



# The Manitoba Chapter Wildlife Society Newsletter



Fall 2005

THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

*Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship Through Science and Education*

October  
2005



## Presidents Corner

This is my first opportunity to address you since assuming the presidency last March. As I sit here writing this I am reminded what a wonderful place Manitoba can be, as it is another glorious fall day. We have been treated to beautiful weather this fall, making up (somewhat) for the damp, cool spring and early summer that we experienced. I hope that all of you had a wonderful summer and were able to spend time experiencing Manitoba's wildlife either through your research or summer activities. I was able to spend some time in Riding Mountain, Pinawa and the Whiteshell. We were also treated to a family of Long-eared Owls calling our yard home for the summer (see Jim Duncan's article on the owl phenomenon this summer). I was able to attend the TWS meeting in Madison, Wisconsin a few weeks ago and Don Sexton was attended the CMPS meeting in August. See reviews of both of these meetings in this newsletter.

The executive has met once already this fall and we have lined up, what I hope will be, an enjoyable and educational series of events. Our first event will be the second

annual Holiday Mixer on December 1 (mark your calendars), with Dr. Gordon Goldsborough giving a presentation on the "rich and famous" of Delta Marsh. Hope to see you all there. We will also be hosting the Delta "get-away" weekend (3 – 5 February) and our annual meeting the beginning of March. We are planning to hold a one day "mini" conference in conjunction with our annual meeting so starting thinking about potential papers you might like to present. More details on both of these events will follow in the next couple of months.

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If you have any information of interest to our membership please forward it for inclusion in our winter newsletter (January 2006), we are always looking for material from our membership. I hope to see you all at the Holiday mixer, where we can catch up on each others activities. So until then, I hope you are able to spend some time enjoying the great outdoors of Manitoba.  
*Karla Guyn*

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## WINGED AMBASSADOR PASSES ON

### *Great Gray Owl "Lady Gray'l" Provided 21 Years of Education and Fun*

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October 17, 2005

Manitoba Government News Release  
News Media Services, Rm 29, Legislative Bldg.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 0V8  
Ph: (204) 945-3746 Fax: (204) 945-3988  
E-MAIL [nmservices@leg.gov.mb.ca](mailto:nmservices@leg.gov.mb.ca)  
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Lady Gray'l, a great gray owl that educated and entertained thousands of Manitobans for more than twenty years, has passed away.

"People who had the opportunity to meet and visit with Lady Gray'l knew the bird as a wonderfully tame great gray owl and an excellent representative of her species and Manitoba wildlife," said Conservation Minister Stan Struthers, when he learned of the bird's passing. "The owl's handler Dr. Bob Nero and this beautiful owl travelled together throughout Manitoba to over 200 schools, educating students and teachers about birds of prey, especially owls and the importance of habitat protection."

Nero, who is a volunteer ecologist with the Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch of Manitoba Conservation, found the owl injured and starving as a young nestling in

1984. The bird was nursed back to health by volunteers with the Wildlife Haven. Nero is a familiar name to many Manitobans because of his extensive education program for the conservation of wildlife, in particular, great gray owls.

"This great gray owl was an excellent representative of the wonderful natural areas in Manitoba and of her species, designated Manitoba's provincial bird on July 16, 1987," said Struthers. "Dr. Nero and Gray'l educated many about owls and the importance of habitat protection and also appeared at many fundraising and social events delighting young and old."

Contributions from appearances were donated to organizations caring for injured wildlife and to cancer research. In addition, funds raised by Lady Gray'l helped to fund six graduate students who studied owls in Manitoba and elsewhere.

In addition to caring for Lady Gray'l, Nero is a naturalist, ornithologist, vocational archaeologist and poet. Many of his nine books were inspired by Lady Gray'l including his newest entitled *Growing Old Together*, and *Lady Gray'l - Owl with a Mission*.



**Lady Gray'l, Bob and Ruth Nero. Summer 2005**

*Photo: Birch Nero*

## **CHAPTER NEWS**

### **TWS Madison: “Following in Leopold’s Footsteps”**

*Karla Guyn*

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Wildlife Society Conference was held September 25-29 in Madison Wisconsin. The theme for the conference was “Following in Leopold’s Footsteps”. The conference was kicked off by a “tail-gate” party on Sunday night to help celebrate the big-ten football weekend in Madison. The party goers were treated to the famous Wisconsin bratwurst and beer. The plenary session the next day followed up on the theme of the conference with Nina Leopold Bradley (Aldo Leopold’s daughter) sharing personal memories of her father. Curt Meine gave a presentation on “Leopold’s Legacy” which reminded me what an incredible biologist, communicator, and conservationist Leopold was. This year marked the 55<sup>th</sup> year of TWS’s Aldo Leopold Award and Richard Knight paid tribute to the past winners. David Anderson (last year’s winner of the Leopold Award) concluded the session by giving a presentation on “Comprehending the Meaning of Evidence”. The awards session followed including the awarding of the 2005 Leopold Award to Charles Meslow.

