

The official publication of Alberta Conservation Association

CONSERVATION

Who's your Daddy?

HUNTRESS:

Meet Eva Shockey

TEA GETS WILD

+ WILD TRACKS

MY MEAT'S LEGAL.

How YOU can
take a stand
against poaching

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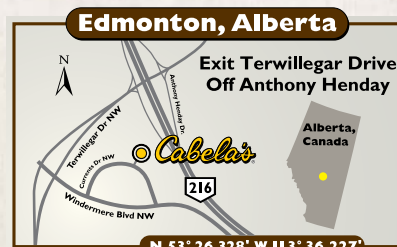
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Pak Wong, Motel Owner at the
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Conserving Alberta's Wild Side

Our Mission

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



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We have a lot to be accountable for. Our work and our successes are possible because of the community surrounding us. Many people, organizations and partners support us, including Alberta's hunters and anglers. Together, these individuals and groups have contributed millions of dollars towards thousands of conservation projects. So the next time you are thrilled by the sight of a brilliantly coloured pheasant, the exotic looks of a pronghorn, or the tenaciousness of a bull trout—think of Alberta Conservation Association and our partners. Together, we conserve the outdoors you know and love today for future generations to enjoy.





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MY MEAT'S LEGAL.



SHARE IT. WEAR IT.

Take a stand
against poaching.
reportapoacher.com

From the Editor



Our Report A Poacher (RAP) coordinator, Len, is one of those stand-up guys who gives it to you straight. To me, he is the epitome of the outdoors—baring the proof on his brilliantly sun-drenched, wind-whipped face. What he doesn't know about the outdoors, he learns and enthusiastically shares with others. We often receive "Len lessons," and then reference his discoveries on Facebook and Twitter. Whether it's the latest about in-season mushrooms; nettle or wild mint tea samplings; an account of the first birds to arrive in spring or the last to leave in fall; pelts of fur to examine or feathers to identify...you name it, he shares it!

There is one other thing that Len brings back to the office, and that's frustration for those who blatantly disrespect wildlife. In his job, people reveal their disgust for and encounters with poachers. Others show complete ignorance of laws altogether. Too many times, Len has witnessed the carnage left by poachers. As an ethical hunter and trapper—who relishes the joy of seeing wildlife and is respectful of the privilege—he has zero tolerance for those who don't obey wildlife laws.

Report A Poacher has been in place since 1990, with a 24/7 hotline for Albertans to take back the wild from those who abuse it. Unfortunately, more than 20 years later, RAP is relatively unknown by newer generations, city dwellers, new Canadians and even those who participate in outdoor activities. When the opportunity came to revive RAP, we created a marketable, mainstream message to turn heads, encourage questions and fuel discussions. Already, the MY MEAT'S LEGAL anti-poaching movement is accomplishing just that—from Canada through the United States and most recently, tourism ministries in other countries.

Ethical hunters and anglers *know and follow* the Alberta hunting and sportfishing regulations. They are involved in conservation efforts, and have a vested interest in the long-term health of wildlife. Most of all, like Len, they are connected to the land in a deeper way. They can say *their meat is legal*.

But: MY MEAT'S LEGAL is for *everyone* who respects wildlife. It's a way for us all to say no to people who illegally take the life of an animal, traffic it on the black market or leave it to waste.

Every single time someone breaks the law and poaches, Albertans pay the price. So please, if you do only one thing, educate yourself. Ethically enjoy the outdoors and ensure your friends, family and anyone else you might encounter are doing the same. Find out how at reportapoacher.com.

Want to do more? Take a stand with me and Len. Share the message. Wear the shirt. Know the number, 1-800-642-3800, and make the call to Report A Poacher.

—Editor-in-Chief, Lisa Monsees

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HERE'S THE DEAL

You hear poaching and you think rhino horns, elephant tusks, tiger skins. Or maybe you just get hungry for eggs benny.

Unfortunately, poaching in Alberta is not a quest for the perfect egg. Instead, it's about an abandoned half-gutted moose, a lifeless trio of fuzzy cubs, pounds of excess fish in someone's basement deepfreeze.

MY MEAT

► by Nicole Nickel-Lane
and Ariana Tourneur, ACA

Isn't it time to take a stand?

IT'S FOR REAL

According to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, there were 293 arrests made for poaching in Alberta last year, yet national estimates conclude that **less than 10% of these cases are even detected, let alone reported or convicted.**

Based on this estimate, the number of **poaching events** in 2011 is close to 2,930, or an average of **8.02 per day**. Extrapolate that number and it becomes evident that staggering numbers of Alberta's wildlife are harvested illegally—left to waste, or sold on the black market.

DEFINE THE LINE

Some of us might think it's not that big a deal to "bend the rules" a bit—like hunting past dusk or harvesting more than your limit. Lines can be easily blurred between technically illegal behaviour and that which is

purely criminal. But according to the law, the definition couldn't be more distinct.

The law paints poaching as poaching.

Regardless of severity, whether you've sold hundreds of bear parts on the black market or hunted 40 minutes past dark, you're a poacher. That's why education and awareness is our best tool. We want to spread the message as widely as possible so we can reach *everyone*, from off-the-grid backwoods hunters to downtown city-dwellers.

DON'T FORGET THE GOOD NEWS

For the past 25 years, Alberta's Report A Poacher program (RAP) has been our best—and only—front line against poaching. This community-based program has generated thousands of calls (63,518 since 2001) to Fish and Wildlife officers and has resulted in numerous arrests and fines.



'S LEGAL.

Programs like these work, and are our best solution to policing the millions of acres of hunting and fishing territory Alberta has to offer. But with Alberta's surging population and no sign of poaching going away, we need more people to be aware and to stand together for something *positive*.

THE MOVEMENT

MY MEAT'S LEGAL. The new anti-poaching movement promotes Alberta's Report A Poacher program. Its message invites you to show pride in following the rules and that you respect Alberta's wildlife and fish. It allows all of us to say that poaching is not tolerated. ■

Be on the lookout. Share the message.
Take a stand. Make the call.
Report A Poacher 1-800-642-3800.

**MY
MEAT'S
LEGAL.**

**TAKE A STAND WITH US.
MY MEAT'S LEGAL.
SHARE IT. WEAR IT.**

For more information on
MY MEAT'S LEGAL and
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POACHING

[poh-ching]

v, n - to catch or kill wild animals or fish illegally

Battered

Walleye are the most commonly poached fish (size and limit violations).



Number of poachers convicted in Alberta last year.



<10% Total number of poaching cases that are detected, let alone reported or convicted. That works out to an estimate of 8.02 poaching events per day in Alberta for 2011.



Top 5

poached mammals in Alberta are elk, moose, bighorn sheep, black bear, and deer.

Top 3

poached birds in Alberta are bald eagles, geese and owls.



2
YEARS

The maximum penalty for illegally killing a grizzly bear in Alberta is a \$100,000 fine and two years in jail.



[ka-ching]
\$45,200

Paid to Report A Poacher callers in 2011 for information that led to an arrest.

Anatomy of a poacher

A small fraction of Canada's 1.5 million hunters poach. Those who do exhibit these general tendencies:

Type A take one or two animals over his limit, usually to give or sell to family or friends.

Type B far exceeds bag limits for the thrill of the kill or hunts for a record-sized trophy in a prohibited area.

