

# Conservation



## **BIGHORN SHEEP**

**Protecting Alberta's official  
mammal from M. ovi**

## **Alberta's Pheasant Release Program**

**More than Put and Take**

## **What is Conservation?**

## **It's All About Fit:**

**Firearms for  
Women and Youth**



# Wildlife Management Fund

The Wildlife Management Fund (WMF) has been contributing to conservation projects throughout Alberta since 2008.



Funded through annual fees paid by outfitters, the WMF has dedicated over \$1.8 million to various wildlife stewardship projects including population surveys, species studies, technology development, and habitat enhancement.

Changes to our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Alberta in 2022 mean that more funding will now be available for APOS to deliver through the granting program.



For more information on how to apply, please visit [apos.ab.ca/WMF](https://apos.ab.ca/WMF)



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## New reasons in every season to connect with nature in the pages of *Nature Alberta Magazine*!

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# Greatness Granted

Supporting scientific and non-research based projects, Alberta Conservation Association's Grants Program provides funding to benefit Alberta's wildlife and fish populations, and the habitat they depend on. Funded by the province's hunters and anglers, these popular grants have distributed over \$25 million to research and conservation-related projects supporting Alberta.

## Application Deadlines

### ACA Research Grants

Accepting applications for 2024-2025 projects November 1–December 1, 2023.

### ACA Grants in Biodiversity

Accepting applications for the 2024–2026 funding term until December 1, 2023.

### ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants

Accepting applications for 2024-2025 projects January 1–25, 2024.

For more information and to download your application form, go to [www.ab-conservation.com/grants](http://www.ab-conservation.com/grants)



Alberta Conservation  
Association

Photo credit: CPAWS Southern Alberta

Grant: ACA Conservation, Community, and Education

Project: bioDIVERSITY: Celebrating 25 years of Conservation Education and Building a More Inclusive Future







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Firearms for Women and Youth



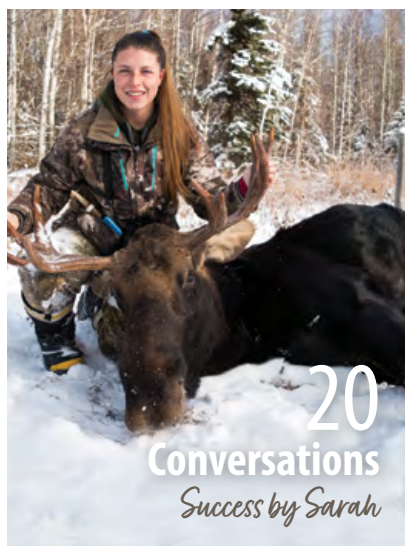
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Follow our work on:



## Our Vision

An Alberta with an abundance and diversity of wildlife, fish, and their habitats; where future generations continue to use, enjoy, and value our rich outdoor heritage.

## Our Mission

ACA conserves, protects, and enhances fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for Albertans to enjoy, value, and use.



# From the President

Fall is a great time of year! The mornings are crisp and cool. The afternoons are warm and sunny. The fish are biting hard and the sound of geese, ducks, and cranes flying overhead gets me excited for waterfowl hunting. This is the time of year that I get to make lasting memories with family and friends.

This year, my wife and I had the opportunity to hunt with some good friends and their twin 5-year-old girls. To add to the fun, we brought along our 10-week-old lab puppy. The girls helped in getting everything set up, following dad around putting decoys on pegs, with intermittent bouts of stopping to cuddle the puppy. The puppy of course was simultaneously in his glory with all the attention and scared to death that one of these rambunctious, loving, little humans was going rip his ears off. In the end, the decoys got placed, the blind got set up, and the puppy (with both ears attached) was retired to a suitable location away from the blind before the shooting started.



As we sat there waiting, those two little girls did exactly as you would expect: they were still and quiet for the first 30 seconds and then they were bored. Mom was well prepared with food and drink and various activities for them, but as soon as the first bird showed up, they instantly became hunters. They watched the birds, cheered when mom made a good shot and wanted to retrieve the birds. The joy those two little kids had in just being out there was so uplifting to see. They loved every minute of it, including packing all the decoys away at the end of the night.

At one point I found myself standing and watching these two future hunters picking up decoys, racing to the decoy bag and giggling all the way. I wondered to myself, what hunting will be like when these youngsters are old enough to bag their own limit? The answer, I think that depends on those of us who are old enough to do something about it right now. Young people are the future of hunting, angling, trapping and conservation, so it is up to those of us who participate in these activities to do what we can to give young people an opportunity to join our ranks. We can't rely on people getting into these activities the same way we did (usually through family connections), at least not if we want hunting, angling, trapping, and conservation to remain an important part of Alberta's heritage. If we want the activities that we cherish to be around in the future, it is our duty to do our part to promote, encourage, and mentor.

In this issue of the magazine, we have a couple different stories of people getting started in hunting as young adults. Hopefully these stories will provide some inspiration, either to take that big step and try hunting for the first time or make the decision to be a mentor to train and encourage a new hunter. Hunting, angling, trapping and conservation activities will be here for years to come, as long as we keep supporting the young people who have the interest.

I hope you have a great fall.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Zimmerling".

Todd Zimmerling, M.Sc., PhD, P.Biol.  
President and CEO  
Alberta Conservation Association

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# 20 YEARS of Teamwork

"It started with coffee table talks with just a couple landholders," remembers Brad Downey, ACA senior biologist. "I think the neighbours were scratching their heads wondering why this landholder wanted to work with us."

**But that initial relationship blossomed, leading to more, and now, 20 years later, MULTISAR has over a million acres enrolled!**

The success is owed to fostering collaboration among landowners, cattle groups, and conservation organizations. "We realized we all want the same thing, to maintain the grasslands. We're natural allies," says Downey.

As for the next 20 years, the goal is unchanging—to connect with people stewarding and managing these lands and develop as many long-term relationships as possible. "Our focus is producer-driven projects that build mutual trust and respect," adds Downey.

**Find out more at [www.multisar.ca](http://www.multisar.ca)**



## Did You Know?

From native grass restoration to wildlife-friendly fencing, MULTISAR has worked with landholders to implement 300+ enhancement projects! This teamwork is filling gaps and connecting ranchland pieces together for a full, broader prairie landscape that benefits everyone.

photos (this page, top to bottom):  
ACA, Mike Verhage; AFGA; ACA, Mike Verhage



## Hear, Hear for All Things Hunting!

Discover expert tips for hunting sandhill cranes, hear fresh perspectives from novice hunters, and cook game in a way that thrills your tastebuds—not to brag, but our goose legs have their own fan club!

You'll find that and loads more on the Harvest Your Own (HYO) Podcast, hosted by expert outdoorsman and chef Brad Fenson.

What can listeners expect in the newest batch of episodes? "One recent interview focuses on a fellow who started hunting late in life," says Fenson. "He harvested his first deer, made smash burgers for his family, and now his brothers are finishing up their courses so they can all hunt together!"

Also listen for Cathy Wolf, an extreme huntress who's hunted nearly all possible species in North America. She's also raising a family, running an outfitter business, and teaching women to shoot and fish with her workshops.

**Start by jumping into episode one, or choose from over 50 episodes based on your interests.**



photo: Cathy Wolf



### Travel Alberta and Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) joined forces to gather public opinions and experiences about angling in Alberta, and the insights are in!

"Results of the Angling Preference Survey show people like fishing here much more than what social media may indicate," says Todd Zimmerling, President and CEO of ACA. "People outside our province even shared we are in fact a destination for fishing."

The survey also collected information about where people like to travel to for fishing—crucial information since angling opportunities create economic benefits in rural areas.

"We're discovering preferred fishing destinations, if people will travel to the northeast or northwest," says Zimmerling, emphasizing fishing's vital economic role in those regions. "I'm not sure we're spending enough time yet considering that when we're talking about stocking and planning. That's what we want to do—through collaborating with EPA (Environment and Protected Areas) and Forestry and Parks—and this survey is a great basis."

**See the survey results here:**  
[www.ab-conservation.com/angling-preference-survey/](http://www.ab-conservation.com/angling-preference-survey/)





## In the Thick THIN of It

The newly added water fountains on your local stocked trout pond are not just to be admired this winter; they are performing a big job—aeration.

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) aerates 22 stocked Alberta lakes throughout the province to provide angling opportunities that wouldn't naturally exist. These magnificent pieces of equipment help maintain oxygen levels for stocked trout to survive year-round.

**Heed warning:** aerators create turbulent open water and unstable thin ice conditions. It's best to follow posted signage and respect safety fencing near winter aerators from mid-October through April.

**Can you still ice fish on your favourite pond with an aerator present? Absolutely!** Just remember, the minimum ice thickness for safe ice fishing and foot traffic is 6 inches (15 cm). Always check ice conditions and winter fishing regulations before you step!

