The Manitoba Chapter Wildlife Society Newsletter

Fall 2002 **THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY** **October 2002**

Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship Through Science and Education

Presidents Corner

Each fall at Oak Hammock Marsh sees a daily "migration" of another kind - school aged children coming out to the Interpretive Center to learn about wetlands and their wildlife. I was recently talking with one of the Center staff and she remarked about a Winnipeg core area school that had just visited. The kids knew very little about life outside the Perimeter and virtually nothing about wildlife, habitats, and "nature"as the teacher described it . Most of these kids had never been outside of Winnipeg and some were even a bit fearful of what lurked in the marsh and along the trails. Others were disinterested or apathetic. Many, in spite of information sent home, were not even appropriately dressed for a cool fall day of being outdoors.

Contrast this with a later group from a local rural school. The kids were more at home with their surroundings, more comfortable with being outdoors, and more attentive to the messages being communicated. The Interpretive staff also felt the kids were better informed to start with.

This got me thinking about our efforts as wildlife biologists to communicate messages about various issues to the public. Most of us are not well trained in this, our messages do not focus on the "who, what, when, where and why"! For example we don't understand how to use media opportunities. I recently had a chance to see this first hand. I was responding to a request by the media for an interview based upon a press release. I have to give the interviewer credit - following my lengthy and detailed response with lots of facts she asked, "what is the most important message you want people to hear ?" And this should be what we need to ask ourselves each time we have an opportunity to convey a message to the public.

Inside This Issue:

Secondly, let us look at the public at large – the kids above provide us with a picture of our audience and its variety of backgrounds or interests; ie: rural, urban, well informed, uninformed, misinformed, interested, apathetic. If our message is overly complex, or too bland, we risk having only a small portion of the public listen, read, or comprehend. Many of us must respond to media that have read a press release that have undergone several iterations after leaving our office .

Be prepared! Have a plan or strategy for your media efforts, and a plan as to how to react to issues that unfold rapidly. No comment or one that lacks information can still be used by the media and can call into question our profession regarding ourselves being informed or up to date! The media can provide a vehicle for getting our message out – a topic that I discussed last time in my President's Message. We must be ready to respond and provide a factual, convincing and interesting message – a tall order. But it is incumbent on us a wildlife biologists to do this...essentially- we must help inform and educate the public with a few short paragraphs or the results of 5 minute interview and even shorter newsclip on the wildlife issue of the day. If not, the cause of wildlife and their habitats will not just take a back seat to other issues, but risk falling off the public radar altogether.

Have a great fall! - *Don Sexton*

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE
Background
Ken Rebizant, Manitoba Conservation

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a progressive, fatal disease of the central nervous system of cervids notably elk, white-tailed deer and mule deer. The disease was first identified in the late 1960's in captive deer research herds in Colorado and Wyoming and was detected in free-ranging deer and elk in southeast Wyoming and northeast Colorado in the early 1980's. It has since been found in wild deer and elk in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, New Mexico and in Saskatchewan. Three positive mule deer in west-central Saskatchewan have been the only positive wild animals found in Canada. It has been found in captive deer and/or elk herds in Saskatchewan, Alberta and 7 western states (Colorado, Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming, Kansas, South Dakota and Oklahoma). CWD has not been detected in captive or wild cervids in Manitoba.

CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE). Other TSE's include scrapie in sheep, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease) in cattle and Creutzfeld-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans. CWD is a progressively fatal disease with no known immunity, vaccine, or treatment.

There is no CWD diagnostic test for live animals. Testing can only be done post-mortem on brain tissue. Although CWD has only been found in elk, white-tailed deer and mule deer, scientists suspect that most, if not all, cervid species are susceptible to the disease. White-tailed deer and mule deer appear to be more susceptible to the disease than elk. In areas where the disease occurs, and where both deer and elk occur

sympatrically, the disease generally has a higher prevalence rate in deer than elk.

Animals infected with CWD display changes in behavior and progressive loss of body condition. Symptoms include weight loss, incessant drinking and urination. An infected animal often stands listlessly, head down and ears drooping, with saliva dripping from its mouth. The disease is always fatal. It may take more than 36 months for infected animals to exhibit clinical signs of the disease. The clinical disease often is more subtle and prolonged in elk than in deer.

