

RECOVERY

An Endangered Species Newsletter



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Recovery Highlights

Calving success

At least 27 right whale calves were born in Florida's coastal waters this winter, more than all the calves born to the North Atlantic population in the past five years. Two of the calves perished. The right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) is designated nationally endangered in Canada. The North Atlantic population is estimated at fewer than 350 individuals.

The population winters and breeds in the ocean around Florida and several areas nearby, and summers in prime feeding areas in the Bay of Fundy off the Nova Scotia coast. Since 1997, Canadian government agencies and wildlife groups have been cooperating with industry to minimize the impact of fishing and shipping on the whales. Collisions with ships, and entanglement in fishing gear, are the two main threats to the species.

New crane route

This fall, pilots of an ultralight plane will attempt to lead a flock of young



PHOTO: BRIAN JOHNS

Whooping cranes are learning a new migration route.

whooping cranes on a new migration route from Wisconsin to Florida. Bill Lishman and Joe Duff, of Port Perry, Ontario, will guide 10 to 25 captive-raised cranes on the journey. The whooping crane (*Grus americana*) is nationally endangered in Canada.

Lishman and Duff, founders of the group Operation Migration, will train the newly-hatched group of whooping cranes to follow the ultralight plane during training sessions in Wisconsin. The project is part of an ongoing cooperative whooping crane recovery effort by the U.S. and Canadian governments.

Nate heads home

Nate has headed home. The young peregrine falcon left his wintering

grounds in Colombia this March, en route to completing his second migration back to Ontario.

The Canadian Peregrine Foundation is tracking Nate by satellite telemetry as part of Project Track-'em, the Foundation's program to learn about peregrine falcon migration habits. Their findings could have important management implications for the nationally threatened peregrine falcon (anatum) (*Falco peregrinus anatum*).

The Foundation fitted satellite transmitters on Nate and three other young peregrine falcons in 1999, and on four more falcons in 2000.

Peregrine enthusiasts can follow the adventures of these peregrine falcons online at the Foundation's web site [www.peregrine-foundation.ca].

Inside	
Team profile	2
Owl discoveries	3
Multi-species plan	4
Bison reintroduction	5
New plover trap	6
Frog recovery	8

Experience and respect central to team's success

BY DAVID WYLYNKO

In its ten-year history, the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake Recovery Team has greatly broadened public knowledge and deference for the snake. This success has come about largely because team members have a diverse set of skills, direct knowledge of the species, and a mutual appreciation for the contributions of other team members.

What makes a recovery team successful? For starters, wide-ranging expertise and a cooperative approach are essential. "Our team includes people who specialize in education, nature interpretation, resource management, and conservation science, as well as policy issues," said team chair Darlene Upton of Parks Canada. "We work well together because we respect one another's strengths."

Bob Johnson of the Toronto Zoo concurs. As lead of the team's education and outreach committee (a role he retired from this past March), Johnson said the team's diverse representation and talent allow it to focus on all areas critical to the recovery of the eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*), designated nationally threatened in Canada.

For example, some members work on administrative aspects, ensuring resources are available for fieldwork that realizes the team's stewardship and research goals. Cooperative efforts have helped the team to secure resources from programs such as the Endangered Species Recovery Fund and the federal government's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.

The team also excels at communicating and engaging local communities in re-

covery efforts. This aspect is significant, since one of the main causes for the species' decline has been persecution by humans, making public outreach an essential ingredient for recovery. Employing a depth of expertise and personal enthusiasm, team members hold regular public workshops to teach individuals how to deal with this shy, non-aggressive snake, giving people the skills to safely live in massasauga habitat and value personal encounters with the species in the wild.

The outreach efforts appear to be working. "People don't want to persecute snakes anymore," said Johnson. "They want to understand how to live with them. We now get many reports each summer of people saying they saw the snake and being excited about it."

Interaction among team members is also important. The team holds bi-annual meetings, often at field sites in one of the four population regions.

"These gatherings let the entire team understand the varying challenges for each population," said Johnson, "which helps later when we're discussing each population."

When not meeting face to face, the team uses the information highway to communicate, and has established an interactive Internet site called the Sistrurus



PHOTO: BOB JOHNSON

Eastern massasauga rattlesnake recovery team.

Information Network (SIN). The site provides the public with information on team activities and descriptions of the four populations. Team members use the site to share research results, discuss projects and funding opportunities, and post reports for review. SIN has also allowed the team to collaborate with U.S. experts in order to coordinate recovery across the species entire range. For more information, visit the web site [www.terra-plex.com/sin/].