Type C is a criminal poacher who sells live animals, animal parts, or wild meat to commercial trade rings. He uses sophisticated techniques and equipment, knows wildlife law and patterns of enforcement in his area. He is likely involved in other criminal activities, such as a drug trafficking and contraband smuggling, and is increasingly violent in his encounters with conservation officers.

All types have superior hunting skills compared to non-violators; most poach near home and favour areas where conservation officers are scarce. Most are in their 20s and 30s. They often use the latest tracking and weapons technology and leave little evidence at the kill site that can be traced to them.

Source: Poaching and the Illegal Trade in Wildlife and Wildlife Parts in Canada by L. J. Gregorich (Canadian Wildlife Federation, 1997)

Seven unsolved poaching cases from 2011. Have a tip?
Call Report A Poacher
1-800-642-3800.



Street
value of
one bear
claw.

Forest in your cup

► by Kevin Kossowan

This is one **inspiring but complicated** shrub with a rich history of culinary and medicinal uses. Today, Labrador tea is a seriously underused terroir* food, making it the kind of ingredient I love to work with, and one that you have to know a fair bit about before you start taking a run at it in the kitchen.

What's it like?

Think evergreen, but more complex. The blossoms, which have a dozen or so pretty little elderflower-looking white flowers in mid-late June, smell of mild dandelion. Fresh tip growth during blossom is delicious and intense—like rosemary or spicy Christmas tree mixed with minty and lavender notes, and a definite underlying mushroomy vibe. To be honest, it reminds me of men's cologne—it's that aromatically friendly and approachable. The older leaves are less fragrant, but still bring lots to the table.

Terroir

Muskeg. When I was harvesting, I noticed huge signs warning drivers to watch for moose on the road. I was also sinking down six inches into the moss carpeting the forest floor. Labrador tea thrives in an extremely acidic environment, making the plant vastly better as a foraged item than a native plant trying to grow in one's garden soil. I thought about it. Briefly.

They bloom at the same time as wild strawberry, and I certainly recommend giving the blossoms and new growth a try when in season, although you can harvest leaves anytime. They tend to grow under spruce and reach a foot tall around here, which would make a winter harvest doable except for the snowiest of conditions. As with all foraging, do tread lightly, and leave the bulk of each plant and the plants as a whole alone—shouldn't be hard as they tend to be prolific when you find them.

Drink it

Labrador tea has a long history of use as—you guessed it—tea. At one point, "The Hudson's Bay Company even imported the leaves into England as a beverage."** I've made many a pleasant cup of Labrador tea, but it has so much potential that stopping there would be a shame. Labrador iced tea is a no-brainer.

To capture its aromatic potential, I thought it might be exciting to infuse it into a neutral spirit. Basically making an evergreeny gin, but

with Labrador tea instead of juniper. You read it here first: labradorteani! And even though there is a long history of mixing Labrador tea and booze, not all of it is...good.

One of the many chemical properties of the plant is that it *potentiates* alcohol. I had to look that one up. Apparently potentiates means to make potent or powerful, increasing an effect. According to native plant guru Robert Rogers, “The elector George III of Lower Saxony prohibited the use of the herb in brewing in 1723, due to the intoxicating effect.” Hmm. Yet, “Today, the Germans and Scandinavians still use *Ledum* leaves to make stronger beer and ale.” I think the point here is: neat potential, but be cautious.



Crush it good—the more you beat it up, the more aromatics it brings to the party.

Photo: Kevin Kossowan

Eat it

Using Labrador tea for **spicing meat** goes way back. Native peoples used it to flavour cooked meats, and it's no shocker why, once you smell it and get the similarity it has to other woody herbs. Keep in mind that Labrador tea doesn't “pop” nearly as much after cooking as its pungent aromatics suggest, so be mindful and tactful to not bury or lose the plot. Like taking a complex, beautiful wine and throwing it into a stew, Labrador tea would similarly lose all the nuance of its aromatics in most cooked applications. I suspect preparations where it's crushed and raw will be the best use. Crush it good—the more you beat it up, the more aromatics it brings to the party.

Because it makes a nice tea, using it as an aromatic in **brine** or **poaching liquid** works too. Labrador tea-brined ruffed grouse is on my to-do list. Imagine a type of gremolata: finely minced Labrador tea tips mixed with coarse black pepper and salt would be lovely on a game steak. Applying it to dry cured game meats as an aromatic has worked wonderfully for me. I'm on a mission to make a successful **Labrador tea BBQ sauce** to finish grilled or roasted game, based on minced uncooked Labrador tea, foraged onion, garden tomato, black pepper, foraged mushroom, cider vinegar from the cellar, and local honey. Just be mindful of how much you eat. It has so much biochemistry going on that generations have used it for a myriad of medicinal purposes. Like, serious ones.

BE CAREFUL

“Caution—Labrador tea is a uterine stimulant and should not be used during pregnancy.” That's what Rogers' piece on Labrador tea finishes with. Yikes. Apparently many used it as a labour inducer, or even for abortive purposes. The list of other medical uses is long and includes remedies for fevers, chest colds, insect stings, rheumatism, anxiety, asthma, bruising, among a myriad of other applications depending on who you were and what part of the world you're from. Not all is daunting though: “Labrador tea has a Vitamin C content second only to rosehips.” That's warmer and fuzzier, isn't it? Much like foraging for wild mushrooms, some mindful due diligence on the forager's part is in order before tackling this one.

Like I said: inspiring but complicated. ■

PAIR IT

Pinot Noir. This plant begs for a light bodied pinot that allows the delicate and complex notes of the Labrador tea to come through. The sprightly and earthy mushroom notes pair nicely. Avoid heavy reds, especially heavily oaked reds as the oak will compete with the evergreen notes—better off with a sturdy white than a bruiser of a red. And don't forget about that whole “potentiate” thing.



Red top mushrooms, *Leccinum insigne* (Aspen Bolete)
Photo: Len Peleshok, ACA

Wild Mushrooms. Give a nod to the mushroomy notes inherent in the Labrador tea. Plus, mushrooms dig woody herbs in general. Win win.

Ruffed Grouse. Although moose, deer, and elk are successful pairings, I can't help but feel ruffed grouse is an optimal choice. They “grow together and go together” like the big game, but ruffed grouse offers a more subtle flavour profile for the Labrador tea to do its delicate thing. It's less likely to get lost. Choose a fricassee, en papillote, or other application that would allow the heady aromatics to penetrate the grouse.

*Cuisine du terroir refers to food that speaks to a place. The Italians forage for the elusive white truffle. Scandinavians sip elderberry drinks. I'm always exploring what foods speak to being in Alberta.

**All quotes in this piece from Robert Rogers' *Sundew Moonwort: Medicinal Plants of the Prairies, Volume 2* with permission, which has loads more information about the medicinal and herbal use of Labrador tea.

Kevin Kossowan is a local food writer deeply involved in Alberta's urban agriculture and foraging communities. He believes wild foods are critical to our regional food culture. Join us every issue as he celebrates and advocates Alberta's regional foods with tips, recipes and fresh ideas.