**Check online for lake aeration locations:**  
[www.ab-conservation.com/aerated-lakes](http://www.ab-conservation.com/aerated-lakes)

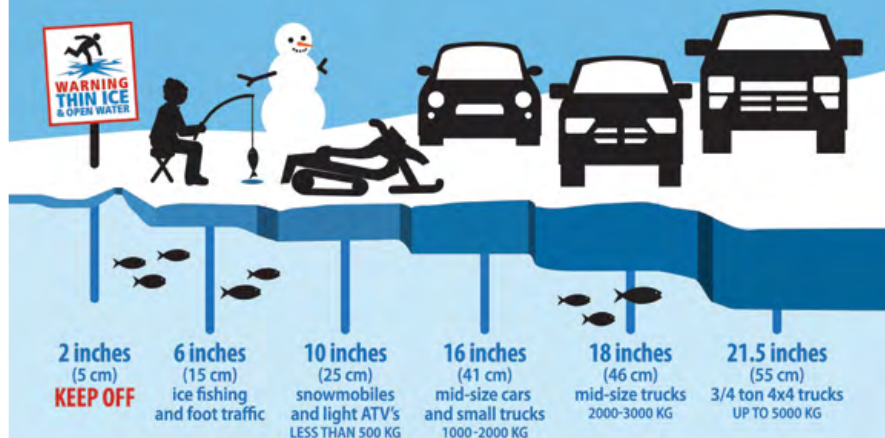


ACA staff installing aeration fencing  
photo: ACA, Mike Jokinen



## Minimum Ice Thickness

Guidelines for loads parked for more than 2 hours but less than 7 days on clear, good quality ice





ACA staff installing aerator  
photo: ACA, Brad Hurkett







# Just Go Through It



photos courtesy of Lisa Roper

## The Art of Ice Fishing with Lisa Roper

► by Ariana Tourneur

It's a March morning, crisp, with the frozen lake still under the pale sky.

But then, you feel it. Collective anticipation warms the icy air. The giant outfitters tent buzzes with caffeine and excitement, and before conversations really take off, one voice anchors the crowd.

"What are your fears?"

Whether it's to one person or 100, that's how Lisa Roper, outdoorswoman behind Canada's largest women-only ice fishing workshop event, begins.

"It doesn't matter our plans, if at the end of the day I can't help these women get through some of their fears, then I don't feel that I've been a successful teacher," she says. "They share things like, 'I'm scared to touch a fish' or 'I feel like I hurt the fish, how can I do better?'"

Roper sees her job as recognizing these fears, shaping her teaching around them, and

guiding women out of their comfort zone. By facing discomfort, she believes we can break free from self-imposed limitations to gain confidence and build resilience.

"This event is about ice fishing and it's not about ice fishing," says Roper. "We lean into other women as we open up to growth, getting ready to take on our next fishing trip with a sense of empowerment."

The 2nd Annual Ladies Only Ice Fishing Adventure at Lac La Biche saw over 100 women doing exactly that. Combining hands-on workshop stations, skill-sharing conversations, and a full afternoon of fun fishing, the event is still on many minds.

"Women want to get out to fish, be more independent, and have some fun. That's why we put this together, and of course, aligned it with International Women's Day," Roper says. Maybe that's why the fish were biting!

"My experiences have taught me that women want to learn from other women," she says. Men are undoubtedly amazing teachers—a special few inspired Roper's passion for the outdoors—but she believes women teach differently. "The special thing is we understand our fears, emotions, and physical well-being."



Register for 2024's event  
Be part of the fun! Registration opens Nov 1.

Visit [lisaroperoutdoors.com](http://lisaroperoutdoors.com)



When Roper opens the event to all women, she means it. Women aged 18 to 85, from seasoned anglers to those who've literally had never held a rod before—there is a place for everyone. “No matter where you’re at in your fishing journey, you will learn more skills as you build camaraderie and relationships,” she says.

Those with mobility limitations can fish comfortably from the heated shack, while others can test their physicality and auger

Another woman, a police officer, caught the biggest pike of the weekend. “I swear, her smile stretched just as big,” says Roper.

Roper continues to receive stories from women sharing their pride in showing their families how to properly handle the fish. “It’s exciting because I wanted to ensure it wasn’t just a ‘hey, come out and just fish’ thing. I want people to learn skills they can carry forward and share beyond themselves.”

their own hole. That’s what a seven-months-pregnant woman did, with the support of expert volunteers at that station. “She was unsure, but once she did it, she was so empowered,” says Roper. “Some women are like, ‘no way I’m touching that auger,’ and then by the end, they’re doing it completely by themselves!”

Crucial to that are the learning stations, each with a different specialization or purpose. One of the most popular was the Conservation Corner—consisting of three female conservation officers. “These officers created so much positive energy and a safe place to ask anything,” says Roper. “Everywhere is a no-judgement zone.”

Year one had six learning stations and year two it grew to 11. Roper hopes to continue this trajectory and have other communities see the positive trickle-down effect and consider similar events for themselves. Of course, goals mean more volunteers! “The reason we do this and have amazing learning stations is because of our phenomenal group of volunteers,” Roper says.

Recently, someone asked Roper if she ever gets scared in her outdoor pursuits. “Are you joking me?!” she exclaims. “I get scared all the time. But I try to let my adrenaline propel me to go through it—not around it, not over it, but right through it.”

And sometimes, she’ll take 100 other women along with her! 🏞️





photo (left) Pheasant release  
credit: ACA, Colin Eyo





# ALBERTA'S PHEASANT RELEASE PROGRAM

## More than Put and Take

► by Ken Bailey

**In 1962, Paolo Aiello immigrated to Alberta from his home in Italy. A carpenter, he was following his childhood sweetheart, whose family was already settled here. Besides marrying the girl of his dreams, Paolo was eager to hunt in Alberta having heard about the plentiful opportunities from cousins who'd immigrated earlier. He particularly wanted to hunt pheasant, recognizing the colourful birds that were also common in his homeland. Unfortunately, when seeking access permission, his difficulty with the English language contributed to a succession of declines. Undaunted, he turned to the only three pheasant release sites existing at the time.**

Soon he was taking sons Vince and John along. They acted as flushers and retrievers until they were old enough to carry shotguns of their own. Young Vince loved those excursions, fuelling his passions for wildlife and hunting. Some 50 years later, Vince is recognized as one of Alberta's conservation leaders. Together with John, he started Alberta's first Delta Waterfowl chapter; he's a past-president of Pheasants Forever; he's become a renowned breeder and trainer of rare blue Picardy spaniels; and, he currently sits as a Public at Large member of the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) board of directors. According to Vince, his love of upland birds and hunting was born on a pheasant release site and led to his lifelong desire to ensure Alberta's wildlife and habitat remain healthy for future generations.

Some will suggest we shouldn't be releasing pheasants in Alberta. That the birds are not native and the program is merely a costly put-and-take affair. Critics, however, are missing the bigger picture. Looking beneath the surface you'll find many benefits to the program that align with and contribute to conservation in Alberta.



photo (above): Vince Aiello at Taber Pheasant Festival  
credit: Vince Aiello



## HUNTER MENTOR PROGRAMS

Pheasants are the perfect game for introducing beginners to hunting; for many novices big game is simply a bridge too far. Pheasants are beautiful, relatively slow flyers and subsequently easy targets, and they're terrific on the table.

Several of Alberta's conservation organizations use released pheasants in their hunter mentor programs, including Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Alberta Fish & Game Association, and Pheasants Forever. Early success is important for helping ensure that first-time hunters enjoy their experience and embrace hunting, and no other game assures that success quite like pheasants.

Ironically, pheasants are also perfect for those in the sunset phase of their hunting careers, when they can no longer walk as far as they once did, or handle the physical requirements of other forms of hunting.



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In 2011, ACA hosted the inaugural Taber Pheasant Festival—a week-long celebration that included hunting pheasants released on local farms, mentored hunts for novices, and a wrap-up gala including dinner and an auction. Now, more than a decade later, it's no longer only an ACA event as the Town of Taber has adopted the festival

as their own. More than 40 landowners participate each year, and the annual online registration for hunters fills up in minutes. In fact, the success of the festival has led to other communities holding pheasant festivals of their own.

The spin-off benefits to conservation in Taber don't end there. The evolving relationship between the town and ACA has led to the

establishment of a community Kids Can Catch stocked pond and event. Additionally, the Municipal District of Taber leases land turned over to ACA as pheasant habitat, and several nearby ACA habitat projects have been established as a result of relationships developed with local landowners.

Another program that has evolved as a direct result of the festival is the Taber 4-H Canada club's growing upland game bird initiative. Participating children invariably want to release the birds they raise on their family land, leading to increased habitat establishment and conservation.

As ACA President and CEO Todd Zimmerling says, "All these small, incremental changes are a meaningful start in influencing the next generation of land managers to include habitat conservation in their lives and their decisions."