David Wylynko is a communications consultant with West Hawk Associates.

Our New Look

The Recovery newsletter is adopting a new look. In this and future issues, these pages will feature several short updates on recovery activities. We are introducing new sections, including Recovery Highlights, News Bites, Field Notes, New Publications, Site Seeing, and Upcoming Events. We hope you'll find the revised format interesting and informative.

Let Us Know

Let us know if you have story ideas for the 'Recovery' newsletter. Please send your suggestions, or any comments you have on the newsletter, to France Gauthier [france.gauthier@ec.gc.ca].

Recovery is a free newsletter providing information and views on the recovery of species at risk. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the policies of Environment Canada. Contents may be reprinted without permission, although credit would be appreciated. Anyone wishing to be put on the mailing list should send his or her name, mailing address, and language of choice to Recovery, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, Canada, K1A 0H3.

The newsletter is also accessible at:
www.cws-scfc.gc.ca/es/recovery/archive.html

Anyone wishing to submit an article is invited to contact France Gauthier of the Canadian Wildlife Service at france.gauthier@ec.gc.ca or (819) 994-2431.

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'Canadian' burrowing owls found in Mexico

Culmination of a ten-year search

BY GEOFFREY L. HOLROYD
AND HELEN TREFRY

For the first time ever, 'Canadian' burrowing owls have been discovered wintering as far south as Mexico. The discovery is the culmination of a ten-year search for the winter home of burrowing owls that spend summers on the prairies. The burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) is designated nationally endangered in Canada.

We made the discovery in late January 2001 during aerial surveys over Mexico, when we picked up two transmitter signals from the air and then returned to the sites by vehicle to identify the owls. Last summer, with help from graduate students Darcey Shyry of the University of Alberta and Danielle Todd of the University of Regina, we attached transmitters to 85 burrowing owls in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta as part

of studies on the species' habitat use and survival on the prairies. The transmitters' batteries last up to 12 months.

One transmitter was found in an orange grove on the side of a small volcanic hill in northern Veracruz State. The ground was littered with owl feathers, which suggests that a predator had plucked the owl. We did not expect to find burrowing owls in orange groves, a much different habitat than the mixed prairie of southern Saskatchewan where the owl was banded. Burrowing owls were flushed twice while we searched for the transmitter.

The second transmitter was on a live adult owl in northern Michoacan, just north of the Monarch Butterfly wintering grounds. This owl had been banded in southern Alberta. The owl was in a patch of shrubland on a hill-

side surrounded by cornfields and pasture. We flushed burrowing owls nine times while searching for the one with the transmitter, indicating that many other owls use the shrubland as a daytime roost.

Both owls had flown over 3,400 kilometres from their summer homes to their Mexican wintering grounds. Only two other banded burrowing owls had ever been recovered in Mexico, one that flew from Utah to Baja and another that flew from Oklahoma to Guadalajara. Other burrowing owls that were banded on the Canadian prairies have been found in Texas, Louisiana and states to the north.

The discovery of burrowing owl wintering locations allows us to focus more of our attention on determining whether over-winter mortality is contributing to the species' decline in Canada.

Through a preliminary co-operative study conducted in central Mexico last winter with Mexican biologist Enrique Valdez, we showed that all owls wintering there survived, while a study near Corpus Christi, Texas by Gerry Batey found that 15-30% of the owls died in the winter. We plan to conduct more intensive studies into winter mortality over the next two years.

This spring, we will search for transmitters by plane in the prairies and adjacent U.S. states to determine how many owls return to nest and how far they have wandered from last summer's nesting sites. Some of the owls may be stopping in the United States rather than returning to Canada, further increasing the apparent decline on the Canadian prairies.

Over 700 landowners in Alberta and Saskatchewan voluntarily conserve over 50,000 hectares of native prairie as nesting habitat for the burrowing owls. Despite this large conservation effort, the breeding population in Canada is declining at about 16% per year.

Geoffrey L. Holroyd and Helen Trefry work for the Canadian Wildlife Service in Edmonton, Alberta.

Burrowing owl researchers Rafael Rodriguez and Helen Trefry in Veracruz, Mexico.



PHOTO: GEOFFREY HOLROYD

Garry oak ecosystems strategy released

A recovery team for the Garry oak ecosystems of southwestern British Columbia has released a draft recovery strategy for public review.