Sausage Savvy

► by Paul Hvenegaard, ACA

Throughout the course of our outdoor pursuits, I'd argue that most of us have experienced some sort of desire to squeeze just a little more out of our sporting passions, whether it be reloading bullets after years of purchasing commercial ammo or tying flies because store bought imitations no longer imitate what they're supposed to. For me, sausage making allows me to extend my "hunter-gatherer" season well into the winter months. Besides the basic pleasure of preparing and serving an excellent food, other worthwhile reasons for making homemade sausage include cost reduction and product control.

Shop around

If we walked down the meat aisle at our local grocery and saw a 50% off tag on a meat product, we'd hit the brakes and toss the bargain in our cart.

Let's compare: a local butcher charges around two dollars per pound to convert venison into sausage. Commercial sausage at the grocery store can exceed five dollars per pound. Stack this up against the **50 cents per pound to create your own sausage**, and the bargain is obvious.

Make it yours

Perhaps even more appealing is the ability to control what goes into the product. At many butcher shops, there is no guarantee that meat brought in for processing is the same that is taken home. Backyard processing is the only way to ensure animal parts typically used to make "hot dogs" don't contribute to the sausage mix. Another key control point is within the recipe itself. Although most sausage blueprints are tried and true, personal tastes can be appeased by tweaking the spice and seasoning components of a recipe. Isn't that the fun of it all? This also allows for personalized recipes we can call our own and ultimately take pride in your product!



The Recipe

Excited about creating homemade sausages? Let me provide you with the same guidance I was given when I was first became interested.

Master the Meat: The quality of any sausage is directly related to the quality of the meat you use. Take the time to ensure your venison is as lean as possible. Also, when mixing and preparing for production, keeping the meat at a cool temperature will add to the quality of the finished product.

Respect the Recipe: Two things in all recipes that can't be modified are the fat content and the nitrites. Don't fool yourself in thinking that reducing the fat content will create a "healthy" product because it won't. Pork fat (also known as white gold) is essential as a binding agent, plus adds moisture and flavour to the finished product. Nitrites, although small in proportion, are critical in the prevention of unwanted food organisms. They also enhance flavour and the pink appearance.

Tame the Temperature: All smoked sausage recipes have specific drying, cooking and cooling instructions that need to be followed and respected. Generally, never dry sausages in a smokehouse warmer than 100 F, don't exceed 175 F when cooking/smoking and have a container of ice water on hand for the cooling process. ■

Venison Sausage

35-38 mm natural pork casing
4 lbs of trimmed venison cut in 1-inch cubes
1 lb of fatty pork trimmings and/or pork fat, cubed
1 cup non-fat dry milk powder
3 tablespoons kosher salt
2 teaspoons fine ground black pepper
1 teaspoon marjoram
6 to 8 cloves fresh minced garlic
1 teaspoon cure (Instacure #1 or prague powder #1)
1 cup ice water

Grind the cubed venison and pork through the medium blade of your sausage grinder. Mix the cure and all the spices except the milk powder with the 1 cup of ice water. Pour the ice water/cure/spice combination into the ground meat and mix it well with your hands three minutes to ensure even distribution. Pour the dry milk powder into the sausage mixture and use your hands to mix it all for another minute or so. Once your sausage is completely mixed, stuff it into 35-38 mm natural pork casings and ready your links for the smoker.

Recipe adapted from www.lets-make-sausage.com.



Meet the Landowner

Albert and Pirkko Karvonen of Amisk Lake, Alberta

► by Jennifer Straub, ACA

In this corner of the world, there are unlimited unique experiences to be had. Watch a golden eye who has taken over a pileated woodpecker's nest. Enjoy the serenity of Amisk Lake at dusk. Bask in nature's song. Whatever it may be, visitors never leave disappointed. With approximately 300 acres to explore, chances of encountering moose, mule deer, black bears, pileated woodpeckers, alder flycatchers, warbling vireos, black-capped chickadees, Swainson's thrush and ruffed grouse are excellent. Chances of encountering Albert and Pirkko Karvonen on their daily walks are just as likely.

Nature's pace

Albert and Pirkko have been enjoying their slice of wilderness, and the natural world as a whole, for as long as they can remember. Daily outdoor excursions, no matter the season, allow Albert to discover something new every day. "The scenery is always changing," he says when asked what motivates him to experience nature day in and day out. "Every couple of weeks things change...new leaves turn to middle-aged leaves, then turn colour and fall to the ground. Flowers that appear in May are replaced by flowers in June and replaced again by late blooming August flowers. Even in the winter, the dynamic nature of the natural world is amazing." Albert always looks forward to escaping from the fast pace of life and getting back into the forest whenever he's away. It brings him calm and renewal. "The forest doesn't need me," he says, "I need the forest."

Back to boreal

His role as an educator early on, and later his role as a nature film producer, allowed Albert to experience nature in some way nearly every day. It gave him an opportunity to share his love of the outdoors and express its importance to others. "Nature is a perfect model of sustainability and recycling, worth leaving intact for future generations," he explains. Over the years, however, he's noticed a disconnection with nature, a lack of attention to it, in our busy daily routines.



"The forest doesn't need me. I need the forest."

Photo: Jennifer Straub, ACA
Background photo: Stefanie Fenson, ACA

When contemplating the future of his beloved land, Albert wondered how he could "stand up for the forest." What could he and Pirkko do to leave a good legacy for generations to come? The answer came in working with Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). The partnership with ACA ensures the land is conserved as habitat and as an area where Albertans can experience the wonders of the boreal forest. Albert's hope is that the Karvonen Conservation Sites will be places where the local schools can bring kids, where university students can learn and explore, and where everyone has a chance to experience all the forest can offer.

Over, under and everywhere in between

The diversity of both sites is vast, ranging from a small 20-acre wetland on the Karvonen Conservation Site to the shores of Amisk Lake on the Karvonen 2 Conservation Site. Old growth boreal forest dominates, with tall overstory species such as trembling aspen and white spruce. The understory has

a variety of prickly rose, wild sarsaparilla, common bearberry, common Labrador tea, and lesser wintergreen. Members of the orchid family grow in small open areas along the lake's edge. Diversity well worth conserving!

Visiting Karvonen Conservation Sites

Visiting the Karvonen Conservation Sites is a worthwhile way to spend an afternoon, be it spring, summer, fall or winter. Access to both is good regardless of the season. Respect for the forest is essential. It's foot access only, and please ensure all garbage is packed out. You don't require permission to explore here but we ask that you avoid the home quarter subdivision on the Karvonen 2 Conservation Site and respect the landowners who have given us this gift. ■

WILD ON THE WEB

ab-conservation.com/mag

Want to explore the Karvonen sites? Find out how to get there and other important details.

WHEN NOBODY'S WATCHING

► by Ken Bailey

Hunting Ethics and You

A hunter should never let himself be deluded by pride or false sense of dominance. It is not through our power that we take life in nature, it is through the power of nature that life is given to us.

—Richard Nelson

Do we really walk the talk when it comes to our decisions in the field? Hunting is unique in that our ethical standards are seldom put on display; challenges often emerge when we're alone, with nobody to judge our behaviour. Most of us like to think that our ethics are wholesome and unwavering. The truth? Our hunting ethics are rarely scrutinized.