## HUNTING DOG TRAINING

Research has shown that well-trained hunting dogs are an invaluable conservation tool, particularly when it comes to reducing the number of wounded and lost upland birds or waterfowl. As beneficial as bumpers and dummies are for training dogs, there's no substitute for providing them experience with live birds. Released pheasants are ideal for training young dogs to find, track, flush or point, and retrieve.



photo: Pepper at Taber Pheasant Festival  
credit: Vince Aiello

photo: Pheasant Hunt  
credit: Vince Aiello





photo: Aiello family  
credit: Vince Aiello

## AN ALBERTA ICON

While it's true that pheasants are an introduced bird in Alberta, first released in 1908, they have long become an adopted native species, a symbol of our culture and traditions. Just look at the number of communities and businesses that use a pheasant in their corporate logos and signage. Still, we must remember that every pheasant in Alberta, even those that are "wild" and naturally reproducing, can trace their lineage back to an introduced bird.

Those who criticize the pheasant release program are missing the true meaning of the term "conservation" suggests Zimmerling.

"Too often, people define conservation very narrowly, when in fact it's really quite broad. We need to think about conservation from the ground up. Some appreciate pheasants for the food and recreation they provide for themselves, their family, and their friends. Others value the economic benefits pheasants and pheasant hunting provide, especially to rural communities, where recreation- and tourism-based industries

can be limited. And some folks just enjoy seeing pheasants in their daily lives, and knowing they're out there. Each of these contributes to establishing and growing a conservation mindset that benefits a wide range of wildlife and their habitat." 🏹

**In fall 2023, ACA will release more than 25,000 pheasants across 41 properties. [www.ab-conservation.com/pheasant-release](http://www.ab-conservation.com/pheasant-release).**

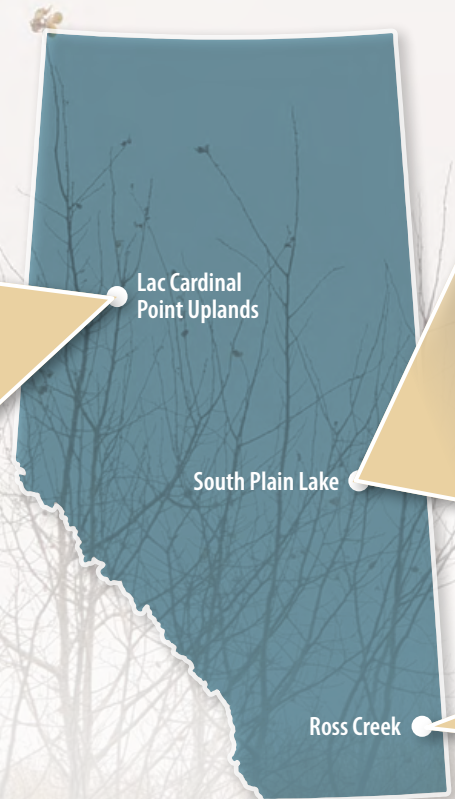
If you choose to hunt at a release site, there's a chance you might run into Vince. All these years later he continues to hunt pheasants across southern Alberta. You'll recognize him by his blue

Picardy spaniel and his broad smile. When he's not hunting upland birds, he continues to provide leadership in Alberta's conservation community. His daughter, Avrille, can be found teaching outdoor conservation at the Wilder Institute at the Calgary Zoo—another generation of Aiellos making a meaningful difference to Alberta's conservation legacy. Their impacts can be traced directly back to Vince's childhood, hunting released pheasants with his father.



photo: Paolo Aiello after a successful hunt  
credit: Vince Aiello





## Pheasant Releases on Conservation Sites

► by Jalen Hulit

Conservation sites across the province hold significant value to fish and wildlife and their habitat. These sites also provide Albertans with recreational opportunities that include hiking, hunting, and fishing. With the goal of increasing recreational hunting opportunities for Albertans, pheasants are released each year on 41 sites throughout the province—many of which are Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) conservation sites.

### Hunting pheasants in northern Alberta

Since the inception of the pheasant release program, the aim has been to increase pheasant hunting opportunities in new areas of the province. Pheasant hunting in northern Alberta became a reality in 2016 when ACA began releasing birds at a site north of Grande Prairie. It was such a hit that in 2017 ACA added a second release site at Lac Cardinal near Peace River. Lac Cardinal Point Uplands is a 623-acre release site with a wide variety of habitat that makes hunting both challenging and rewarding. The site is managed in different ways to facilitate pheasant hunting while benefitting all wildlife species that call it home. Strip haying is a habitat management strategy used to manage litter load and promote healthy grass growth. Habitat maintenance is important as it provides the necessities of life for pheasants and many other wildlife species at different times of the year.





Photos (from left to right): ACA (Successful hunt at Lac Cardinal Point Uplands); ACA, Mike Jokinen (Melanistic pheasant); ACA, Cassandra Hewitt (South Plain Lake); ACA, Charmaine Brunes (Pheasant); ACA, Amanda MacDonald (Fencing upgrade at Ross Creek); ACA, Tyler Johns (Pheasant hunting at Ross Creek); Background: ACA, Charmaine Brunes (Hunters at South Plain Lake)

## Pheasant release site partnerships

Partnerships with like-minded conservation groups are vital in the feasibility of the pheasant release program. Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited Canada, local fish and game associations, and many other conservation groups help to maintain and create wildlife habitat at many pheasant release sites. A 1,097-acre conservation site east of Medicine Hat has been created to preserve both native grasslands and riparian areas along Ross Creek. There has been many wildlife habitat enhancements developed at the site, including wildlife-friendly fencing, shrub plantings, and wetland development—all of which will benefit pheasants and wildlife into the future.

## Melanistic pheasants

For the past three years, ACA has randomly released a small number of darker colour phase, or melanistic, pheasants to promote pheasant hunting and create excitement

within the hunting community. Melanistic pheasants are the same subspecies as the Chinese ring-necked pheasant, but they produce a higher amount of melanin or dark-coloured pigmentation that cause their feathers to appear darker.

## Recreational opportunities near urban centres

Creating more outdoor recreational opportunities near major urban centres has been a priority of ACA since the early days of the pheasant release program. ACA is releasing pheasants on nine sites in central Alberta, all within a two-hour drive of the province's two largest cities. This includes South Plain Lake east of Edmonton. The 480-acre site was created in 2015 and is heavily used during the pheasant hunting season.

Eleven ephemeral wetlands were restored at South Plain Lake, creating great habitat for pheasants and other game bird species. The area also holds high recreational value for other outdoor enthusiasts throughout

the year. Many different species call this site home at different times of the year—including waterfowl, moose, black bear, and white-tailed deer—making it a great place to hike and observe wildlife.

Throughout the province, you'll find many other pheasant release sites that hold significant recreational opportunities outside of hunting. For more information on the pheasant release program and the release sites, visit [www.ab-conservation.com/pheasant-release](http://www.ab-conservation.com/pheasant-release).

These sites can also be found in ACA's Alberta Discover Guide, along with over 780 other conservation sites across the province. Whether you are a hunter, or an outdoor enthusiast, you can find a site near you! 🏞️





# conversa

## Success by Sarah

by Ariana Tourneur

Her family hunted, she tagged along. But when they left the boreal forest of Saskatchewan for an Alberta city, that lifestyle was put on hold—until the hunter education course at school piqued Sarah Vriend's interest and she asked her dad to take her again. Embracing the hunting lifestyle ever since, she (along with her husband Sam) doesn't plan to hit pause. Sarah is still learning, still appreciating and, in our minds, always inspiring.

**You've chased major milestones—learning to bow hunt, your first duck hunt, and harvesting a bull moose, to name a few. How did the journey begin?**

When I was quite young, my family (including grandparents) would go grouse hunting in northern Saskatchewan. They hunted big game too. But after we moved to Alberta when I was in grade two, my dad stopped hunting. It wasn't until junior high that I got to take the hunter education course. Knowing my family hunted before, I asked my dad to take me.

**Why do you hunt?**

I always find it special and rewarding when I can use the land to acquire food. It's natural and challenging and it feels so good to be able to put food on the table from an animal you have harvested.

**Food is such a strong motivator. What else keeps you coming back for more?**

What keeps me committed is the puzzle of a hunt, especially in a new area. You have to understand the landscape's clues—the plants, animal sign, and topography—to help you figure out where an animal might be. Also, Sam and I like to take our Labrador, Wren, out waterfowl and upland game bird hunting. Watching her retrieve and seeing how happy it makes her is so special.

**Tell us about a memorable hunting experience.**

My recent mule deer hunt was special because it was my first coulee mule deer. We woke early and spotted him—he was headed into a coulee draw and we just had to hope he was doing what we thought he would do because we didn't see him for hours. After slowly making our way through the draw, we finally spotted him following a doe. In all of 30 seconds, I got ready and made the clean shot. The deer ran just a little ways and then fell with a splash into a creek. It sure was steep to pack out, but totally worth it!

The bull moose I harvested a few seasons ago was also memorable. Sam and I had seen moose in the area the evening before, so we made sure to come first thing in the morning. Disappointed that we hadn't made it to the spot in time (tracks revealed they had already moved through), we waited just in case. As we were heading back, we saw two bulls and quickly made a game plan. We sprinted to a little hill, and I got behind a tree. After worrying we missed them again, the first one stepped out and I got a clean shot. It didn't even go 20 yards before it dropped.