In the days that followed there were over 20 Symposia, 2 special poster sessions and several contributed papers and posters. Several MB TWS members gave presentations including Bob Emery, Jim Devries, Dave Howerter, Merlin Shoesmith and myself. I attended the leaders lunch where the council members and the new executive director, Michael Hutchins, provided updates on TWS business. We will be seeing a couple of changes to the

publications in the coming years. The Monograph and the Journal will largely remain the same, but the Bulletin will no longer exist. In its place a magazine will be published (tentative name “Wildlife Professional”) and mailed to all members as a benefit of membership. The Wildlifer newsletter will be incorporated into the new magazine. TWS is currently involved in a strategic planning exercise and I expect that we will see a few more changes in the next couple of years.

The conference itself was held at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, the center was designed by the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright and was a beautiful facility. The convention center was near the University of Wisconsin campus, an interesting shopping district and several (excellent) brew pubs. All in all this was a well run conference with some top notch symposium and speakers. It was an excellent opportunity to get up to speed on the latest statistical techniques, survey methods, and home range analyses, not to mention the chance to catch up with or meet other colleagues. Mark your calendars for next year when the conference will be held September 23 -27 in Anchorage Alaska, yes, Alaska!!! Hope to see you there.

### **CMPS 2005 Annual Meeting**

**August 10-12, 2005**

**Medora ND**

*Don Sexton*

The CMPS Meeting was held in Medora, in the heart of North Dakota’s Badlands and on the doorstep of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP). The meeting was hosted by the North Dakota Chapter, TWS and had over 70 attendees. Larry Bidlake and I attended from Manitoba and all states in the Section were represented.

The meeting had the usual mix of field trips and paper sessions. On day one there was a business meeting (see CMPS website for business meeting details) followed by a mixer, BBQ dinner and fund raising auction. Over \$1250 US was raised at the auction with the highlight, for those familiar with the tradition, the crampon auction. As the crampon had been 'lost' for over a year, Steve Riley (Pres. CMPS 2004-2005) was given the opportunity to bid and purchase said item. Immediately thereafter it was re-auctioned whereby Gary White (incoming CMPS Pres) purchased it!

Day 2 featured the field trip to TRNP. Discussion included wildlife management and habitat issues including invasive plant species, fire management and management of large ungulates (primarily bison, elk and feral horses). The afternoon portion of the field trip included management issues in the Little Missouri National Grasslands, covering black tailed prairie dogs, gas/oil wells and exploration, grazing and riparian management. To those who have never been on a CMPS field trip, they are always noteworthy in that attendees get into areas of the host province/state to see landscapes and wildlife/wildlife issues that they would otherwise likely never experience.

Day 3 was the paper session with a focus on ND Badlands habitat issues including bison, elk, grassland management planning, water developments on arid habitat and ND bighorn sheep management. Additionally there were papers on habitat or wildlife issues such as wind power, sage grouse, whitetailed and blacktailed prairie dogs, chronic wasting disease, coal bed methane, and wild turkeys.

For those that didn't attend, you missed a great opportunity to view Badlands

landscapes, hear about and see the associated habitat and wildlife issues. As well there were excellent opportunities to see some prairie wildlife, including mule deer, elk, bison, big horn sheep, pronghorn, black tailed prairie dogs, burrowing owl, prairie falcon, and a prairie rattlesnake.

Of note regarding the CMPS Executive, Tanys Uhman (Manitoba) was reelected as a board member.

Next year the CMPS meeting is slated for Laramie, Wyoming. Special thanks for the generous donations for the CMPS auction go to the following from Manitoba:

Delta Waterfowl

Don Sexton

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Fort Whyte Center

Larry Bidlake

Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

Manitoba Chapter- The Wildlife Society

Rick Baydack

Travel Manitoba

University of Manitoba- Faculty of Environment, Earth and Resources

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## **Breeding Long-eared Owls Invade Southern Manitoba in 2005.**

*Jim Duncan*

The largest documented irruption of Great Gray Owls in southern Canada and the northern United States in winter 2004-2005 has received much attention by amateur naturalists and professional biologists. But another, more cryptic phenomenon related to climate and food availability has taken place with other owl species, at least in Manitoba in summer 2005.