Management of the disease is complicated by several factors. CWD has a long incubation period, there is no live-animal test, and until the final stages of the disease (last 3 - 6 months before death), an infected animal generally appears healthy. In Saskatchewan, only about 10% of the animals that tested positive for the disease during trace-out testing of infected farmed elk herds displayed any clinical symptoms of having the disease.

CWD is believed to be caused by the accumulation of abnormal prions (small protein strands) in the brain tissue which create vacuoles or holes. The exact modes of CWD transmission are unknown and research is being conducted to learn more about it. Researchers believe CWD can be spread laterally (from animal to animal) by body secretions and that there is both direct and indirect transmission. It is unknown at what point during an infection that animals start to shed infectious prions but it is suspected that as the disease progresses an ever increasing number of them are shed. It appears that shedding of the prions precedes the onset of clinical signs in both deer and elk. Animals that are in the final stages of the disease are most infectious. Urine, feces, saliva, placental tissue and decomposing carcasses of CWD infected animals are believed to be potential sources of transmission with infection through the alimentary canal. Common watering and feeding sources are suspected to be focal areas for disease transmission. Once shed, the prions remain viable in the environment for an extended period of time which in some cases can be years. Two unique aspects of prions are the lack genetic material (DNA or RNA) and extreme resistance to breakdown by environmental conditions, disinfectants, and treatments that normally inactivate infectious disease agents such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, etc.

CWD has been spread between wild animals or between captive and wild animals through simple nose-to-nose contact. There is some evidence to suggest that pastures and associated facilities which have held infected animals remain contaminated for a long period of time, even after top soil is removed and the remaining soil is treated with an antiseptic solution. Run-off water from pastures may also be a source of transmission. CWD has been identified as a disease that may be transmitted between captive and wild cervid populations in either direction. The persistence of the prions in contaminated environments represents a significant obstacle to eradication of the disease from either farmed or free-ranging cervid populations. Concentrating deer and elk in captivity or by artificial feeding probably increases the likelihood of direct and indirect transmission between individuals.

Although current evidence suggests CWD does not freely transmit to humans or cattle, it may be many years before this can be confirmed. As a general precaution, people

should avoid contact with any wild animal appearing sick. As well, health agencies strongly advise that meat from animals testing positive should be destroyed and not consumed by humans or pets. In Saskatchewan and those states where CWD has occurred in wild deer and elk, it is recommended that hunters wear rubber gloves while dressing and handling game carcasses and avoid consuming brain, eye or spinal cord tissue. Any animal appearing sick should not be consumed, regardless of the cause. Deboning of carcasses is also advised.

CWD is an emerging disease. The current number and distribution of infected captive animals is increasing steadily in North America due to surveillance and trace-out investigation. Even more disturbing is the increased prevalence and geographic spread of the disease in free ranging mule deer, white-tailed deer and elk. CWD was recently discovered in Wisconsin, approximately 700 miles east of any previous known infection and in a state with the highest deer densities. In Colorado, the disease has spread to the western part of the state and threatens the states largest elk and mule deer herds. As well, in some localized areas the prevalence appears to be increasing at a more rapid rate than in the past, although it is not clear whether or not this is because of increased incidence or increased surveillance for the disease.

The long-term effects of the disease on a wild cervid population are unknown. However, it is suspected that when the infected rate reaches a level of 5% that a population will start to decrease because of the impacts of the disease. Some deer populations in Colorado have reached a 10% - 15% level of infection. Epidemological modeling of the disease in Wisconsin predicts that infected populations will be wiped out within 15 years if aggressive containment measures are not undertaken. The high density of deer in that state increases the rate of spread of the disease and impact on deer populations.

In Manitoba:

CWD has not been detected in any wild or farmed deer or elk in Manitoba. As an aside to the Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) monitoring program, elk and deer samples submitted for TB testing from the Riding Mountain area were also tested for CWD. Between 1997 and 2000, more than 500 hunter- harvested elk and 200 white-tailed deer were tested for CWD. All samples tested negative for the disease.

Manitoba Agriculture and Food (MA&F) has made it a mandatory requirement that all farmed elk that die on-farm or have been slaughtered be tested for CWD. As a result of these tests, no animal has tested positive for CWD.