The strategy takes a groundbreaking approach by considering, firstly, whole ecosystems, and then developing a strategic plan for each species at risk that inhabits the ecosystems. The strategy encompasses Garry oak ecosystems and associated meadow, rock outcrop, coastal bluff, vernal pool, and transitional forest ecosystems.

At present, 93 species of organisms inhabiting Garry oak and associated ecosystems are designated as provincially at risk. Eighteen of them are nationally designated, ranging from butterflies like the endangered Taylor's checkerspot (*Euphydryas editha taylori*), to plants like the threatened white-top aster (*Aster curtus*), to reptiles such as the endangered sharp-tailed snake (*Contia tenuis*).

The strategy identifies two specific recovery goals:

- Establishment of a network of Garry oak and associated ecosystems that
 - a. Is representative of the full range of ecosystem variation across the geographic range;

b. Is sustainable over the long term; and

c. Supports the full range of native biota.

- Improvement and securement of the status of all species at risk from Garry oak and associated ecosys-

tems, except those that are extinct, so that they no longer have at-risk status.

To learn more about these ecosystems, visit the web site of the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society [www.garryoak.bc.ca/history/html].

Important amphibian and reptile areas designated

Though found in different provinces, the Lake Erie water snake (*Nerodia sipedon insularum*) and Great Basin spadefoot toad (*Spea intermontana*) are benefiting from the same national program. The snake, designated as nationally endangered, inhabits Pelee Island in Ontario. The toad, designated nationally as a species of special concern, inhabits the South Okanagan Valley of British Columbia.

These are the first two locations designated as Important Amphibian and Reptile Areas, under a program initiated by the Canadian Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Network (CARCNET).

Launched in 1999, the goal of the program is to raise awareness about sites that are particularly significant and sen-

sitive for reptiles and amphibians in Canada. To be considered for designation, an area must hold:

- significant numbers of individuals of a species that is designated as at risk of extinction;
- a high biodiversity of amphibians or reptiles;
- unusually large numbers of amphibians or reptiles that congregate for the purpose of some life history activity such as reproduction, hibernation, or thermoregulation.

The designation is intended to draw attention to these important areas; it has no legal implication. For more information, visit the CARCNET web site [<http://eqb-dqe.cciw.ca/partners/carcnet/intro.html>].

Multi-species recovery plan released

A multi-species recovery plan was recently released for the Acadian flycatcher (*Empidonax vireescens*) and hooded warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*).

In Canada, these two forest bird species nest only in Ontario, mainly within the Carolinian forest zone in the southwestern portion of the province. This is the first multi-species national recovery plan developed under RE-NEW, the national recovery program.

The Acadian flycatcher is nationally designated endangered and the hooded warbler threatened. These designations were made because of the small population size of both species and threats to their breeding areas.

The goal of the plan is to increase populations of each species such that the flycatcher will be re-designated down at least to a threatened status and the warbler down to at least a special concern status. The plan sets out six major recovery strategies for the two species:

- clarify the population status, distribution, and trends of both species in Ontario;
- examine nesting productivity and factors affecting it;
- determine habitat requirements;
- identify, protect, and expand critical breeding habitat;
- assign management of critical habi-

tat;

- foster public and professional support through education and incentives.

A key component of the recovery plan is the objective to identify five core breeding areas in southwestern Ontario, each containing large woodlots with substantial forest-interior and surrounded by a number of adjacent "satellite" woodlots. The recovery team is working with concerned individuals, agencies, and groups to create local, community based management plans emphasizing the protection, expansion, and consolidation of the identified core habitat complexes.

Wood bison reintroduced

Herd transferred in cooperative venture

Wildlife biologists recently transferred a herd of 58 wood bison to an 80-acre holding facility on the Heart Lake Indian reserve in northeastern Alberta.

The February 20th, 2001 transfer is part of a cooperative effort between Alberta Treaty 6 First Nations, Environment Canada, and Parks Canada that may eventually lead to re-establishing a wild population in Alberta. The Heart Lake First Nation will manage the captive breeding conservation herd that is being held on their lands.

The herd of wood bison (*Bison bison athabasca*), a mammal designated nationally threatened in Canada, came from Elk Island National Park, located just east of Edmonton, Alberta, which maintains a source herd for captive breeding.

The Heart Lake First Nation is one of six member First Nations of the Alberta Tribal Chiefs Association, which

took on the project by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Elk Island National Park of Parks Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada.

The Tribal Chiefs Association will establish a joint management committee with the Wood Bison Recovery Team, which will be responsible for the administration of this First Nation Wood Bison Recovery Project. The captive facility can be expanded to encompass the entire 26 square kilometre (10 square mile) land base of the Heart Lake First Nation.