Unusual high rain in summer and fall 2004 resulted in conditions that prevented many farmers from harvesting alfalfa and other agricultural crops routinely grown on the Manitoba prairie. It appears that meadow voles (a kind of field mouse) took advantage of the resulting abundant food supply and bred, well, like voles during winter months under a nice warm blanket of insulating snow. The resulting wet spring conditions in 2005 further prevented regular agricultural activities in many areas, and the resulting explosion of vole populations drew the attention of more than alarmed urban and rural homeowners. It seems that Long-eared Owls (*Asio otus*), and to a lesser quantified degree, Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*), decided to cut short their migration and settle down to take advantage of the large supply of meadow voles and breed in southern Manitoba in high numbers.

To date (August 2005), thanks to the reports from landowners, staff from Manitoba Conservation, and staff and volunteers with The Wildlife Haven, I have tabulated information on 34 Long-eared Owl nests and/or breeding sites and 10 locations with evidence of breeding Short-eared Owls, at

least a ten-fold increase over normal years. In what I can only now describe as a June-July “owl-o-rama”, I visited 23 of these locations personally to interview landowners and to see first hand the behaviour, nest sites, and habitat of these prolific owls. Evident was landowner’s excitement and generally protective attitude towards the owls. This summer’s plethora of Long-eared and Short-eared owls afforded many Manitoba citizens with their first personal encounter with an owl. Owls were often found nesting in old crow and magpie nests (owls do not build their own nests) in trees immediately adjacent occupied houses!

Since young owls typically leave the nest as downy chicks before they can fly, many people found one or more young flightless owl on the ground and innocently, but often incorrectly assumed that these chicks were abandoned or orphaned. Subsequently at many long-eared owl chicks found their way to the care of The Wildlife Haven. I tried to reunite chicks with their parents as best I could while I visited nest sites to study them. Thus, seven of 13 long-eared owl chicks turned into The Wildlife Haven were either returned to their original nest or they were fostered to a different family group in the wild—thank goodness owl parents cannot count! What happened to the other six you ask? Four were transported to Katherine McKeever, a veteran owl rehabilitator in Vineland Ontario who runs The Owl Foundation, where they are being raised by unreleasable adult long-eared owls to avoid imprinting, and two were kindly taken in by the Assiniboine Park Zoo.

This summer many of the people I met asked me “Where did all these owls come from?” Biologists like Dr. Stuart Houston of Saskatchewan have earlier provided some

insight on the nomadic nature of Asio owls in Saskatchewan, Canada. Stuart noted that while the migratory and nomadic nature of Short-eared Owls is well recognized, that of the Long-eared Owl is somewhat cryptic. The secretive nature of the more nocturnal Long-eared Owl appears to mask the extent to which they are nomadic. I am preparing a more detailed report on the breeding of high numbers of Asio owls in southern Manitoba this summer that will include an examination of how well Manitoba's volunteer-based spring nocturnal owl survey tracked this dramatic fluctuation in the number of the enigmatic and seemingly nomadic Long-eared Owl.

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### **Meet your Executive**

*The first in a series of Bios from the 2005/06 Executive, more to come in the next newsletter - Ed.*

- **Dale Wrubleski - President Elect**

A native of Saskatchewan, I've been fortunate to have lived across much of the prairie region. My undergrad, in general biology, is from the University of Regina. I did my M.Sc. at the University of Manitoba and my Ph.D. at the University of Alberta. For both degrees I studied the Chironomidae (midges) at Delta Marsh. If you've ever been to Delta, you'll know the importance of these small flies to the local ecology. I then spent a few years working at Ducks Unlimited writing up some marsh vegetation studies, and then moved on to work for the U.S. E.P.A. in Duluth, Minnesota. While there I worked on a field project looking at the effects of agricultural tillage on prairie potholes near Woodworth, North Dakota. Following this project I returned to Winnipeg and now work as a wetlands research scientist with the Institute for

Wetland and Waterfowl Research (IWWR), the research arm of Ducks Unlimited. I have several projects near completion or ongoing at Delta Marsh, including a fisheries survey, a large field project examining the impacts of common carp, and a study of the long-term changes in the emergent plant community. I'm currently helping to develop a waterbird survey for the marsh. Along with Dr. Gordon Goldsborough, I teach a Wetlands Ecology course at Delta. When not at Delta or Oak Hammock, I enjoy gardening, camping and fishing.