Manitoba Conservation (MC), in cooperation with Manitoba Agriculture & Food (MA&F) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), undertook an enhanced CWD surveillance program during the fall of 2001. Hunters were requested to submit the heads of white-tailed deer harvested in southwestern Manitoba in GHAs 13A, 18A, 18C, 22 (west of PTH 83), 23, 23A, and 27 (see Appendix I). Elk heads were also collected from the hunter-harvest in the Riding Mountain and Duck Mountain areas. The intent is to conduct the program over a minimum of five years. In the unlikely event that a deer or elk is confirmed to be infected with CWD, a program of localized population reduction is planned. A sample of more than 400 deer heads was

collected during the rifle deer season in the CWD surveillance program area, from which 350 will be tested for the disease.

In Saskatchewan:

A total of 227 elk on 41 different farms in Saskatchewan have tested positive for CWD. CFIA has destroyed approximately 8000 game farmed elk in that province on 150 premises as a disease containment and eradication measure and as a research effort to learn more about the nature of transmission of the disease. CFIA has also destroyed 259 cattle and 99 bison which had pastured on the source farm. More than $30,000,000 has been spent in Saskatchewan by CFIA for compensating elk farmers for animals destroyed. The total cost of CWD programming in Saskatchewan has been estimated at $100,000,000.

Three wild mule deer in Saskatchewan have tested positive for CWD. Two of these deer were harvested in the fall of 2000 by hunters in the west-central part of the province along the Alberta border and detected by that province's CWD surveillance program. The third deer was shot in the same area during disease control and surveillance measures undertaken in the spring of 2002. Saskatchewan is undertaking an extensive testing program to determine the prevalence of CWD in that province.

Most of the Saskatchewan elk farms that have had positive CWD animals are in the western half of the province although at least two are near the Manitoba border (near Yorkton and Moosimin). There is concern that some elk on farms in Manitoba illegally entered the province during the early stages of the industry's development may have originated from Saskatchewan farms which subsequently had animals that tested positive for CWD. MA&F and CFIA are currently investigating this matter.

In Alberta:

One CWD positive farmed elk was detected at slaughter in April, 2002. This animal came from a farm near Grande Prairie. Trace-out testing of herd mates that were sold to other farms were all negative and it is likely that the disease is confined to the single farm. Localized testing of wild deer and elk near the source farm is planned. As well, Alberta Wildlife and Agriculture has stepped up patrols and testing of wild cervids and farmed deer and elk, along the Saskatchewan border to ensure that the disease has not entered Alberta from that province. Alberta's borders have been closed to the import of elk, other than from the Yukon, since the late 1980's. Alberta has not made it mandatory to test all farmed cervids that die on-farm for CWD.

OVERVIEW:CMPS 2002 Meeting Lead, South Dakota

Each year, in the last week of July or first 2 weeks in August the Central Mountains and Plains Section (of which the Manitoba chapter is a part) of TWS holds its annual meeting . Some of you may recall (and a few that attended may not – but that's another story!) the CMPS meeting held 2 years ago at Falcon Lake. This year, the meeting was held in Lead, South Dakota. Lead is in the northern part of the Black Hills. As this is a tourist destination in summer, the meeting was held in mid week to insure accommodation space.

The meeting went over 2½ days and included a variety of papers, with a number focusing on Black Hills wildlife projects. Of note was the emphasis on 2 topics; Black tailed Prairie Dogs and Chronic Wasting Disease. Black tailed Prairie Dogs are a species that were almost listed by the USFWS as an endangered species, and there is a lot of monitoring, research and associated habitat work going on in prairie states on this species for this reason. Similarly, CWD is an emerging wildlife issue that engendered 3 presentations, and a lot of discussion during the meeting.

The traditional field tour that forms part of the meeting took a bit of a different turn as a trip to the historic Spearfish fish hatchery. This was also the sight of the auction and dinner. The business meeting included a discussion of student travel awards to conferences and I am pleased to see that U of M students managed to capture some of this for the recent TWS meeting in Bismarck. Also, with Jeery Kobriger completing his term as Section representative to TWS, the election of Tom Ryder was announced. Tom is a long standing member of the Section and TWS, hailing from Wyoming and will represent the Section well .