**How exhilarating! Do these experiences make you think of other hunting goals?**

My biggest goal when hunting is to make sure that when the time comes to shoot, I can ensure the least amount of suffering to an animal. When I hunt, if anything feels off or I feel I am too rushed, I don't shoot. Sometimes a shot isn't meant to be, and I would rather not shoot than be rushed and wound an animal.

**What's one skill hunting has provided you?**

Patience. It can be so frustrating when something falls apart last minute, and you have to wait again.

**Do you have advice for a new hunter?**

Don't be discouraged if you don't get something right away. It can take years to be successful (depending on what you're hunting) and that's normal. Practice a lot with your bow or gun. Find a mentor. Respect the land and landowners. Have fun! 🦌





# tions



## *Rapid Fire Questions*

**Favourite animal to hunt?**

Moose.

**Favourite wild game dish?**

Dry Garlic Venison Steak Bites from [harvestyourown.ca](http://harvestyourown.ca).

**Next on your outdoor bucket list?**

Caribou hunt.

**Besides hunting, what else do you love?**

Long walks looking for shed antlers and collecting plants for my herbarium.



photos: Samuel Vriend



# Appreciate the Harvest

► article by Amanda Gill  
photos by Stuart Blaikie

*With* rolling hills, stretches of farmland, and an abundance of wildlife, the rural life is a big part of the fabric of Alberta. Growing up in the city, I never had much exposure to this way of life. Fishing, hunting, living off the land, were not a part of my everyday experiences. Living in the province my entire life, I've been fortunate to be able to drive and experience nature in beautiful parks like Jasper and Banff, and in smaller areas such as the River Valley in my hometown of Edmonton. When I encounter wildlife, I'm always astounded at the beauty of animals living in harmony with their ecosystem.

For a city dweller like myself, hunting has always been a foreign topic to me and admittedly I've never quite grasped the appeal of it. In talking recently with Stuart Blaikie, an avid outdoorsman and hunter, I've discovered that hunting is a very personal pursuit, and that it can be difficult to understand if you are not a hunter yourself.

Stuart has been hunting for many years, first introduced to it around 12 years of age and mentored by his cousin Brad. He hunts with a traditional wooden long bow, after switching from a compound bow about four years ago, and his harvest of a mature white-tailed deer last September was the reward of a five-year pursuit with this animal.

Stuart first spotted the deer when it was around three or four years old, noticing its very unique non-typical antlers. He continued to track the deer as it matured. It takes great skill to track an animal and Stuart appreciates the tracking of an older mature deer. In his opinion, an older deer is smarter and can roam freely from place to place, making it more of a challenge to track.

I wondered, why track an animal for that many years? Do you grow a connection with it? I had no idea that this is a common practice to track an animal for an extended period of time! Tracking gave Stuart the opportunity to watch the animal grow from being a young member of a bachelor group into a mature, dominant animal, travelling the woods solo.

Seeing the growth of life in its own habitat and learning from them every day, how can you not build a connection? The animal becomes an extension of your life, almost part of your family. When it was temporarily thought that this deer had been killed on the highway last winter, and their story together cut short, tears were shed. Luckily, Stuart spotted the deer once again, and their story continued.







*When* it finally came time to harvest the animal there were many mixed emotions. The slow build of years of pursuit and anticipating the moment, and then with one last exhale, the story was over. Stuart noted, “It’s incredibly difficult to explain the feelings in this moment. There is an incredible amount of excitement and remorse.” It’s overwhelming, the loss of the animal bringing more tears. I found it especially moving to learn that Stuart also partakes in a private prayer to honour the animal’s life and thank it for what it will provide to his family.

Stuart is also sharing his passion for hunting with his young children, aged ten, eight, and six, “I want to share the celebration of the animal as much as possible for my family.” He wants to teach them at a young age the necessary respect that every animal deserves, especially before the taking of its life. They have also joined him in the prayer to thank and honour the animals they hunt. This is very important to Stuart and also very personal.

In hearing the conclusion of the long pursuit, I couldn’t help thinking, what a special experience it is to be a hunter. As someone who has never seen wildlife up that close, let alone pursuing to hunt it, I realized what a true honour it is to have that special connection with an animal.

The world falls away as you become part of nature—observing and learning—and this small insight from Stuart’s story has given me a different perspective on hunting. The challenge, the reward, the appreciation for such a special act, is something I will take with me in my next encounters with wildlife and beyond. 🏹

*“I want to share the celebration of the animal as much as possible for my family.”*

*- Stuart Blaikie*







# BIGHORN SHEEP

**Protecting Alberta's official  
mammal from *M. ovi***

► *by Brad Fenson*





**My fascination with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) started at an early age**—brought on by the

appeal of the regal-looking horns, majestic mountains, and pristine wilderness. My first sighting of a bighorn ram is etched in my memory and still seems like yesterday. Photographing and hunting wild sheep is one of my passions, and the more time I spend in sheep country, the greater my appreciation for the species grows.

Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep were designated the official mammal of Alberta in 1989, and ever since curling horns have adorned government documents and special awards like the Order of the Bighorn. This coveted species has generated millions of dollars for conservation in our province through Minister's Special Licences. These hunting opportunities are auctioned and raffled off to raise funds for conservation and education.

**Concerns for the wild sheep population**

Alberta is home to an estimated 9,000 bighorn sheep, ranging along the eastern slopes and mountains from the Montana border to the Willmore Wilderness Park near Jasper and the mountains that extend north. One of the biggest challenges is the overlap in habitat between wild and domestic sheep and goats. Disease, like *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (*M. ovi*), from domestic livestock can ravage wild sheep herds, and there are concerns it could devastate local populations or spread further. Wildlife disease specialists within Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) monitor and help manage issues and protect Alberta's bighorn populations.

**What is *M. ovi*?**

*M. ovi* is a highly contagious bacterium that predisposes wild sheep to various pneumonia infections. Unlike a virus, this respiratory illness is bacterial and there is no vaccine. The bacterium spreads from airborne respiratory droplets from the sneezing and coughing of infected animals. A single infected ewe can spread *M. ovi* through a herd, and those infected who survive do not gain immunity and become carriers to spread it. There is no cure or treatment. Once an infection starts, the only way to prevent further spread is to kill all remaining animals.



## M. ovi in North America

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies considers pneumonia the greatest threat to North America's wild sheep. Bighorn sheep are highly susceptible to the disease having no previous exposure, and due to their gregarious nature, this leads to quick transmission through a herd. In Montana, entire herds of bighorn sheep have been eliminated to prevent them from travelling or encountering other bighorn populations. The greatest areas of concern are anywhere domestic sheep and goats can come in contact with bighorns.

## M. ovi in Alberta

Alberta has suffered significant loss of bighorn sheep from pneumonia outbreaks in the 1980s on the Yarrow, Castle, Livingstone, and Sheep River ranges. This decline in sheep numbers took nearly two decades to recover. In 2017, Alberta Environment and Parks (currently EPA) began M. ovi surveillance and have tested over 500 animals to date. Blood and tissue samples and throat and nasal swabs were collected, with no M. ovi in any of the animals tested. Hunter-harvested sheep are tested when registered, and kits are available for hunters to check any non-trophy sheep harvested.

In February 2023, there was an outbreak of M. ovi in the Blue Rock Wildland Provincial Park (near Kananaskis) that led to the death of 16 animals, mostly young rams. Nine of the sheep were found dead and tested positive for the disease, and seven were shot to prevent further spread. Of the seven rams euthanized, six were positive for late-stage pneumonia. The closest nearby herd of 95 animals was monitored and 41 were captured and tested negative for M. ovi, indicating the disease had been contained.

## What is being done?

M. ovi infects wild sheep in contact with domestic sheep or goats that are infected or carrying the disease, and anywhere the domestic and wild species overlap is a concern. Plus, the migratory or seasonal movements of bighorn sheep can find them incredible distances from the mountains, and potentially in contact with domestic sheep and goats.

Conservation and education groups, like the Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta, rallied members to look for diseased animals and watch for domestic sheep and goats that may have strayed into bighorn country. A good example was the call to action and quick response in the summer of 2023 when a four-horned domestic sheep snuck into bighorn country in southwestern Alberta. A poster was made with an image of the sheep and the public was asked to report sightings to the provincial government to help find it before it interacted with bighorns.

Wildlife managers have put measures in place to try and prevent M. ovi outbreaks. Education programs are aimed at domestic sheep and goat producers, veterinarians, and the public to reduce the threat. A disease surveillance plan is in place to assess risk and identify where infected animals are located for domestic and wild populations. Fencing and dogs ensure domestic sheep and goats do not have contact with wild sheep. A key measure requires testing domestic sheep and goats that will graze in or around wild sheep and their ranges, and the current policy is to ensure they do not come within 50 kilometres of any bighorn sheep range.

