are available for the show. Contact Ken Kranrod at 780-410-1989 for details.

Conservation in Action

Tom Bateman

Tom and Bonnie Bateman

■ *by Nicole Nickel-Lane*

Meet Tom Bateman. Retired. Father of three. Eight grandchildren. Soon to celebrate his 50th wedding anniversary. Twenty-five years as a Fish and Wildlife officer. Forty years spent absolutely, unequivocally dedicated to the enjoyment and conservation of Alberta's natural resources. Instrumental in the creation of the now 3,000-member-strong Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) in 1964. Increased annual student participation in hunter education programs ten fold since 1995, with more than 1,000,000 graduates to date. Author of two books. Winner of just about every conservation award out there, including the prestigious Order of the Bighorn and the WISE Foundation award for his conservation work here in Alberta.

But do all these numbers, awards and accolades really matter? In Tom's own words: "When you're out doing what you love and find you're officially recognized for your work in some capacity, it's a very humbling experience." From my interview with Tom Bateman, it became abundantly clear that there were many other people he thought were more worthy of recognition than himself. It's okay to be recognized as one of Alberta's great conservationists, Tom. Besides, it's the rest of us who should be humbled by your passion and dedication to the natural world we share. You have helped make it a better place for more than a million of us.

Many of us came into this world without the innate desire—or need—to explore the outdoors, to hunt and fish, discover new lands, experience nature. Most of that has been numbed by the mechanics of daily life in an urban culture. Probably what motivates Tom most is to help people reestablish that link with nature, to recognize the connection between people and wildlife, and appreciate how greatly wildlife contributes to our quality of life here as Albertans. According to Tom, the best way to do this—if the million-plus graduates from AHEIA's hunter education programs are any indication—is for people who love the outdoors to take other people into the outdoors *with them*.

Tom's life work is proof that when one person takes another person outdoors good things happen. It takes two elements to make a spark. Same rule applies to reigniting our desire to be in nature. Consider the kid who showed up in Tom's care at Camp Albert one summer, at a typical teenage crossroads between becoming a decent human being or an utter you-know-what. As it happens, an incident with a young black bear forced Tom and this young person to figure out the situation together to help the bear over the course of a day and a half. Things crystallized. 20-odd years later, this individual went on to become a leader in conservation himself.

"Hunter education is character education," says Tom. "It teaches you to do the right thing regardless of the situation." He and the approximately 3,000 other volunteer instructors at AHEIA are motivated by the same thing: to promote a higher standard of sportsman behaviour. Together—in groups large and small, informal and organized—they will lead an estimated 75,000 students through various hunter and outdoor education courses this year alone, making it one of the largest and most respected outdoor conservation and education associations in North America. According to Tom, people generate such tremendous interest in these resources themselves, often coming out for sessions not as individuals but as a family unit. This broad interest prompted Tom to help establish AHEIA's Outdoor Women's program 18 years ago, also the largest of its kind in North America.

But let's not forget the point: it's not about becoming the biggest or the best, winning the most awards, garnering the most attention. It's about the sublime fulfillment that can come from a life dedicated to doing what you love, motivating countless others along the way, and contributing hugely to the big amorphous "greater good." ■

"In the outdoor world Tom Bateman epitomizes what we should all strive to be. He is a very knowledgeable, conservation-minded person who cares about the future of our hunting and fishing heritage." Layne Seward, Biologist, ACA.

We see the possibilities.

For Suncor Energy, growth brings opportunity and a set of new challenges. The biggest one of all: balancing increased development with the need to live up to our social and environmental responsibilities, both as an individual company and collectively as part of Canada's oil sands industry. We believe the key is collaboration. A great example is the Oil Sands Leadership Initiative where Suncor works closely with four companies to improve environmental, social and economic performance in the oil sands industry. With a shared commitment to excellence and innovation, we can work together to build a more sustainable energy future.

36% decline in amount of fresh water Suncor has withdrawn from the Athabasca River since 2004*

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Vincent Saubestre, executive director, Oil Sands Leadership Initiative