What would you do? As hunters, we can continually improve. It's important that each of us thinks carefully about how we want to act when faced with choices in the field. A little forethought and introspection will help you make decisions you can take pride in. Think about some of the following common ethical dilemmas that regularly challenge hunters—*how do you act when nobody's watching?*

QUESTION PERIOD

1. Respect the rights of others.

Private landowners are important stewards of our natural resources. Asking permission before entering private land is usually a no-brainer. So is closing all gates and reporting problems with livestock, land or buildings. But have you ever offered to help with chores? Do you leave nothing behind but footprints? Think about thanking private landowners for their generosity and even sharing some of your game when you're successful.

2. It's only 40 minutes past dark.

There's minor give and take around legal shooting times if you choose to play the system, and game seems to be more active in the shoulder hours of the day. Do you set your watch as accurately as possible, follow the sunrise/sunset tables closely and hunt accordingly? Or is being close good enough?

3. Give unto others.

Hunting and conservation organizations take on much of the responsibility for restoring and managing our wildlife and habitat. As a hunter, have you thought about giving back through donations of time or money to the resource that offers so much enjoyment?

4. Straight shooter.


Do you understand the limits of your firearm, ammunition and shooting skills, and contain your shots to within these boundaries? Do you refrain from taking less than optimal shots at game irrespective of its trophy quality?

5. Make every effort.

Retrieving downed and wounded game, whether it's a monster buck or a shoveler in the marsh, matters. Do you treat all game with the same reverence and respect?

6. The work comes after the harvest.

Is the cleaning, transporting, cooking and overall care of the meat as important to you as the taking of it?



7. Relationships with other hunters can make or break a hunt.

Do you jump to the shot when your partners are a little slow to react to opportunities, or does everyone get equal opportunity when circumstances allow? When waterfowling, do you hold off when you know you've shot your personal limit of birds, or do you treat it as a group limit and shoot until everyone's bag is full? Do you fill your partner's tag in the spirit of "party" hunting or allow others to fill your tags without appropriate licensing?

8. It's not all about you.

Consider your reaction when you see other hunters acting illegally or inappropriately. Do you: a) call in to the Report A Poacher hotline, b) personally reprimand them and remind them of the regulations, c) turn away shaking your head in disgust, or d) simply ignore them, believing it's not your job to police the actions of others?

9. Choose your hunting legacy.

Think about how others will have the opportunity to experience and enjoy the traditions you have. Is mentoring youth or a novice hunter part of your personal creed?

10. A respected hunter—in the field and out.

The majority of the public are non-hunters who accept hunting as long as it's conducted in a lawful, responsible way. Are you respectful of their expectations and do you represent yourself and the hunting community in a positive way?

Most of us know what's "right" when it comes to hunting, but perhaps not as many of us act consistently based upon our own supposed ethical standards.

That leaves only one more question.
***Are you doing your part?* ■**

Teddy's ethics

In 1893, the first modern discussions of hunting ethics were led by none other than Theodore Roosevelt. He put into words the concept of "fair chase," a standard that while expanded upon considerably since first introduced, remains the heart of hunting ethics for most of us to this day. In 1948, Aldo Leopold introduced his renowned treatise, *A Sand County Almanac*. But even Leopold recognized the individual nature of true ethics, noting that simply distributing information about conservation would not, by itself, create the land ethic he envisioned.

Photo: Mike Jokinen, ACA



Her quiet confidence blankets the woods. No doubt—her shot is precise, her reflexes sharp and her endurance enviable. But to her, there's much more than the hunt. Quick to smile, painstakingly patient, and forever a devoted steward of the wild outdoors, this complex creature is changing the face of hunting.

BUILD THE SKILLS: Learning the ethics of hunting and how to hunt is becoming easier, especially for women and children, thanks to programs and courses offered by AHEIA. In August 2012, AHEIA conducted its 19th Annual Outdoor Women's Program.

EYES NARROWED. BROW FURROWED. HANDS STEADY. INHALE. HOLD.

FIRE.

Huntress

► by Ariana Tourneur, ACA

Meet the woman hunter. Because you'll be seeing a lot more of her.

In 1968, Kathy Etling was lured out of Missouri into Alberta for her first ever big game hunting trip. She and her husband snagged a four species license for bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain goat, one antlered animal and a bear (grizzly or black)—all for the princely sum of \$150. Kathy spent an exhausting yet rewarding two weeks in Alberta's Willmore wilderness, hunting the drainage of the Sulphur River.

You can cook it but don't catch it

Back then, what was Kathy's adventure of a lifetime wasn't all that appealing for most women. Few made hunting an essential part of their lives. True, women and hunting certainly isn't a new phenomenon (we've all seen the historical Annie Oakley-style photographs of the "lady hunter"—all bustles and fancy hats with a gun delicately perched on her hip). The game changer was the end of the Second World War, when society began to push more "traditional" family values and women were actively discouraged from outdoor pursuits. Men came to dominate the sport.

Round two

But now, we've nearly come full circle. It almost feels different this time—like this is a *big*

shift that's here to stay. Is it because women are shaking off labels and fixed expectations, expanding their boundaries more than ever? Because they want healthy, straight-from-the-source food on the table for their families and are committed to doing it themselves? Or do they simply want to try something unexpected?

While we can't pinpoint all the exact reasons, there's no

Hunters and conservation

Hunters are an essential part of wildlife management and play a growing role in wildlife conservation. Since 1998 in Alberta, hunters have paid in excess of \$63 million dollars in licence levies to Alberta Conservation Association, where their money goes to wildlife and habitat conservation.

denying that the number of women hunting is steadily climbing. AHEIA (Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association) reports that women represent the fastest growing sector of the hunting community in Alberta, younger females especially. In fact, male hunting numbers have dropped slightly from 2010 to 2011, while female numbers (including youth statistics) have steadily risen

every year since 2006. The number of websites dedicated to chic hunting gear and trendy, "lady-cut" camo are staggering. Some even say the recent explosion of female hunters was driven by the outdoor press and gear industry—paying special attention to women's interests in order to boost overall hunting numbers. Regardless, the women have arrived. And they're picking up right where they left off.

Co Ed

Even though more women than ever are enjoying themselves out in the wild, the evolution hasn't been easy. Many are still learning, feeling their way around and getting comfortable with their newfound passion—and peers. "Yes, women belong beside men in the field," emphasizes Kathy. "A game animal is gender neutral. Whether hunted by a man or woman it will use the exact same tactics in an attempt to escape."

Think about why people love to hunt—the appeal of the hunt itself, the time spent soaking in nature, the experience of acting as a predator. These desires are ageless and genderless. Most of all, it's an opportunity to gain that unmistakable sense of accomplishment, the one you get only from a hard day's work

in the woods. You learn more about yourself and our natural world too. Whether you're male, female, old, young, novice, pro... it's enjoyable for all. Bottom line? If the desire is there, anyone can find his or her place in the field.

Digging a little deeper

When out in the field women not only aim to take an animal, but also forge bonds, put healthy food on the table, push their limits, make new friends and spend time with their loved ones. Shevenell Webb, an avid hunter and mother of one, says, "When a woman goes hunting, she tends to bring the entire family." It makes sense then that bringing women into the sport helps reach so many more. Children who are raised enjoying the outdoors and hunting will most likely pursue it for the rest of their lives. In turn, they spread their passion exponentially as they grow and have children of their own.

Our younger generation is perhaps the best indication of what the future of women's hunting will look like. Enthusiastic, inquisitive, hardworking, caring, passionate... add those qualities to their innate hunting genes, and we've got a new force to be reckoned with out in the woods.