A co-operative research project was started in 2022 to examine wild sheep movements and disease risk. The Minister's Special Licence program, Government of Alberta, University of Alberta (Boyce Lab), and Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta funded the study. PhD student Ian Gazeley deployed over 150 satellite collars on bighorn sheep to watch, monitor, and prevent disease spread in their populations throughout the province.







photo: Sheep are naturally gregarious, making them susceptible to quickly spreading diseases  
credit: Brad Fenson



photo (above): Bighorn sheep collared to assist with monitoring and to prevent spread of disease  
credit: Brad Fenson



## What to watch for

*M. ovi* exhibits in sheep as a mild to severe cold or pneumonia, and an infected animal will cough and exhibit nasal discharge. The sound of coughing can carry a long way and has been used to identify infected animals in neighbouring Montana sheep country. The sinus cavities fill with discharge and can plug the animal's ears, causing head shaking. Fever and lethargy set in and the animals do not act normally—standing still or lying down, and not being afraid of predators or people.

## Know what to do

Any bighorn found dead in the wild should be reported and checked. Domestic sheep or goats seen in bighorn country, or bighorns outside of their normal range and close to domestic sheep and goats, should be reported to a local provincial biologist by calling 310-0000. A reference map can be found at [alberta.ca/assets/documents/aep-goat-and-sheep-area-provincial.pdf](http://alberta.ca/assets/documents/aep-goat-and-sheep-area-provincial.pdf). 🏠

**More information on *M. ovi* and how to identify a bighorn with pneumonia is available at [alberta.ca/bighorn-sheep-disease-surveillance.aspx](http://alberta.ca/bighorn-sheep-disease-surveillance.aspx) or [wsfab.org](http://wsfab.org). A documentary on the t-transmission of *M. ovi* is available at [youtube.com/watch?v=zO8M6eRG0tU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=zO8M6eRG0tU)**

***(The film contains scenes that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.)***

photo (bottom): Sheep live close to each other, making it easy to spread *M. ovi*  
credit: Brad Fenson



# Change. Plan. Do.

## The West Central Culvert Remediation Project

► *by Ariana Tourneur*

**How fortunate are we to live in a place dotted with a network of creeks, streams, and rivers?**

**Beyond giving us life, recreation, and beauty, Alberta's waterways are home to a diverse array of 60+ fish species—including native Arctic grayling, Athabasca rainbow trout, bull trout, and westslope cutthroat trout.**

photo: Prairie Creek at Swan Lake road  
credit: ACA, Chad Judd





## Learning from the past

These remarkable species depend on cold, clean, and connected water. Alberta has plenty, but habitat fragmentation and sedimentation—growing from the legacy of improperly installed and maintained stream crossings—have made it harder and harder for native trout to thrive. While it's the law in Canada to protect fish habitat, maintaining stream crossings to ensure fish passage wasn't always top priority for private and public road owners in Alberta.

"If I think back to the early days of my career, the big focus was identifying the issues and helping to prioritize remediation work," says Mike Rodtka, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) senior biologist. "We spent so much time gathering information to identify the stream crossings that were the biggest issue for these fish species, but unfortunately, most crossing owners weren't ready to prioritize fish passage. We knew this was a problem—a problem all over the province—but what's the point of recognizing problems if we couldn't ever get them fixed?"

During that time, ACA stepped back from that work, except for in select cases where there was confidence that follow-through remediation would be done.

## Fresh outlooks

Fast-forward to present day and the landscape of attitudes and action have truly changed. Rodtka says Alberta is now in a position that is less about, "Where are the

problems?" and more about, "Are these solutions actually achieving the objectives we wanted?"

"This is huge progress; it's so encouraging!" he says. "Don't get me wrong, there is still plenty of work to be done, but things are going the right way."

Today, more and more people are acknowledging the issue and actively seeking solutions. Although regulators weren't initially putting heavy pressure on compliance, industry is starting to recognize problems and take initiative to address them. Under Alberta's Watercourse Crossing Program, more players than ever before are participating in native trout recovery and addressing habitat fragmentation and degradation, particularly in the East Slopes.

## Where does ACA fit in?

"With the West Central Culvert Remediation project, we're a tiny piece of an absolutely massive puzzle," explains Rodtka. "We're helping in two ways: number one, evaluating some publicly owned crossings that have been fixed in the past 15 years. We go out and make sure they're actually achieving their objective of reconnecting habitats and improving sedimentation issues."

The second part of the project is evaluating culvert removal or replacement, slated over the next couple of years. "We'll be looking at the short-term results of this work being done and collecting data on its effectiveness," says Rodtka.

## Results you can see

This first year is about testing field methods to get a better sense of what's working and what isn't. "We're also looking at the scope of the project—up to Edson area and down south to Cochrane, maybe even farther south than that," says Rodtka.

One of the most exciting parts of this project is the partnership with Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC). "A lot of the work we're doing is at a broad scale, occurring up and down the East Slopes, but with this partner, we've been able to dial in," he says. "TUC is replacing a problem crossing consisting of multi-culverts (the Whispering Pines project). What's very cool about this work is that it's very tangible—they're literally reconnecting habitats for native trout."

Much has already been accomplished with plans for more. "ACA is helping get the good word out on the work happening," says Rodtka. "When people talk about the Whispering Pines crossing and understand why it's important, it helps us gather support to do more of this kind of work and make a difference." Not to mention, it highlights how impactful collaboration can be!

Typically, many groups are working on these goals in any particular watershed—a big leap forward from decades ago. And while some might subscribe to the notion of too little, too late, Rodtka doesn't. "I like to focus on the positive. There's been a massive uptick in this kind of work in Alberta in the last ten years, and I can't wait to see what changes another ten or 20 will bring!" 🐾

# WHISPERING PINES EAST RECONNECTION PROJECT



Both westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout have experienced severe population declines in Alberta's Eastern Slopes, but remnant populations persist in pockets of the Waiparous Creek watershed. That's why it's vital to protect and reconnect the watershed—this will help these populations thrive and grow!

Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC) has already replaced hanging culverts at Whispering Pines West with an open bottom arch, which after decades of disconnect, allows fish to move freely throughout the stream. The goal is the same at Whispering Pines East; TUC will install a properly sized open bottom culvert to accommodate various stream flow, reduce sedimentation, improve water quality, and allow fish to access headwater reaches.

The project also involves bioengineering and native vegetation planting at the crossing site to restore habitat and strengthen streambanks post-construction. All together, these efforts will reduce watershed fragmentation while rejuvenating fish habitat for Alberta's native trout.

photo: Celebrating a successful culvert upgrade  
credit: Trout Unlimited Canada (ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grant: East Slopes Native Trout Recovery)



Limited Series:

## A Novice Hunter's Journey



During this time, I was going to school in Ontario, in a community a few hours north of Toronto. My school was known to be very vocal about their political stance and ostracized those who didn't fit their mold. My friends and partner at the time were very vocal about their distaste for any form of firearm and for hunting in general. They didn't see a need for either. When I had brought up an interest in learning to shoot, I was met with a lot of disgusting looks and comments from these friends that essentially made me out to be a monster that would be willing to take another life, which was far from the truth. Once they made up their minds about something it was set, and to keep these friends my own mentality was altered.

With all of this, well, it got to me. I went from, "OK, I can do this," to a few emotions short of a panic attack. I cried hard and was terrified, so I left and didn't look back. I went next door to a climbing gym, where I was comfortable bouldering while my family finished shooting at the range. After that day I had no interest or desire to ever be near any kind of firearm. Whenever I thought about the possibility of holding or shooting a firearm, the same strong feelings would well up. That all changed in August of 2022 at Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Waterfowl Warmup.

At the event, with words of encouragement from a friend and the support of two mentors, Dan Mosier and Brad Fenson, I moved past my fears and emotions and held (and shot!) a shotgun for the first time. I didn't feel alone, pressured, or judged for any feelings or nerves I had. I felt supported and, guess what, I loved it! They taught me safety and respect around firearms, which made me more comfortable holding the shotgun. Then they taught me how to stand, target, and squeeze the trigger, which made me more comfortable shooting the shotgun at a clay disc. After shooting my first clay, I noticed a smile on my face. It wasn't only because of the shot but also in thanks to the supportive community. Now I'm looking to learn more and further my knowledge and experience with shooting.

This hunting season, I hope to go on a hunt. Whether I'm just there to observe and learn more, or attempt to harvest something, I look forward to expanding my experience, understanding, and knowledge of shooting and hunting, and how it all fits into my world. Who knows, maybe I'll learn how to shoot a bow in the future! 🏹

## Mixed EMOTIONS

► by Cassandra Hewitt

If you had told me six years ago that I would be shooting clays and enjoying it, I'd laugh right in your face and walk away. But here we are now, and I did it, enjoyed it, and look forward to more.

In 2016, I was in my early 20s and attending university for my undergrad degree. I had a moldable mentality and was eager for life experiences. While on vacation in Calgary with my family, one such experience led me to a shooting range. My parents wanted to learn more about handguns and try shooting them, so I went along for the ride. What I did not know was how emotional I'd get being around a handgun and how it would change my mentality for years to follow.