The only disappointment in this year's meeting was the low attendance . Chalk it up to maybe the mid week schedule? Next year's meeting is slated for Nebraska, with details to unfold over the winter. - *Don Sexton*

CHAPTER NEWS

Announcement
TWS MB Chapter Mixer

Take note that the Manitoba Chapter of the Wildlife Society will be holding a HALLOWEEN MIXER on October 30, 2002 at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, 303 Sinnott Building, 70 Dysart Road from 3-6 pm. This will be a 'spooktacular' opportunity for interested students to meet professionals in the field, network, and become part of a great local organization! Professionals, come show your support and find out what types of research projects are being conducted by students. Refreshments will be available and don't forget to bring your best wildlife costume! New Membership will include a Manitoba Chapter T shirt and beverage ticket.

Delta Getaway 2003
Wildlife Disease Workshop

The Manitoba Chapter of the Wildlife Society invites all members, students and other interested parties to the annual Delta Getaway. The general theme of this professional development workshop will be Wildlife Diseases. Wildlife diseases have long been topic of concern to wildlife managers and these concerns have increased as new diseases threaten wildlife populations in Manitoba. Tentative workshop plans include presentations on type C botulism, chronic wasting disease (CWD), and West Nile Virus.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD), a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy, is a fatal prion disease affecting wildlife where

the mechanisms of transmission are unknown. CWD seems to be spreading with instances across North America and as close as Saskatchewan. West Nile Virus has entered Manitoba in 2002 in a big way being detected in a number of avian species. Type C botulism has long been a concern to waterfowl managers and recent research in prairie Canada is changing management regimes.

The nature and location of the workshop will require advance registration, as space will be limited. The cost of the weekend workshop will be $35.00 for students and $65.00 for professionals. This includes Friday and Saturday nights accommodations (bring your sleeping bag, etc), meals and Friday and Saturday evening mixers. A Saturday day rate will be available for around $15, which will include lunch. Bring your ice-fishing gear and participate in the "Great Lake Manitoba Perch Search".

Contact Cory Lindgren for registration by email – c_lindgren@ducks.ca

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TWS SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP OFFER
A Special Message from TWS

"Now is a great time to invite members of your student chapter, chapter, or section to join TWS. From now until November 1, new members will receive

all the benefits of membership immediately -- including receiving the November-December 2002 issue of The Wildlifer. That means they'll receive 7

issues of The Wildlifer for the price of 6! New members also can take advantage of membership discounts on books beginning immediately. Generally, new member benefits don't begin until January.

While this offer is open to both students and professionals, we think it will be particularly attractive to students. We have prepared a flyer

advertising this special offer. Chapter leaders are urged to post it on bulletin boards, announce it at meetings, and distribute it electronically

to as many chapter members as possible. A downloadable Adobe Acrobat version of the flyer is available on the TWS website at

www.wildlife.org/about/FallMembershipOfferflyer.pdf.

Time is short! New member applications must be received by November 1 in order to be included in the print run for the November-December issue of The

Wildlifer. A TWS Membership Application can be found on TWS' website, www.wildlife.org/about/index.cfm?tname=membership.

Thanks very much for your assistance. Strengthening TWS' membership is a win for all of our programs."

New 2002-03 Chapter Executive

President: Don Sexton

President Elect: Rick Riewe

Past President: Cory Lindgren

Secretary/Treasurer: Jacey Scott

Student Representative: Alex Miller

Member at Large: Neil Mochnacz

Meet your Executive

Jacey Scott - Secretary/Treasurer

I am currently a second year masters student at the Natural Resources Institute and have just completed my first field season. My thesis is looking at habitat use of northern prairie skinks in Spruce Woods Provincial Park. The goal of this project is to determine the habitat and resource requirements of northern prairie skinks, the results of which will be used to design a management plan for this species and its related habitat in the mixed-grass prairie of southwestern Manitoba. I am originally from Cambridge, Ontario and did my B.Sc. in wildlife biology at the University of Guelph. My primary interests are in wildlife and habitat conservation, especially related to species or spaces that are frequently overlooked in management activities. When I have spare time, I like to go hiking, camping and horseback riding. I'm looking forward to this year serving on the TWS executive!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TWS 2004 Calgary – Update

In an earlier newsletter it was announced that the 2004 TWS meeting had been confirmed for Calgary, Alberta. At the 2002 Bismarck TWS meeting members of the Alberta and Manitoba Chapters met informally to discuss a few initial thoughts for the 2004 meeting. Timing will likely remain similar to most TWS annual meetings (approximately the third week of September). Volunteer involvement may change a bit from past meetings as in 2003 there is the opportunity to have an administrative support person hired part time to help with a lot of the logistics. This should free up volunteers to focus on the aspects of the meeting more closely related to the wildlife themes and ancillary meetings, etc.