Kathy Etling

Accomplished hunter, author and grandmother.

I hunt because I enjoy nature, and I love the feeling of interconnectedness *with* nature that I get when I'm hunting. I can hunt for days on end, weeks even, and have no luck at all yet still have an amazing time. Hikers and bikers and climbers may say they too have this connection, but I'm skeptical. I think hunting is a primal urge and you have to actually be hunting—out in the snow, the rain, feeling the wind on your face, witnessing sunrises and returning back to camp exhausted after sunset—to get the real deal. It's the very first sport, one our very lives depended upon. To this day, my own life, that is, my spiritual, emotional and physical well-being, depends on hunting.

Bringing down an animal is my least favourite, though. On the one hand, seeing the animal fall—or finding it later—means I have succeeded in my quest. But it also means I have taken the life of a beautiful animal.

My favourite part? The anticipation. Not just the moments in the field, while you're hoping, praying, and doing everything in your power to spot the animal, but also the anticipation when you're applying for licenses, deciding where to hunt, gathering and packing gear, and driving to your hunting spot. The anticipation grows with each of these things, and as you get closer it reaches a peak that almost borders on frenzy. The anticipation once made me such a wreck, pre-hunt, that I would break out in hives. I've since learned to temper my excitement. It's not that I'm such a successful hunter. It's simply that I feel most alive when I am hunting. My body, mind and spirit simply cannot wait until I'm out there, hunting, once again. I hope that when I die, I do so while I am hunting.



Eva Shockey



Hunting enthusiast and advocate, seen in Jim Shockey's Hunting Adventures and The Professionals.

My Dad has hunted for as long as I can remember and

filmed his TV shows since I was little, so I've grown up with hunting and TV cameras everywhere. It was a way of life for our family and seemed completely normal, even though I didn't have a single friend who hunted or knew anything about it.

An adult willing to show me the ropes made all the difference. The future of the hunting tradition depends on how many young people are introduced to it—that's why I'm a big advocate for teaching our youth to hunt.

Mostly I hunt with my family, and I cherish every moment I spend with them. I enjoy spot-and-stalk hunting the most because you work—a lot of hiking and patience! Plus, for our shows, we get up close so the footage is real as possible for our viewers. This adds another element of challenge because we sneak closer than usual...which I like because it makes success so much greater.

I try to encourage women and youth to hunt, or to at least join their husbands, boyfriends, brothers or dads out in the field. In fact, I didn't start hunting until I was 20 because I thought it meant having to act like the men. As I got older, I realized I can be feminine and still love to hunt. I love seeing girls who hunt and know they can still be themselves, wearing nail polish and mascara, but enjoy the hunt as much as the boys. I remember rarely seeing women hunters when I was younger and attending tradeshows with my parents. Now I travel the circuit across North America and attendance is nearly 50/50 of men and women!

I love learning from more experienced hunters and hearing their stories and opinions, so I go into hunts with an open mind and show people I'm eager to learn. In my experience, the men have been very welcoming and supportive and that has definitely increased my confidence. I believe hunters are some of the most down-to-earth, kind-hearted, family-oriented people that exist, and I'm proud to say I'm one of them.

Shevenell Webb

Mother, biologist and avid outdoorsperson.

Hunting represents everything that is required to do a job start to finish, from getting into shape to butchering animals to the delectable dinner plate. My family's freezer is filled with healthy, organic, local meat—not the fancy, expensive kind you buy at the farmers' market, but the kind we selectively harvest, process and wrap with our own bare hands. Hunting is a lot like gardening. It takes an immense amount of effort and patience to get to the final product, but there is nothing more delicious or rewarding than knowing the exact source of your food.

I still remember the rush and accomplishment I felt from spotting and successfully harvesting my first grouse, not to mention how amazing it tasted over the campfire. Bird hunting is a perfect introduction to learning how to hunt—there are usually many opportunities to spot birds and it tends to have a higher success rate, which is really important for a first-time hunter. Later, I was overwhelmed with emotion when I harvested my first pronghorn antelope. Hunting larger, more difficult game gave me a valuable lesson in perseverance.

It's a privilege to have learned how to hunt, trap and fish from experienced and ethical outdoorsmen and women. Hunting brings me closer to the land and challenges me in ways beyond belief. I hunt because it gives me an opportunity to spend time with my family in the outdoors, and also because of the satisfaction of knowing where my food comes from. As a mother, I'm eager to share my knowledge of the outdoors and pass on the hunting skills to my daughter, so she can too pass it on to her children. It's true—when a woman goes hunting, she tends to bring the entire family. The connection I feel to nature keeps me coming back, and so does the fact that we have to replenish the meat supply in our freezer! ■



BEHIND THE SCENES

The wolverine goes by many names that describe its voracious appetite, prickly personality and good looks: glutton, mountain devil, hyena of the north, quick hatch, skunk bear and carcajou. Although they have a bad reputation, they have earned our respect.

GLUTTON TRACKING A GHOST GLUTTON



► by Shevenell Webb, ACA

Even though we're tucked away in a humble trapper's cabin, deep in the forest far from civilization, I still get to enjoy the luxury of a hearty breakfast. Good thing—we'll need it to fuel the expedition ahead. I pile on layers and finish off with bulky extreme temperature rated boots, wondering if they'll be enough. I'm a human marshmallow, but at least I can face a bitter winter's day.

As I reluctantly step out of the toasty cabin into the biting air, my breath is conspicuous and I adjust my gear to make sure as little skin is showing as possible, quashing my frostbite fear. I grin at my partner, the trapper—comfortably strolling along, wearing half the clothing I am. We might seem like an unlikely team, but today our mission is the same: pursuing the most elusive of all creatures.

Unsolved mysteries

The wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) is probably the least understood carnivore because they are so difficult to study: they occur naturally at low densities (an average of one wolverine per 40 km² to 800 km²), have massive home ranges and tend to live in rugged, remote areas away from people. The status of wolverines globally is considered vulnerable, while here in Alberta, wolverines are classified as data deficient. We simply lack basic information about where wolverines occur and what surroundings may be important to their perseverance. That's why in 2010, the Alberta Trappers' Association (ATA) approached Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) with interest in gathering more information, to better define the status of wolverines.

Take it to the people

Gathering province-wide information for the wolverine project requires an army of people and a creative strategy. Our citizen-science approach uses trapper knowledge and manpower to collect information on wolverine status, distribution and habitat relationships. Multiple methods contribute to our findings such as harvest records, trapper questionnaires and field data. Brian Bildson, an ATA representative, sees this partnership as a model on how research can, and should be done. "By combining trappers' traditional knowledge with academic research we have the best of both worlds. Our findings are dispelling many of the misconceptions we've held about this tenacious survivor."

*My pulse quickens
as we turn onto the
"wolverine trail."
We're officially off
the radar.*



photo: Mike Jokinen, ACA,

The deep end of the wild

Today, my partner is Bill Abercrombie, a lifelong trapper and skilled outdoorsman who plays a lead role in the project. As we skidoo the trail checking traps, we scan our eyes from side to side in search of tracks or other clues. Bill quizzes me on the tracks we find, a welcome return to my roots as a wildlife biologist. If we're lucky, we'll document occurrence of the most mysterious and rare animal in the forest.



Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*)
photos: Trail Cam, ACA

We pass the tracks of a lynx following a snowshoe hare through bushy willows, and a herd of elk that seems to enjoy the ease of travelling on the packed trail as much as we do. From mice to moose, the stories of wildlife are written in the snow. My pulse quickens as we turn onto the "wolverine trail." We're officially off the radar.



A softer side of science

It's this true wilderness that inspires ACA biologist Mike Jokinen. Mike works closely with trappers to make sure the data collected in the field are scientifically defensible. "Trappers are the modern day *Survivorman*," he says. "They are extremely in tune with their surroundings. Trappers have a deep relationship with the land,

biologists can confirm the species back in the office. With all this activity, Bill will be busy making sure there is enough bait to attract a wily wolverine.

Show us your patch

Wolverines, like many other members of the weasel family, have light coloured throat and chest markings unique to each individual. Using photos,

biologists can count the number of different wolverines visiting a station simply based on unique chest patterns. Biologists have also documented from photos evidence of gender, lactation, scent markings and other behaviours. A second camera further away captures wary wolverines that enter the general area but do not climb the run-pole.

Back in the office, biologists match each hair sample to probable species based on photos. As biologists, we like to think our work is as exciting as an episode of C.S.I. We carefully inspect the evidence and decide which hair samples go to the laboratory for analysis. The genetic analysis confirms the number of individual wolverines visiting a station and gene flow between wolverines across the province and other jurisdictions—important in determining whether there may be barriers to movement such as major highways.

Red fox - just one of many visitors to the run-pole bait.
photo: Trail Cam, ACA

Trappers collect wolverine hair samples from alligator clips.
photo: Mike Jokinen, ACA

One step closer

We round a corner and the quaint cabin nestled in the woods comes into view. I breathe a sigh of relief after a long, but rewarding day. There is never a dull moment in the field, especially when you're with an experienced trapper. Although we didn't find a wolverine, I consider it a success. Not only did my toes stay warm, but we are also building bridges with trappers and together, learning more about the fascinating world of wolverines and other wildlife. ■



A cougar is caught in the act on the run-pole.
photo: Trail Cam, ACA

From mice to moose, the stories of wildlife are written in the snow.

ACA biologist and trapper inspect tracks in the snow.
photo: Mike Jokinen, ACA

much like a farmer would, but the land they know as their backyard is often our wildest of areas (with the wildest weather conditions). Just like a trapper, I have an indescribable passion for wild areas and the species that inhabit them. I hope my efforts working on this fascinating project ensure future generations have the opportunity to experience wild areas, where hunting, angling and trapping are still encouraged as a way of conservation."

The hair of the matter

The last stop is at a wolverine station, set up with a camera and hair snagging device. As we approach, I see several alligator clips holding black hairs. The excitement! Only after we check the photos on the camera do we learn the origin—the hair belongs to a very ambitious and acrobatic fisher, a smaller relative to the wolverine. Every scrap of beaver bait intended for a wolverine has been devoured by fisher, squirrel, lynx and cougar. Nonetheless, the trapper collects the hair sample so



Support from Shell FuellingChange

After nearly two million votes cast as part of the Shell FuellingChange program (voting began November 4, 2011 and closed April 30, 2012), we received official word that \$100,000 will be awarded to the wolverine project. The Shell FuellingChange grant will pay for remote camera equipment and the analysis of DNA samples, critical to making this citizen science initiative a success. Thank you to everyone who took the time to vote. It made all the difference.

WILD ON THE WEB

ab-conservation.com/mag

Wonder what a run-pole looks like and how it works?

10 Things You Didn't Know About Wolverines

Read the full Shell FuellingChange release: "Shell donates \$1 million to environmental projects."



Who's your Daddy?

Turkey Toms know a Trick or Two

► by Wayne Lynch



Photo: Doug Manzer, ACA Inset Photo: Wayne Lynch

Finding a bird on a nest is a precious moment—a rare glimpse into a secret avian life. On a pleasant spring day in the foothills of Alberta, a female wild turkey huddled over a clutch of eggs at the base of a large cottonwood tree. Her chocolate brown plumage, accented with metallic highlights of bronze and rust, disguised her presence in the dappled sunlight and shadows of the forest floor.

From inside a photo blind, I watched the hen's life unfold as she warmed the precious eggs beneath her.

The big hatch

The hen sat quietly, monitoring the forest around her for the slightest movement that might betray the approach of a hungry bobcat or cougar. At least once an hour, she lifted her breast, and with her beak gently turned a few of her tan-coloured eggs. Sometimes she revealed the red engorged skin of her brood patch with which she warmed her clutch. It seems trivial now, but tedious hours in a blind can elevate these moments to exaggerated importance. Now and then she would idly rearrange a few twigs around herself, tilt her head skyward to monitor a raven or hawk flying overhead, or peck at a ground beetle scuttling across the leaf litter.

Three weeks into the waiting game, the incubating hen had a surprise. An inquisitive female mule deer approached, close enough to sniff around the nest. The turkey flattened herself on the ground with her neck outstretched and fluffed the feathers on her back. Whether it was an act of intimidation or concealment, within seconds the deer quietly walked away, her curiosity seemingly satisfied.

In the first days of June, the hen started clucking repeatedly whenever she turned her eggs, a common behaviour believed to synchronize hatching. The chicks respond, making audible chipping sounds and clicking vocalizations from inside the eggs. Together, the mother and young coordinate hatching so all the poults break free in 24 hours or less. In a commercial incubator turkey eggs hatch in two or three days, but if the eggs are subjected to tape-recorded clucking sounds of a hen during the last few days of incubation, the eggs hatch within 12 hours of each other. A couple days later, the hen finally hatched her brood and I never saw her or her family again.

Born to be wild

For the mother turkey, the early summer hatching of her clutch was the conclusion of a process that began in late winter, when she heard the gobbles of gaudy males priming themselves for courtship. The gobble call of the male wild turkey is probably its most characteristic feature, helping to attract females and frighten rivals. Gobbling peaks in the spring, is absent in summer, and resumes on a small scale in autumn and winter. When conditions are ideal with little wind, a gobbling tom can be heard two to three kilometres away. The gobble call of one male frequently stimulates neighbours to respond with their own proclamation of machismo. Sometimes gobbling can be elicited by loud noises such as a dog barking, the slamming of a truck door or the hooting of an owl. Biologists call this behaviour *shock gobbling*.

The rainbows of romance

The physical appearance of the male wild turkey is an example of how hard-to-please hens have driven the process of natural selection to colourful heights. The head and upper neck on a male turkey has few feathers and the skin is heavily wrinkled and covered with bumps, called *caruncles*. During the breeding season, the caruncles enlarge and change colour from bright red to blue and turquoise. The intensity of the colour varies greatly, depending upon whether the tom is feeling excited and aggressive or subdued and subordinate.

On the forehead, just above the beak, the male has an additional conical structure

called a *snood*. When flaccid, the snood is only a centimetre or two in length, but when the tom is aroused it flushes red, lengthens and droops over the side of his bill, extending six to eight centimetres. The body feathers of a healthy male also carry their share of colourful accents. From a distance, the plumage of a turkey tom appears to be a uniform chocolate brown or black, but up close, when the sun is shining, his body feathers glint with iridescent patches of metallic red, green, copper, bronze and gold. There's no question that the colourful facial bumps, swlooon snood, and flickering feather tips are meant to excite hens and intimidate rival males, but what can a female actually discern from what she sees? *As it turns out, a lot.*

Fading glory

Colour is indeed an honest indicator of avian health and vitality. Parasites can diminish the colouration in birds. Infections sap energy, leaving fewer reserves for extravagant, gaudy displays.