Picture being in a room learning how to hold a handgun for the first time. Emotions and feelings are high as you try to navigate the new experience. Every stance and position are being analyzed by the instructor in front of other people, in my case my family. In addition, you have the words of friends in the back of your head about their personal beliefs and feelings towards any type of firearm.



photos: ACA, Charmaine Brunes



*Through raw emotion and insightful tips, Cassandra takes us along on her hunting journey in this limited series.*



photo: ACA, Cassandra Hewitt



## Novice Tips

To anyone hesitant to try shooting targets for the first time, here are my words of advice:

- Your feelings are valid and you're not alone. We all start somewhere, and our comfort levels will all be different.
- Take your time and surround yourself with encouraging and supportive people.
- If hunting or firearms are not for you, that is OK. Maybe it'll be bows. If not you now have a better understanding of firearms in general.
- Take the wins, you took the first step in addressing any fears, and that is HUGE.





# Greyvin

► by Dr. Lee Foote

**He was a hunter.** He was also frail, undergoing chemotherapy, and 88 years old. That explained why his travelling nurse assistant met me at the hunting camp door, handed me a two-way radio. It was too cold for Mr. Coleman to sit in the duck blind that morning, but he would be on the radio right there with me for the calling, decoying flights, and shots. He was still a hunter.



Likewise prominent Alberta big game biologist Bill Wishart, hunting moose each year with the help of his other 80+ year old companion. Their secrets? A 4x4, a winch, a loooong retrieval cable, a lot of patience, and 120 years of combined hunting experience.

These are rather extreme examples, but now that I am closer to Bill's or Mr. Coleman's ages than to Lee, the spry 25-year-old duck guide, my admiration for their hunting commitment continues to grow. Us post-war baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 have a few wrinkles and our remaining hair is greying, and as outdoorspeople, we are feeling our age. The rigours we face are many—cold weather, rough ground, reluctant outboards, fuzzy rifle sights, thin tippets, and profoundly early mornings. These are daunting enough to make oldsters want to throw in the towel and take up golf or bridge. But let me channel Mr. Coleman for a minute and build a case for staying outdoors on your own terms.

Older anglers and hunters have some distinct advantages. Many are retired, thus, their schedules allow them to cherry-pick the best weather conditions, uncrowded field times, and availability of companions. Most of us with wrinkled foreheads have achieved some financial stability, or at least have our kids out of the house, and a realistic picture of our life plans. Basically, we know what we can and can't afford, and besides, we may well have more money than time at this juncture. We take a certain satisfaction in having earned seniors-discounts at hotels, restaurants, ferries, and fishing licences in many jurisdictions.



# gout

## Possibly the greatest advantage older anglers and hunters have though is wisdom.

If you have been doing something for 50+ years, you have had time to develop competency, and reflection on what worked and what did not. Can't lift that canoe onto the truck? That elk quarter too heavy to lift? It is certainly nice to have friends to help—and if they are younger and stronger, all the better. In the informal currency of what they bring to the outdoors, they have strength, endurance, and excellent night-driving skills. We have wisdom, a credit card, flexible time, and maybe some landowner access contacts.

It pays to keep outdoor activities sociable and to work together. Clubs such as the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Alberta Fish & Game Association, and others provide excellent stewardship opportunities where meeting like-minded outdoor lovers is inevitable.

While we may be past carrying a heavy backpack for a week in sheep country, many of us could easily stroll the bare prairies or stubble fields to flush grey partridge, pheasants or sharp-tailed grouse; sit for long snoozy periods in a deer stand's padded chair; or show the fish what real patience looks like. The older me has a much easier time sitting and reflecting, appreciating, and burnishing gratitude than my earlier action-man persona could muster.

And then there's the mentorship role. As the father of two twenty-something women hunters, I know they benefit from my experience. They really don't have to make all the same mistakes I made, for instance, gasoline is NOT an appropriate fire-starter. For their part, they bring me modern insights on the human relationship with nature through our non-monetary costs to the environment and I listen. While the logistics and techniques I demonstrate will certainly make their outdoor adventures easier, the more important exchange is the shared respect, validation, and trust we build. Many powerful meanings of hunting and fishing rest on interpersonal relationship building.

The older Lee finds joy in being still in a silent marsh with a shotgun at my knee, watching from a jon boat as lake fog lifts around the perch rig in my hand, or sharing binoculars and awe on a windy hawk-strafted ridge. Even the anticipation of these adventures reminds us we are living fully. Instead of greying-out, consider greying-in to the outdoors on your own terms. There is usually a way to make it work! 🏹



photos:  
Group of hunters sharing stories and advice, Lee Foote (left);  
Lee Foote, Roxy, and Ed Foote after successful waterfowl hunt (right);  
Decoys at sunrise, ACA, Stefanie Fenson (back)



# It's All About Fit:

## Firearms for Women and Youth

*In* the ten years between 2013 and 2022, the number of Alberta hunters grew by 23 percent. Adult male hunters increased by seven percent, while adult female hunters more than doubled, expanding by a staggering 104 percent. Among the reasons for the rise in women hunting is a growing locavore movement, women discovering that hunting allows them to connect more closely to the food chain and to nature, and a growing appreciation for the self-reliance and self-confidence that comes with going safely and successfully afield. However, one of the barriers women face is sourcing gear and firearms that truly meet their needs.

It can be a challenge to find a custom fit in an off-the-rack world. Fortunately for female and youth hunters, firearms manufacturers have responded to this growing market. For decades, firearms were manufactured around a one-size-fits-all concept, with shotguns and rifles designed to fit the “average” man. Even though this average varied considerably between manufacturers, none were well-suited to women or youths.

Whether you’re a man, woman, or youngster, a shotgun or rifle must fit you well if you’re going to shoot it comfortably and accurately. This means that when you bring the firearm to your shoulder, the stock should meld properly to your cheek—you shouldn’t have to lift or tilt your head to ensure you’re looking straight down the barrel. You also need to be able to squeeze the trigger without stretching your hand or finger, and the firearm must be balanced and not heavily weighted-forward.

It may be stating the obvious to say that women are built differently than men, but some of those differences specifically influence gun fit. When comparing “average” women to “average” men, women tend to have shorter arms and smaller hands, narrower frames, and higher cheekbones. Think about that—the critical interfaces affecting firearm fit are your hands, your shoulder and your cheek. It should come as no surprise that firearms designed to fit average men don’t fit average women—and that’s not even taking into account their respective differences in height, weight, and upper body strength.

### *field note:*

A well-fitting shotgun is key to shooting it well.

photo: Ken Bailey





*field note:*

Mossberg's 940 Waterfowl Pro features a highly adjustable stock, meaning it can be customized to fit a wide range of body sizes and shapes.

photo: Ken Bailey







## Firearms for *Women*

Let's talk shotguns first. Key features that women should look for include a Monte Carlo-style or an adjustable comb that raises the contact point to meet a higher cheekbone. You'll also want a smaller grip to better fit a smaller hand. A reduced length of pull (LOP), the distance between the butt and the trigger, is also important, though many of today's shotguns come with shims and spacers that allow you to adjust the LOP.

Some suggest that women should select lighter guns. I'm of mixed feelings on that point. While a lightweight shotgun is more enjoyable to carry on a day-long upland hunt, there is a trade-off as a lighter gun generally translates to increased felt recoil. Too much recoil and you'll begin to flinch before pulling the trigger, and that's the kiss of death for shooting accuracy.

When considering recoil, semi-automatic shotguns typically produce the least amount of felt recoil, with some of the energy being absorbed in cycling the action. Diving deeper, gas-operated semi-automatics produce less felt recoil than inertia-driven systems, though that usually translates to a slightly heavier and bulkier shotgun.

For years the recommendation for women was to shoot a 20-gauge. While generally lighter, the reduced weight means felt recoil is often similar to that of a 12-gauge. The appropriate gauge for you really depends on whether you'll be hunting Canada geese, grouse, or something in between. If you can comfortably handle the weight of a 12-gauge, the increased number of pellets usually means greater success in the field.

Among the best-suited shotguns for women is the Syren series by Fabarm\*. They offer both semi-automatic and over/under models designed from the ground up specifically for women. Beretta's Vittoria over/under shotguns are also built specially for women. Other top choices include the Franchi Affinity Catalyst, Mossberg's highly adjustable 940 Pro series, and the Browning Citori CX micro over/under.

Because you "point" a shotgun and "aim" a rifle, usually through a scope, a perfect fit isn't as critical to accurately shooting a rifle. Still, you want the best fit possible to ensure safety and comfort. LOP is the key feature to look at—too long and you'll have to extend your arms unnaturally, too short and your face will be too close to the scope. Both situations contribute to increased felt recoil, not to mention potential injury.

When selecting a woman's rifle, ensure the pistol grip and fore end fit comfortably. Consider the balance too—a shorter barrel makes a rifle less front-heavy and generally accommodates a woman's dimensions better. Overall weight is a consideration, but keep in mind that less weight means more recoil.

### *field note:*

Match the rifle calibre with the person shooting it to ensure that excess recoil isn't a problem.

photo: Blaine Burns



Recoil is a funny animal. Some men don't handle recoil well. Conversely, some women have no problem shooting even large-bore rifles. As a rule, all shooters should start out with light-recoiling cartridges. Among the many female-friendly options, some of the best deer-suitable cartridges include the .243 Winchester, .25-06 Remington, 6.5 Creedmoor, and 7mm-08 Rem. For elk or moose, the .270 and .308 Winchester are excellent choices.