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## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Delta Getaway**

The date for the annual delta Getaway has been booked. Mark your calendars for February 4 - 6, 2005. More information to follow.

### **Christmas 'Shin Ding'**

The date for the first annual Manitoba Chapter Christmas 'Shin Ding' will be announced shortly. More information to follow.

### **66<sup>th</sup> Annual Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference**

**Dec. 11-14, 2005**

Amway Grand Plaza Hotel  
Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The conference theme is "Bridges to Understanding: Linking Multiple Perspectives".

[www.midwestfishandwildlifecom.](http://www.midwestfishandwildlifecom.)

**First Shorebird Science in the Western Hemisphere Meeting**

Feb. 27 - Mar. 2, 2006.

University of Colorado  
Boulder, Colorado

Additional details of the meeting, including the venue, abstract and symposium submittal deadlines, science program, etc., are posted on the US Shorebird Conservation Plan website <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/ScienceMeeting.htm>).

**71<sup>st</sup> North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference**

**Mar. 22-25, 2006**

Hyatt Regency  
Columbus, OH.

**Gamebird 2006, A Joint Conference  
Quail VI and Perdix XII.**

31 May -4 Jun 2006

University of Georgia  
Athens, GA

This meeting combines the 6th North American Quail Conference and the 12th Perdix Conference to encourage international collaboration and exchange of ideas. Please see the conference website for details

<http://gallus.forestry.uga.edu/QuailVI/>) or contact DR. John P. Carroll [jcarroll@forestry.uga.edu](mailto:jcarroll@forestry.uga.edu)).

**4th North American Duck Symposium and Workshop**

Aug. 23-26, 2006

Ramkota Hotel  
Bismarck, North Dakota

Organized by North Dakota Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society, and Bureau of Reclamation. The theme is "Integrating Waterfowl Science and Management." Contact Mike Johnson, [mjohnson@state.nd.us](mailto:mjohnson@state.nd.us), 701-328-6319, for additional information or to be put on the email list for future information and announcements.

**4<sup>th</sup> North American Ornithological Conference**

Oct. 3-7, 2006

Veracruz City, Mexico

The 4th NAOC is being organized jointly by the American Ornithologists' Union, Cooper Ornithological Society, Society of Canadian Ornithologists-Société des Ornithologistes du Canada, Association of Field Ornithologists, Wilson Ornithological Society, Waterbird Society, Raptor Research Foundation, and Sección Mexicana del Consejo Internacional para la Preservación de las Aves -CIPAMEX (local host). The conference theme is "Wings without borders". The conference is scheduled to coincide with the peak of the migration season in the world's largest raptor migration bottleneck. Check the NAOC website for updates on organization <http://www.NAOC2006.org>





**November 18, 2005**  
Winnipeg Art Gallery  
7:30 p.m.

Tickets cost \$15 and are available at Mountain Equipment Co-op and McNally Robinson Booksellers.

Don't miss the Winnipeg stop on CPAWS' national tour to promote the protection of Canada's Nahanni wilderness.

The Nahanni National Park Reserve is more than just a spellbinding landscape. It's one of the world's greatest natural wonders... and it's right here in Canada. Right now, this World Heritage Site in the Northwest Territories is under threat by proposed mining that would put this magnificent landscape at risk.

Enjoy an evening filled with personal stories, dramatic images, and cultural and scientific insights.

Special guests include:

- **James Keelaghan**, Juno Award winning singer-songwriter
- **Dr. Derek Ford**, Professor Emeritus and world expert on limestone caves
- **Harvey Locke**, CPAWS Conservation Advisor

For more information visit [www.cpaws.org/events/nahanni](http://www.cpaws.org/events/nahanni) or call (204) 949-0782.

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### LINKS OF INTEREST

- Current issue of EnviroZine.  
[http://www.ec.gc.ca/envirozine/english/home\\_e.cfm](http://www.ec.gc.ca/envirozine/english/home_e.cfm)
- Citizen Science Network  
<http://www.citizenscience.ca>
- Institute For Wetland & Environmental Education and Research  
<http://www.wetlanded.com/>
- Job seekers, the TWS Job Board is now on-line [www.wildlife.org](http://www.wildlife.org).