Parasites not only dampen the colour of a tom's complexion but also affect the iridescence of his feathered finery. In wild turkeys, an infection with the parasite *coccidia* causes males to grow feathers with less brilliant iridescence. The iridescence results from the structural design of the feathers themselves whereas the colouration of the birds' skin is derived mainly from pigments, but both types of colour are sensitive reflections of a bird's health. Numerous studies have revealed that viruses,

bacteria, malaria-like blood parasites, lice and fleas all have a negative effect on both pigment and structural colours. A turkey tom's tint truthfully signals if he has the right stuff, and hens undoubtedly use this information when selecting a mate to father their chicks. ■

Humans are not much different than wild turkeys

WHAT?

We routinely assess our own health by our complexions. Researchers in Scotland wanted to know how sensitive we are to changes in facial colouration. In the study, they asked college students to use computer graphics to alter the facial colour of photographed people, making them look as healthy as possible. In virtually every case, the students added redness to the faces.

Physically fit people or ones with higher levels of sex hormones have more blood vessels in their face, flushing easier than people who are unhealthy, unfit, elderly or smokers. Healthy humans also have more oxygen in their blood. The 2008 report concluded people are quite sensitive to the subtleties of facial colouration, and we unconsciously rely on skin colouration to advertise our health and attract mates.

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.

Merriam's Turkey

Meleagris gallopavo

Diet: grass, leaves and seeds

Average Life Span: 3 to 4 years

Body Size: Males, 48-50 inches and females, 35-37 inches

Wingspan: 1.3 to 1.4 m (4.1 to 4.8 ft)

Weight: 2.5 to 10.8 kg (5.5 to 18.8 lbs)

Alberta Status: Exotic/Alien

Hunting: Special licenses are issued to resident hunters only. Check the *Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations* for details.

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
 Cold turkey? Find out more...



Photo: Wayne Lynch

TURKEY TALES

In the early 1960s, two dozen wild turkeys were transplanted from South Dakota into Cypress Hills Provincial Park. A decade later, a second group was released into Alberta's Porcupine Hills, and from there, to areas near Pincher Creek. Currently, the only turkey population in Alberta large enough to be hunted is the one located around Pincher Creek. The total population size in the province is unknown.

A Pledge for the Prairies

► by Jeff Smith, ACA Board Member

As you crest the top of the Cypress Hills, heading south on Highway 4, you are treated to a view found nowhere else. Picture it—miles and miles of open prairie carpeted with native grasses and sage brush, the flats slashed open by several coulees for as far as you can see, with Montana's Sweetgrass Hills as the backdrop. Scattered throughout are ranches, many dating to the earliest days of Alberta, teeming with deer, elk and antelope. Hawks glide on the thermals as they search out prey. Welcome to the Northern Sage Steppe.

Home shrinking home

This dry, semi-arid country is suitable for only the hardiest of creatures. It's also the last stronghold for one of our most endangered species, the greater sage grouse. These birds once called a 49,000 km² area home. Their home range extended from the US border north as far as Empress along the Alberta-Saskatchewan line, then southwest to slightly west of Lethbridge and back to the border.

Today, the range is a mere 4000 km², near the town of Manyberries (in the far southeast corner of Alberta). This stretch has most of the remaining native prairie grass and sagebrush flats that make up critical sage grouse habitat. Even here, they have only a tenuous foothold on the landscape due to habitat destruction and fragmentation from human activities—road building, urbanization, agriculture, both cultivation and over grazing, and the oil and gas industry. Another factor is environmental conditions. While predators, weather and climate are mostly to blame, West Nile Virus is a recent invader. In 2003 it caused five sage grouse deaths. According to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) studies, sage grouse have little chance when struck by this disease.

Rare and rarer

Over the years wildlife managers have noted a drastic reduction in sage-grouse populations in Alberta, estimated as high as 92 percent of the birds. In 2000, they were designated as Endangered under the Alberta

Wildlife Act. Recent spring counts at the few existing strutting grounds (leks) have revealed that only 13 male sage-grouse live in our province!

Look to the land

The Multiple Species At Risk (MULTISAR) team and concerned stakeholders from industry, agriculture and conservation groups formed a recovery plan. MULTISAR's role involves habitat identification, protection and rehabilitation. To start, the team logged many hours and kilometres mapping out a target area. They met with landowners in the Manyberries area, building relationships and encouraging them to participate in the program—after all it is mutually beneficial. Efforts paid off; several landowners now work with MULTISAR.

Protection efforts have been successful too, with several sites on privately held land in various stages of rehabilitation. In partnership with like-minded groups, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) purchased the Silver Sage Conservation Site. The areas



A view of the Cypress Hills and Northern Sage Steppe.
Photo: Jeff Smith



Greater sage grouse
Photo: Mike Jokinen, ACA

we choose are based on their proximity to critical habitat and ability for conversion from crop land back to the native grasses, forbs and sagebrush that promote and sustain sage grouse. Some properties were still in their native state and needed only protections in place. One ranch in particular, the J-BAR-J, provided several parcels of land for MULTISAR to work with. I recently visited a couple of these sites with Brad Downey, ACA biologist and project lead for MULTISAR.

Grow it and they shall come

It's hard to believe our first stop—a 180-acre site boasting a healthy mix of native grasses and mature sagebrush along with young forbs—was once a mud-hole. The overgrazed

plot is thriving only one year after replanting in May 2011. Several hundred sagebrush plugs were planted to supplement natural production.

Our next visit is to a site (140 acres) that was rehabilitated four years ago. Thick growths of grass cover the property, with different types of forbs peppered throughout. Sweet clover, an invasive yet common plant, is also obvious. Brad mentioned that while it would be ideal to not have it there, it is a food favoured by antelope. This site also has a seasonal wetland with various ducks. These areas are now home to a number of other species of concern. I heard Sprague's pipits throughout my visit; burrowing owls frequent the area too.



J-BAR-J Ranch fence dividing north and south pastures to protect active leks. Note the plentiful, mature sagebrush. Photo: Jeff Smith

What the lek?

Leks, or display grounds, are where males gather to perform a "strutting display" for attentive females. The male sage grouse will fan their pointed tail feathers, erect their head plumes, strut forward, and produce a series of fascinating wing swishes and whistles—all in hopes of winning over a captivated female to mate with.

Perhaps the most fascinating area is the active lek site on the ranch. The rancher protected it by putting up a fence dividing north and south pastures, keeping cattle out. The fence is even topped with reflectors to deter birds from coming in contact with it, preventing injury or death. Further down the road, there is a piece of critical habitat with a well site smack dab in the middle. Irony indeed!