Among the rifles well-suited to women is the Savage 111 Lady Hunter. It's tailored to a woman's contours, with a raised comb, slender grip and fore end, shortened LOP, and 20" barrel. Other good options include the Weatherby Camilla, Browning X-Bolt Micro, and Tikka T3x Compact Lite—but prospective buyers should shoulder as many rifles as possible before making their choice.

Consider these options merely as starting points. The ideal firearm for you is the one that fits you best. That means going to your local retailer and handling as many as you can, seeking the one that's most comfortable while also meeting your budget.



## field note:

A .22 is well-suited for introducing youngsters to firearms.

photo: Ken Bailey



## Youth Firearms

The fit considerations for women generally apply to youths as well, with the primary concerns being LOP, grip dimensions, weight, and overall balance. One difference is that firearms manufacturers have been responding to the needs of youth much longer than they've been designing specifically for women.

When selecting a shotgun for a youth, keep in mind that they are growing—a firearm that fits them this year may soon be too small. Select a model that can grow with them. One of the very best is the Mossberg 500 Bantam, a pump-action shotgun that comes with spacers allowing you to adjust the LOP a full inch. Other models to consider include the Remington V3 Compact, Franchi Affinity 3 Compact, Stoeger M3020 Compact, and Benelli Nova Youth. There are other quality youth shotguns on the market, so check them all out to determine what best fits your young hunter and budget.

Young shooters have huge variability in their dimensions, strength, and ability to withstand recoil. It's important to match the shotgun with the individual, as a discouraged or fearful young shooter may walk away from the shooting sports forever. I'm more inclined to consider a 20-gauge as a suitable choice for a youngster than for an adult woman, but I don't recommend any smaller gauge as the reduced pellet count makes it increasingly difficult for beginning shooters to hit their target.

There are numerous rifles designed with youngsters in mind. I recommend starting them on a .22, but when they're physically and mentally mature enough to handle the responsibility of a centrefire rifle, consider highly adjustable options like the Savage 11XP Youth Combo, Ruger's American Rifle Compact, Mossberg Patriot Bantam, or the Tikka T3x Compact Lite. As for calibres, ideal options are those described earlier for women.

## Choose Wisely

Whether for a woman or a child, a first firearm marks a rite of passage into a world that can offer a lifetime of rewards. However, if they get off on the wrong foot they may put their firearm down, never to be picked up again. So help them choose wisely. And here's one last hint—most women don't want a pink gun! 🦋



*\*The author is in no way influenced or compensated for mentioning specific brands of firearms or ammunition.*



# Wild Winged Hunters

► article and illustrations  
by Dick Dekker

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**My lifetime of watching wild falcons and eagles is derived from a sublimated hunting instinct.**

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*In the 1950s*, when the pesticide crisis first made the news, I was still living in Holland, one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world. Particularly alarming was the doomsday prediction that apex predators like the peregrine falcon were on the way out, poisoned by the effects of DDT and other toxic agricultural chemicals. At that time, peregrines did not nest in the Dutch lowlands, but were a regular migrant. A much rarer winter visitor was the European sea eagle. To me, these celebrated birds of prey represented all that was still truly wild and natural in the country of my birth.

In 1959, longing for a less polluted environment, I immigrated to Canada and settled in Calgary. I learned that peregrines were known to nest along the Red Deer River, and walking miles of that scenic river valley I checked the high banks and cliffs for nesting falcons and found five occupied sites.

In 1960–1962, I spent many days watching these falcons from the opposite riverbank, though regrettably never saw them hunt and catch any prey. The adult falcons sat high on their home cliff and when they finally took flight they just flew away, gaining height over the adjacent agricultural plains. Half an hour later, they might return with a small bird in their talons.

While living in Calgary, I also explored the spectacular country to the west. Looking for raptors, I discovered the now famous spring migrations of golden and bald eagles along the Rocky Mountain front. My strategy to observe them in action was to select a windswept viewpoint in the Morley foothills. Scanning the slopes through binoculars, I waited for golden eagles to approach and descend like a meteor with furred wings. Their tactic in hunting ground squirrels was to race low over the grass and take one by surprise or just before it reached the safety of its burrow.

To watch bald eagles in action, I walked the banks of the Bow River downstream from Calgary, where stretches of swift water remained open all winter. Whereas the golden eagle is capable of seizing a duck that rises from the river surface, the bald eagle concentrates on birds that fail to flush. If a duck or coot submerges instead of flying away, the eagle circles back and swoops down as soon as the target comes up for air. If the bird dives again, a persistent eagle might repeat its swoop half a dozen times. Compared to more active birds of prey such as the golden eagle, bald eagles often make a rather lazy impression. Their lifestyle is geared toward conserving energy.

I found no nest sites of peregrines along the Bow River, and after the mid-1960s the Red Deer River population became locally extinct due to pesticide contamination and human disturbance. Fortunately, northern peregrines were still migrating through the province. In 1965, after Irma and I moved to Edmonton, I looked forward to watching passage peregrines at Beaverhill Lake. The huge wetland was well-known to waterfowl hunters and birdwatchers, and less than an hour east of the city. When I approached the local bird club about peregrines, I was told, “Yes, we used to see them in May, swooping at these masses of migrating shorebirds, but today peregrines have become so very rare.”

A waterfowl hunter I met at the lake offered a more hopeful perspective, “You mean the duck hawk? Oh yes, I see them quite often. Just the other day one of them flew by along the shore. He hit one duck after the other and just dropped them dead into the water. He never even tried to pick them up.”



Bald Eagle with mallard prey.  
Oil on canvas board, 24x21 inches.





Eagle Hills at Morley.  
Oil on linen, 50x32 inches.

Although misinterpreted, his observation agrees with what I have learned over more than half a century of watching falcons at Beaverhill Lake, on Vancouver Island, along the Pacific west coast, and at the Bay of Fundy. Plunging into the nearest water is the instant response of ducks being pursued by a peregrine. The action is so sudden it looks as if the duck was struck down, but it's rarely the case.

However, if the hunt takes place over land, the result can be very different. Overtaking the duck, the peregrine seizes it in mid-air and bears it down. In a brief struggle, the falcon delivers a killing bite to the neck vertebrae of the prey. A typical result of the many hundreds of peregrine hunts I have seen though, is that by far most hunts are misses. Depending on species and circumstances, eight or nine birds out of every ten attacked managed to avoid the falcon's claws.

The published literature describes the peregrine's typical hunting technique as an aerial strike that sends the prey plummeting to the ground, either dead or mortally wounded. This may indeed happen, especially with pigeons, on account of their loose feathering, which is a defensive feature. However, in practically all successful attacks on flying waterbirds I observed, the prey was simply grabbed and carried down to a plucking post. Striking a bird with an aerial blow and letting it fall down would be poor practice, because that prey might be lost in the dense vegetation.



Peregrine Falcon attacking plovers.  
Oil on linen, 40x26 inches.

Peregrines that consume their catch in the open must be continually alert to the avian pirates that will attempt to rob them, including their own kind. Male peregrines are about one-third smaller than their mates. Such wide sexual dimorphism in raptors makes sense because the bigger female produces the eggs and guards the chicks, while the smaller male acts as the agile provider. Around the nest and away from it, females never have any trouble making male peregrines surrender their prey.

Peregrines carrying food are often pursued by bigger hawks, and the greediest pirate of all is the bald eagle. In recent years, after the pesticide hazard was lessened, bald eagle numbers increased across North America. In Alberta, they now nest here and there along our rivers and lakes. Peregrines too have come back

## Meet Dick Dekker

*Dick is a self-taught wildlife ecologist with a PhD from a Dutch university. He is the author of ten books published in Canada and four in Holland. His 2021 title, Stories of Predation - Sixty Years of Watching Wildlife is published by Hancock House, Surrey, British Columbia.*

from the brink. More than a dozen pairs of the once *Endangered* falcons now nest on high buildings and other vantage points in Edmonton, Calgary, and other communities.

Interestingly, peregrines have become common in Holland too. The latest survey shows about 200 breeding pairs. Even the white-tailed sea eagle has become a resident of the Netherlands with a growing number of tree nests. This amazing resurgence has much to do with a pesticide-free environment and mankind's increasing tolerance for, and appreciation of, our winged hunters. 🦅

*Note from the Editor: Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) wishes Dick a very happy 90th birthday this year.*



# The Value of What You See (and What You Don't)

► by Paul Jones and Sue Peters

Hunters and recreationists don't often get a chance to actively participate in the management of species they love and cherish seeing. This is especially true for moose and pronghorn hunters who can wait a lifetime to be drawn!

Hunters who draw a tag for moose or pronghorn can contribute valuable information to what we know about these populations. And ABHuntLog makes it easy! The ABHuntLog feature built into the iHunter Alberta app allows them to submit their observations while in the field.

ABHuntLog was developed in partnership with Alberta Conservation Association, the University of Alberta, Métis Nation of Alberta, and iHunter. This fall, we hope moose and pronghorn hunters step up, step outdoors, and submit their observations.