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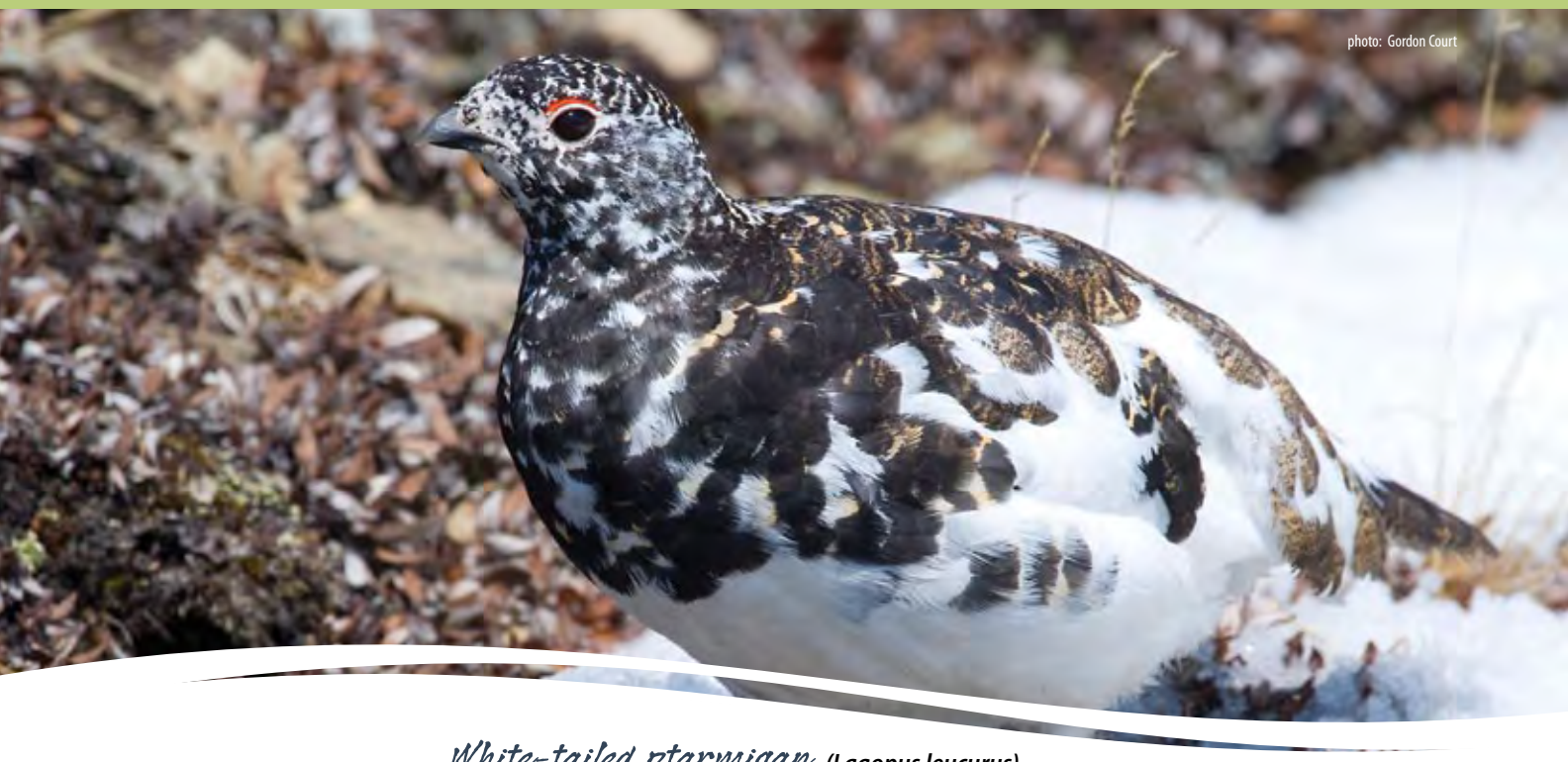

photo: Gordon Court

White-tailed ptarmigan *(Lagopus leucurus)*

■ *by Sue Peters, ACA*

This hardy grouse lives year-round in Alberta's Rocky Mountain Natural Region, from Willmore Wilderness Park south to Waterton Lakes National Park. Like all ptarmigans, white-tailed ptarmigans change colours with the seasons, allowing them to thrive in their open, rocky alpine and subalpine meadow habitat. Snowy winters are a seamless match for their white winter plumage, contrasted only by their striking red eye combs and dark bill. They're further adapted to winter with feathered legs and feet, and a preference for burying themselves in powdery snow for insulation. Summer vegetation and lichen-covered rocks serve as excellent camouflage for their colour change to mottled brown, gray and black plumage. Not surprisingly, the white-tailed ptarmigan can be distinguished from other ptarmigans by their white tail, which they sport year-round.

When in Alberta's mountain parks, you may be fortunate enough to see a white-tailed ptarmigan if you venture into their rugged terrain—high up in the alpine during the summer or in the open subalpine forest and willow meadows during the winter. They're fairly common in their habitat and their numbers fluctuate naturally from year to year, depending on the abundance of willows, their primary winter food.

In Alberta, the white-tailed ptarmigan is considered *Secure*, and can be hunted where permitted as per the *Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations*.

There are 19 species of grouse, including ptarmigan, worldwide. Seven of these species are found in our province. ■

Alberta Conservation Association

Conserving Alberta's Wild Side

www.ab-conservation.com

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