The way it was

A great deal of time, effort and money has been invested in these projects. The last open hunting season for sage grouse was held in 1996. It's hard to imagine an Alberta where that can happen again. In the meantime, we'll keep on taking the small and necessary steps to conserve a species that will perfectly complete that one-of-a-kind view on the crest of Cypress Hills. ■



Brad Downey and J-BAR-J Ranch landowner Bayot Britschgi. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer, ACA

Sagebrush plug planted in 2011. Photo: Jeff Smith



Example of a reflector designed to deter sage grouse from colliding with the top wire. Photo: Jeff Smith

MULTISAR is a partnership between Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), Environmental Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) and the Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF). Visit www.multisar.ca.

WILD ON THE WEB
ab-conservation.com/mag
Read more about transforming the J-BAR-J Ranch back to native prairie.

Conservation Site Getaways

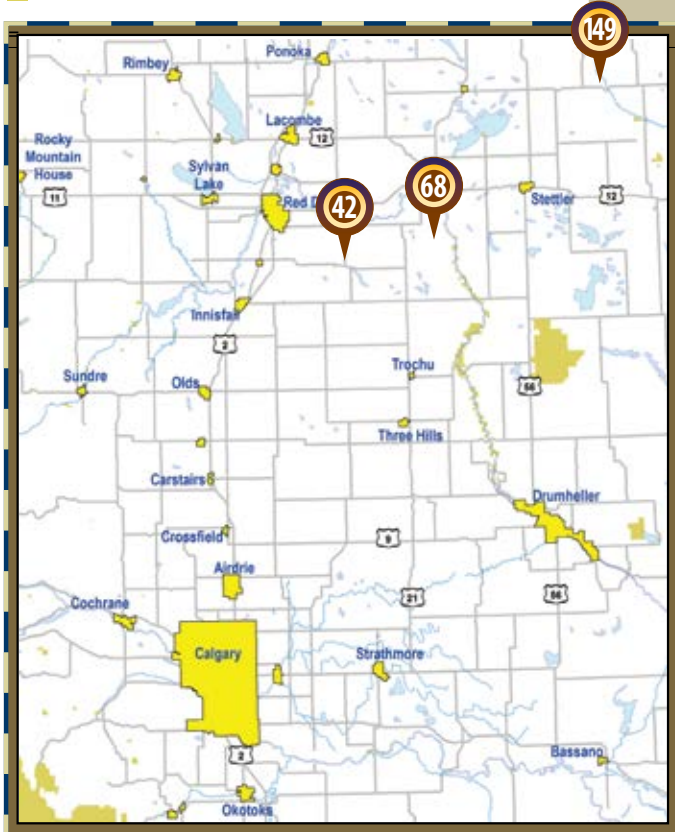
► by Andy Murphy, ACA

► Intro by Ariana Tourneur, ACA

Solitude and the City.

Do you know where to find perfect little pockets of peace between the people, traffic and noise? Step out of the tedious routine and into one of these outdoor escapes. In Grid E3, nature's thrill doesn't stop when the weather cools. Whether you hunt, hike or pride yourself as a photography nut, opportunities abound—especially at these three unforgettable Conservation Sites. So slip on a couple extra layers, grab your thermos, and enjoy the serene beauty and bounty of Alberta during its cooler months. ■

■ Parks and Protected Areas



Always refer to the Alberta hunting and sportfishing regulations while hunting or fishing on a Conservation Site.



Discover maps, driving directions and more to these Conservation Sites and 712 others with the free 2012-2013 *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide* or the Discover Guide App, available on the App Store. You can also visit us at ab-conservation.com/guide.

Nature next door Stonhouse/Pope

Map Grid **E3**

42



Easy access doesn't detract from the solitude or beauty of Stonhouse/Pope, an expanse of rolling hills and open meadows close to Red Deer. In mid-July through August, saskatoon thickets will make your mouth water. Watch for ripe chokecherries in August and you will be guaranteed to go home with a full stomach or bucket! The winter brings ample hunting opportunities too. During the summer, broods of Canada geese and diving ducks are aplenty in the large, deep wetlands of the southwest corner. While common, dabbling duck broods are quite shy and harder to watch. Ghostpine Creek runs through the site's northeast corner and enters Ghostpine Lake 2.5 km downstream—a perfect place to watch northern pike spawning each spring. With so much to see and do, the only hard part is deciding where to start! ■

A LITTLE MORE:

- This site is 797 acres.
- Site Partners: Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Fish & Game Association and Ducks Unlimited Canada.
- Determined to see a dabbling duck brood? Early in the morning, approach one of the large wetlands very quietly. Stay out of sight, and use your spotting scope to search the emergent vegetation on the opposite side of the wetland.
- Berry pickers: please avoid cattle that may be grazing one or more quarters.
- Located in the heart of the Pine Lake Moraine (only 30 km from Red Deer and just 3 km from Ghostpine Lake on the northeast corner of the intersection of Highway 42 and Highway 816 North). This site offers solitude just minutes from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Let it grow, let it grow

Wood Lake

Map Grid **E3**

68



Before its conservation conversion in 2008, Wood Lake's eastern half was grazed 24/7 year after year. ACA and DUC prescribed much-needed R&R to restore habitat quality...and it's working! Aspen, poplar, saskatoon, chokecherry, rose, raspberry and beaked hazelnut have produced a flush of new shoots. Wildlife have more food and better hiding spots. Berry pickers rejoice—short bushes on the east side make for good pickings. The occasional stream and 12 acres of wetlands have beavers and water birds residing on Wood Lake. It's simply a great year-round place: hunt in the fall, appreciate the stillness in winter, bird watch in spring and forage in the summer. What's stopping you? ■

A LITTLE MORE:

- This site is 149 acres.
- Site Partners: Alberta Conservation Association and Ducks Unlimited Canada.
- Adjacent to 5 quarters of crown land and Wood Lake (a 60+ acre lake).
- Please avoid the acreage (NE corner of the quarter) that is excluded from this site.
- *Take Highway 21 and Twp Rd 374 east (and southeast) from Delburne. Travel 13.7 km to RR 224 and then go south 0.6 km to the widened approach beside the Conservation Site sign.*



Beaked hazelnut
Photo: Len Pelleshok, ACA



Photo: Jim Potter, ACA



Ruddy duck
Photo: ACA

The dreamscape

Spruce Coulee

Map Grid **E3**

149



Stand on the grassy hilltops along Spruce Coulee's eastern ridge for a spectacular view—ungulates and coyotes roam in the distance, while all kinds of birds dip into the picturesque landscape. With the trusty breeze blowing away pesky mosquitoes, how could you ask for more? The Battle River Valley and Spruce Coulee run through the property, and striking contrasts between opposing hillsides create interesting microsites that host a huge array of plants and animals. On top of that, the soft banks of the Battle River floodplain and its curving oxbows provide nesting opportunities for bank swallows and the belted kingfisher. The river also provides forage fish for kingfishers, mergansers, herons and pelicans, and the oxbows provide a wide range of aquatic insects for both diving and dabbling ducks. Hunt, fish, hike, berry pick, or simply enjoy this special spot—just have your camera handy! ■

A LITTLE MORE:

- This site is 320 acres.
- Site Partners: Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Fish & Game Association and Battle River Community Foundation.
- Includes over a kilometre of the Battle River and several terrific vantage points.
- *Located about 42 km from Bashaw. Follow Highway 53 E for 41 km to RR 171A and then travel 2.4 km west and north until you reach the footpath. It leads (west 0.8 km) into this site. Access is along the north boundary of NE-02-042-17-W4M.*

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