This co-management project is a cooperative venture to reintroduce wood bison to First Nation lands and facilitate the resurrection of the spiritual and cultural lifestyle of the First Nation communities. It is intended to provide economic development opportunities for these areas, and restore wood bison and ensure the species' long-term survival.

Updates

Yukon Wildlife Act under review

The Yukon government is proposing to adopt new species at risk provisions as part of the first major public review of the Yukon Wildlife Act in nearly 20 years.

The new provisions would help the government meet its commitments under the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk, according to a news release distributed this past February.

The government will take a phased-in approach to changing the Act by tabling amendments in each of the next three years, with the species at risk provisions to be applied in 2002. More information can be obtained by visiting this web site [www.renres.gov.yk.ca].

Recovery team chair workshops held

Recovery team chairs and practitioners were offered two workshops recently, exchanging information and providing feedback on proposed changes to the national recovery process introduced under the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk.

Workshops were held in Winnipeg, Manitoba in February and Sackville, New Brunswick in March.

Topics explored at both workshops included the role and formation of recovery teams, issues of concern to recovery teams, development of recovery strategies, and approaches to recovery planning.

Representatives of the federal government's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk made presentations on the program at both workshops.

Workshop participants included biologists from federal, provincial, and territorial governments, academics, consultants, and representatives from non-governmental agencies.

The feedback obtained from each workshop is being considered for incorporation into the draft recovery operations manual being developed by the National Recovery Working Group for the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee.

Stewardship funding announced

Threatened spiny softshell turtle getting help

The spiny softshell turtle (*Apalone spinifera*), designated nationally threatened in Canada, is getting valuable assistance in Quebec from the federal government's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.

Under the program, Environment Canada recently announced three major conservation projects in Quebec for species at risk. The Feb. 28, 2001 announcement makes the following commitments:

- Projects designed to protect the habitats of species at risk in the Haut-Richelieu region of Montérégie will receive \$306,000;
- Initiatives to protect species at risk inhabiting the St. Lawrence River will receive \$200,000;
- Efforts to conserve species at risk habitat in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine will receive \$110,000.

Under one of the projects in the Haut-Richelieu region, the program will grant \$195,000 to the Nature Conservancy of Canada to secure and promote awareness of natural spiny softshell turtle habitat. Several government agencies, interest groups, including corporations, watershed associations and clubs, as well as many residents will be involved in this project.

The Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk is a new federal government conservation initiative, jointly developed by Environment Canada (which also administers the program), Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada.

For a complete overview of the recent projects funded, visit the Quebec Region link to the Environment Canada web site [www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/faune/html/contents.html].

Scientists adopt new trap

Wildlife biologists in eastern Canada have adopted the use of a trap devised in Russia to live catch the nationally endangered piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*). A Cuban biologist, Pedro Blanco, first used the trap while doing research on another plover species in Russia, and introduced it to Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) biologists last summer.

The traps are placed over the bird's nest to ensure the adult piping plover will enter the cage. Previously, CWS biologists used a wooden trap that they pulled shut with a rope once the bird was inside.

The door of the new trap closes automatically. Scientists attach a fishing line to the top of the door and stretch it just over the eggs to an aluminum hook. When the bird sits on

the eggs, it pulls down the line and frees it from the hook, allowing the door to close. The top of the new trap consists of a net used in aquaculture, while the sides are constructed from trap wire used by lobster fishers.

Scientists catch piping plovers to band them. When the bands are recovered, biologists learn about the birds' movement patterns within and beyond Canada, migratory trends, wintering areas, and survival rates. This kind of information could help explain the decline of the population and determine which protective measures are most suitable for piping plovers.

CWS biologists now use the modified trap on Îles-de-la-Madeleine (Québec), as well as in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.



PHOTO: FRANÇOIS SHAFFER

Canadian scientists have begun to use this innovative piping plover live trap in their research.

Satellite tracking

The revolutionary technique of satellite telemetry has become an increasingly effective research tool for tracking species at risk, helping scientists determine their movements on a hemispheric scale.

In recent years, the Nova Scotia Leatherback Turtle Working Group has tagged and tracked five leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), which are designated as nationally endangered in Canada, and critically endangered by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Coordinated by Mike James, the group is a collaborative marine turtle research and conservation group involving commercial fishers and scientists.