Manitoba Chapter members will have an opportunity to help with the 2004 conference as some of the subcommittee work can be done out of province (ie: Alberta), and more details will follow in subsequent newsletters. Presently the cochairs are to be Arlen Todd, with the Province of Alberta, and Terry Kowalchuk at the University of Lethbridge. - *Don Sexton*

10th Annual Conference of The Wildlife Society

Burlington, Vermont September 6-10, 2003

Call for Symposium, Workshop, and Special Poster Session Proposals. Deadline: October 31, 2002

Proposals for symposia, workshops, and special poster sessions are invited for the 10th Annual Conference of The Wildlife Society. Symposia, workshops, and special poster sessions should be technical in nature and focus on topics of wildlife science, management, education, or policy within the broad theme of Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship through Science and Education.

Call for Papers and Associated Meetings. Deadline: February 14, 2003

To place a request for an Associated Meeting at the 2003 Conference, please download and complete the Request for Associated Meeting form from the Society website at www.wildlife.org. You can also download the 2003 Conference Call for Papers and Posters for more information on paper and abstract submissions.

3rd International Wildlife Management Congress

Ki te raki ki te tonga - Ki uta ki tai (From north to south - From mountains to sea)

The beautiful coastal city of Christchurch, New Zealand will be the exciting setting for the 3rd International Wildlife Management Congress. December 1-5, 2003 is early summer, the perfect time to visit New Zealand!

Programme highlights:

The Congress will have a strong Pacific and Southern Hemisphere flavour, but the main focus will be on contrasting perspectives on wildlife management in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Within the theme of the Congress (Ki te takikite tonga - ki uta kitai: From the north to the south - from mountains to sea) we will bring these contrasting perspectives together for a fascinating global focus on wildlife management issues in the 21st Century.

Principal themes will be:

- Wildlife conservation
- Wildlife utilization
- Management of over-abundant wildlife
- Wildlife health and diseases
- Wildlife toxicology
- Contrasting wildlife management systems
- Wildlife population management and dynamics
- New technology in wildlife management
- Management of wildlife by indigenous people
- Landscape issues and wildlife

management

- Wildlife-based tourism
- Other aspects of wildlife management

Hosts:

- The Wildlife Society (USA)
- Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research (New Zealand)
- Australasian Wildlife Management Society
- Ngai Tahu (Maori tribe of New Zealand's South Island)
- New Zealand Department of Conservation

For more information, visit the conference website at http://www.conference.canterbury.ac.nz/wildlife2003/

7th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference
Keeping the Wild in the West

The 7th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conferences is coming the Calgary February 26-29, 2004. This conference has a tradition of excellence due to strong support and attendance from a broad cross-section of society including conservation groups, industry, government, and academics. More than 600 people are expected to attend. Keeping the Wild in the West will focus on sharing information and ideas on conserving prairie ecosystems, both big & small. The conference will be interest to a wide range of participants from the agricultural community, First Nations, energy industry, government agencies, municipalities, universities and conservation groups. For more information visit the conference website at http://www.PCESC.ca.

Links of Interest

- Current issue of EnviroZine. http://www.ec.gc.ca/envirozine/english/home_e.cfm
- The 2003 Draft NAWMP Plan Update. http://nawmp.ca/eng/2003_NAWMP_draft.html
- USFWS Conservation Library. http://library.fws.gov/
- Facts about West Nile Virus. http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/wnv
- Urban Goose Working Group (Winnipeg). http://www.gov.mb.ca/ugwg
- The Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society. http://www.albertadirectory.com/actws/
- Season dates and bag limits for migratory bird hunting in 2002-2003 http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/publications/reg/index_e.cfm