In August 2000, in the waters off Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, the group attached satellite tags to two males, Ivan and Melvin, and two females, Helen and Molly. The first leatherback turtle the group tagged was Sherman, who was tagged almost a year earlier in September 1999. His tag stopped transmitting near the end of October 1999, at which point he'd swum south-east well into the Atlantic Ocean.

The battery-powered satellite pack the turtles wear is a walkman-sized mini computer encased in fibreglass. The unit is called a platform transmitting terminal (PTT). The turtle wears this "tag" on top of its shell by means of straps, much like a

Owl survey catching on

Manitoba conservationists are hoping a homegrown nocturnal owl survey protocol will become an international standard for monitoring owl populations. Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia have adopted the new protocol, which a federal/provincial committee has established as the standard national protocol.

The survey design increases data reliability by not using tape-recorded playback, a method that can create a bias since the equipment used is not standardized from one jurisdiction to another. As well, the survey calls for the distance between survey stops to be set at 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) apart, after the common practice of stopping every 0.8 kilometres (.5 miles) resulted in over-sampling, or the same

owls being counted twice.

Kurt Mazur, a wildlife biologist with Manitoba Conservation, said he hopes the protocol will eventually be used across Canada and the United States. It can be used to monitor the barn owl (*Tyto alba*) and northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), which are designated nationally endangered in Canada, the flammulated owl (*Otus flammeolus*), which is designated of special concern, and many provincially designated and common species.

Surveying owls is critical to determining their status and whether conservation efforts are required. The protocol was employed in Manitoba this spring for the second consecutive year.

backpack. The backpack, which was designed by California marine turtle biologist Scott Eckert, will fall off the turtle after the tag's batteries have run out.

When the turtles surface to breathe or to bask in the sun, the PTT emits a signal that allows satellites overhead to pinpoint its location. A company monitors the satellite-derived locations of PTTs,

and e-mails researchers a list of when and where the transmitter was located that day.

Tagging sea turtles allows the group to learn about the movements of individual sea turtles, and use the information to better understand the species' biology. Their adventures can be tracked online [www.seaturtle.ca].

continued on page 7

New Publications

Wild Species 2000: The General Status of Species in Canada. Published in April, 2001 by the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council, this report provides an overview of the status of Canada's species. It brings the results of provincial, territorial, and federal monitoring efforts onto a single platform for the first time. It is also available online [www.wildspecies.ca].

Conserving Borderline Species: A Partnership between the United States and Canada. Published in Spring, 2001, this outreach brochure profiles cooperative recovery activities for 10 species at risk shared by the two countries. It is also available online at [www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca] and at [<http://endangered.fws.gov>].

Proceedings of a conference on Biology & Management of Species & Habitat at Risk. This collection of papers stems from the third conference in British Columbia to focus on species and habitats at risk, held February 16, 1999. The proceedings include papers dealing with aspects of the biology of more than 60 species. Find out more online [www.crownpub.bc.ca/show.cgi/442/CP.02.01.30.02].

Planting the Seed. This 56 page, illustrated introductory guide designed to assist people interested in planting prairie and meadow, has been newly published by Environment Canada.

Visit the Tallgrass Ontario web site for more information on the guide [www.tallgrassontario.org/planting_the_seed.htm].

The Piping Plover in Eastern Canada. This illustrated brochure, released by the Canadian Wildlife Service - Atlantic Region, describes the nationally endangered piping plover in eastern Canada, includ-

ing its distribution and abundance, habitat characteristics, breeding behaviour, causes of decline, and protection measures. It is available online [www.ns.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/plover/brochure/index.html].

NWT Species 2000 - General Status Ranks of Wild Species in the Northwest Territories. This publication summarizes the initial findings of an ongoing process to monitor the general status of wild species in the Northwest Territories, and presents the system for this evaluation. The system is shared by all other jurisdictions in Canada. Available online [www.nwtwildlife.rwed.gov.nt.ca/monitor.htm].

Millennium Wetland Event: Program with Abstracts. This publication includes abstracts from the August 6-12, 2000 conference held in Quebec, Canada. The event included a special symposium on species at risk and wetlands.

Find out more online [www.sws.org/quebec2000/].

A proceedings report is being prepared for the 6th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference, 'Sharing Common Ground', held February 22-25, 2001 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The report is to be released in the winter of 2001/2002.

Site Seeing

Species at Risk in Canada: [www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca]
 Canadian Chestnut Council [www.uoguelph.ca/~chestnut/]
 Wildlife Branch, Manitoba Conservation:
www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.html
 'Wild Species 2000: The General Status of Species in Canada':
www.wildspecies.ca

Upcoming Events

July 29-August 1: 15th annual meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology, University of Hawaii, Hilo, Hawaii. The theme is *Ecological Lessons from Islands*, and will include discussions on isolated fragments of habitat within altered landscapes [www.uhh.hawaii.edu/~scb/].

August 5-9: 86th annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. The theme, based on the quote from Aldo Leopold, is "Keeping all the parts: Sustaining and restoring complex ecosystems" [<http://esa.sdsc.edu/madison/>].

August 9-11: Tallgrass Forum, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario. This event includes an examination of the priorities and goals that guide recovery efforts of tallgrass prairie in Ontario [www.tallgrassontario.org/tallgrass_forum.htm].

October 15-19: Old-growth Forests in Canada: A Science Perspective, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. A Canadian national science symposium and workshop for forest scientists, forest managers, and policy-makers with interest in Canadian temperate and boreal forests [www.ulern.on.ca/oldgrowthforest/].

continued from page 6

The group is also being featured in the educational project called Space for Species [www.spaceforspecies.ca]. For more information, contact the working group's communications director, Kathleen Martin, by e-mail [kmartin@seaturtle.ca].

Awards

Fred Cooke, Canadian Wildlife Service/Simon Fraser University Chair in Wildlife Ecology, is to be appointed a member of the Order of Canada for his outstanding research career.

Erich Haber, independent scientist, won the prestigious Roland Michener Conservation Award in June 2000, presented each year by the Canadian Wildlife Federation to an individual whose efforts further the conservation of Canada's natural resources.

Restoring frog habitat

First Nation's involvement is key

BY WILLIAM ANDREW

The Oregon spotted frog (*Rana pretiosa*) is known in Canada solely from three isolated locations in the Fraser River Lowlands of southwestern British Columbia. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated the frog as endangered through an unprecedented emergency assessment in September 1999. Recent estimates suggest that total Oregon spotted frog numbers in Canada may be below 300 individuals.

One of the isolated populations is situated at the upper end of Seabird Island in a wetland called the Maria Slough. The Seabird Island First Nation has over 600 members (living both on and off the reserve). Seabird Island is part of the Sto:lo Nation Tribal Council, which consists of 18 member Bands (First Nations) in the Upper Fraser Valley.

For at least 20 years, the Seabird Island First Nation has been involved in salmonid enhancement in the Maria Slough. The slough, now an isolated offshoot that was once a main channel of the Fraser River, historically supported seven species of salmonids (including chinook, chum, sockeye, and coho, and three trout species). It also supports other wildlife species, such as beaver, otters, and various waterfowl species. The abundance of fish and wildlife in this area is a source of great pride for the community.

When COSEWIC designated the Oregon spotted frog as endangered, Chief Wayne Bobb of the Seabird Island First Nation went on record as fully supporting the frog's recovery. Frogs have tremendous cultural significance to Aboriginal peoples; the frogs' call announces the end of winter and the coming of spring, and their abundance is a significant indicator of environmental health.

The Seabird Island First Nation has become a member of the Oregon Spotted Frog Recovery Team, which was established by the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks and consists of key individuals and agencies that plan recovery activities for this species.



PHOTO: RUSS HAYCOCK

The Seabird Island First Nation is helping restore habitat for the nationally endangered Oregon spotted frog.

Since 1999, the recovery team has undertaken several measures directed at recovering the species. These initiatives include monitoring sites where the population is declining, developing captive-rearing techniques, and surveying potential reintroduction sites.

Under an agreement with Environment Canada, the Seabird Island First Nation has initiated stewardship and rehabilitation activities for Oregon spotted frog habitat on the Maria Slough. Other partner agencies represented on the recovery team have also participated in the project.

The program established employment opportunities for eight Band members, who are creating potential breeding habitat near the occupied site in the Upper Maria Slough and are constructing a possible new frog pond in the Lower Maria Slough area.

Since the pond is adjacent to a

spawning channel being constructed for chinook, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has become a partner in this portion of the project with Environment Canada and the Seabird Island First Nation.

Ideally, the project will establish suitable spotted frog and salmonid habitat in the area.

The Seabird Island First Nation has welcomed the chance to participate in stewardship and rehabilitation activities. These projects provide an excellent opportunity for training Band members in environmental enhancement. As well, protecting species like the Oregon spotted frog is a significant way for the Band to demonstrate its respect for this cherished territory.

William Andrew is Resource Management Assistant for Seabird Island First Nation and a member of the Sto:lo Nation Tribal Council.