So why are biologists looking to moose and pronghorn hunters for help? These tags are hard to come by, so hunters won't get a lot of opportunities to submit their observations while actively scouting and hunting. Additionally, moose and pronghorn populations are especially susceptible to environmental conditions, making it important to stay on top of their populations on an annual basis.

Moose numbers across the world have been experiencing dramatic declines, and populations in some areas of Alberta are

suspected to be in decline. Generally, warmer winters and less snow cover are likely contributing to declining populations. These conditions also make moose more susceptible to tick infestations, which can result in poor body condition or even death. It is key for hunters to submit their observations, allowing us to look at trends in moose numbers in each Wildlife Management Unit (WMU). It will give us a better idea of how populations are faring and how they change from year to year. This hunter-supplied data will supplement data already collected by the Government of Alberta on moose populations and help inform management decisions.

Extreme winter conditions can lead to mass die-offs in pronghorn populations and lead to wide fluctuations in the population.

But pronghorn are adaptable and can often rebound quickly as females consistently produce twins in the spring. Having hunters and wildlife enthusiasts report their observations allows us to track their numbers and determine if populations are rebounding

as quickly as seen historically.

Participating in ABHuntLog will not necessarily increase your chances of drawing

a moose or pronghorn tag, or increase populations. It will, as more observations are submitted, increase the information available to managers and allow for better informed decisions for managing harvestable species populations in Alberta. The aim is to help stabilize populations, leading to increased hunting opportunities over time, which will benefit not only you but all hunters in Alberta. 🏹



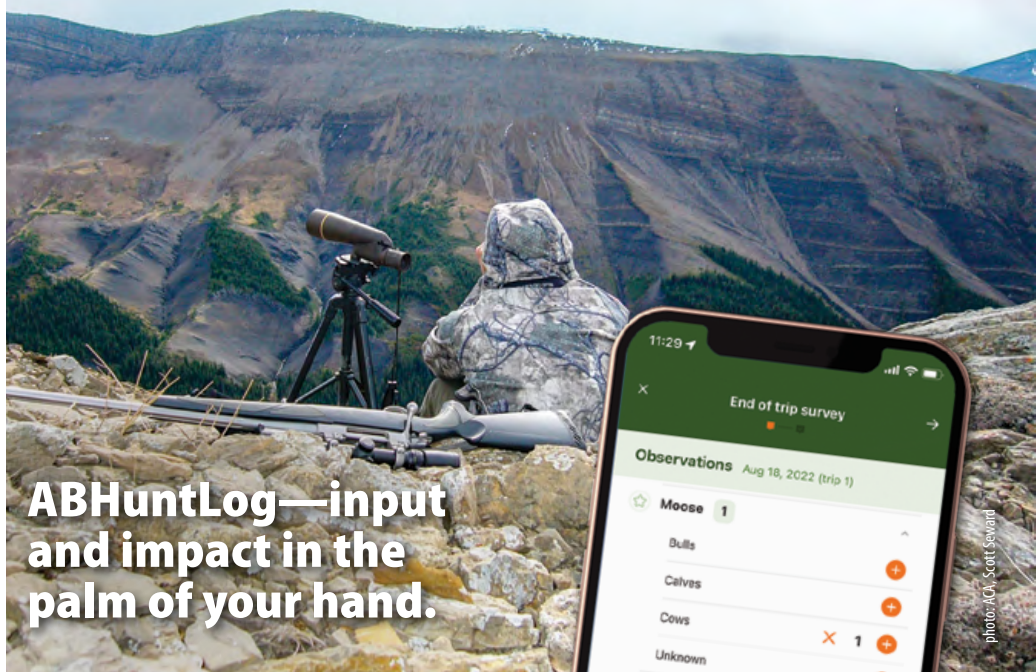
**ABHuntLog—input  
and impact in the  
palm of your hand.**

## Zeros are Heroes!

We also want to know what you did not see (or "zeros"). Yes, really! These zeros gives us a true picture of what is happening on the landscape with a particular population. So please record your zeros.

Reporting your zeros is easy! Click the star button to indicate which species you were hoping to observe during your trip, and ABHuntLog will automatically populate the database with zeros for that species if you do not enter any observation numbers.

In this image (right), Mule Deer is starred but no observational data appears. In the database, Mule Deer will be auto-populated with zeros indicating that you did not observe any though you were looking for them during your trip.





In 2022, Fish and wildlife officers were able to solve several cases with help from the public.

Here is one of those cases.

## SOLVED CASE: MEDICINE HAT

**An investigation led by Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Services has concluded resulting in \$27,500 in fines against an Alberta outfitter, a guide, and two non-residents.**

In September 2019, Medicine Hat's fish and wildlife received a public complaint regarding non-resident hunters who killed an antlered mule deer on land without obtaining permission from the landowner and trespassed onto other land without permission during an outfitted hunt.

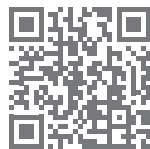
After the investigation conducted by fish and wildlife officers and supported by Québec Protection de la Faune and Environment and Climate Change Canada, the following occurred on November 25, 2022, in Medicine Hat Provincial Court:

- The non-resident client pled guilty to one count of unlawful possession of wildlife and one count of entering onto land without making the required contact with the landowner and was issued a fine of \$6000.
- The guide pled guilty to one count of unlawful possession of wildlife and was issued a fine of \$5000.

- The non-resident hosted hunter pled guilty to one count of unlawful possession of wildlife and one count of entering onto land without making the required contact with the landowner and was issued a fine of \$8000.
- The outfitter pled guilty to providing false information and failing to submit record(s) as required and was issued a fine of \$8500.

**This is a reminder that it is an offence to access property without the landowner's or leaseholder's permission.**

All non-resident hunters wishing to hunt big game, wolf, or coyote in Alberta also require a guide or a hunter host. Hunters contracting hunts through a commercial outfitter must obtain special licences by using an allocation, available through their outfitter. All outfitters and guides hold a heightened responsibility as professionals to ensure the hunts they conduct are lawful.



Anyone with information of suspected poaching is encouraged to contact Report A Poacher by phone at 1-800-642-3800 or online at [www.alberta.ca/report-poacher.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/report-poacher.aspx). All reporters can remain anonymous and could be eligible for a reward.

**REPORT A POACHER NOW. CALL TOLL-FREE OR REPORT ONLINE  
24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK.**

All calls are kept strictly confidential, and the information you provide can lead to an arrest, fines, and jail time. The Report A Poacher program is delivered in joint partnership between Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and Alberta Conservation Association. 🦋







## What is Conservation?

► by Susan Hagan

**I**n ancient times people perceived nature as a miracle. Most cultures considered earthquakes, floods, and droughts as the wrath of gods. During the age of Enlightenment, people began to apply science and logic, but for centuries the wilderness still remained an obstacle to be controlled and conquered, romanticized at best.

Slowly, nature became irrelevant to humans as the world urbanized, especially since the 1930s. Only 15 percent of Albertans are rural now compared to about a century ago when it was half of all Albertans.

Rainbows, sunsets, rivers, and stars, which dismally grow dimmer due to light pollution from urban centres, have disappeared from our lexicon since the 1950s. According to a Berkely study, nature is barely mentioned in modern books, poems, music, and movies.

What impact does alienation from the natural world have on conservation? For Todd Zimmerling, President and CEO of Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), conservation relies on active engagement with nature, because without connection, people don't care and don't act.

“

From my point of view, conservation means the resource is available into the future for people to use—not just set aside to be looked at but never touched—not like your grandmother's living room with the plastic all over the chairs. We're conserving it so you can harvest a deer from one of our sites; so you can fish for a rainbow trout.

”

## Can we conserve habitat with a place for people?

There are extreme ideas about conservation. Some want to bring back species like the woolly mammoth through “de-extinction.” Others want to put a velvet rope across the wilderness and keep all people out. “Excluding humans might be necessary in rare cases for sensitive ecosystems,” says Zimmerling, “But we can't do that for the whole planet. Nor would we want to.” As populations grow, cities encroach on what has long been farmland, scraping off topsoil and paving over to make way for box stores and new communities. Agriculture gets pushed further out to marginal farmland. More forests are razed, and more natural prairie is lost.

Conservation biology is defined as the study of the loss of Earth's biological diversity and ways to prevent this loss. There are many organizations around the world conserving habitat to restore biodiversity, which means everything in an ecosystem, from plankton to predators.

## What conservation looks like for lands shared with humans

Farmers and ranchers are reshaping their practices to store more carbon and embrace improved ecological practices. Brad Downey, Senior Biologist for ACA, has spent two decades putting back what's been lost on southern Alberta's prairie lands. A long time ago marginal lands were plowed for farming; today Downey works with producers to restore marginal cropland to native grasses for grazing and to attract wild species like the *Threatened* Sprague's Pipit. Landowners, mostly ranching families who have lived on the land for generations, talk to biologists about what their land requires and what their own needs are from the land.

“Conservation to me is combining it so there's a win-win for all parties involved,” Downey says. “We know that can be accomplished by learning from and listening to those on the ground, working together.”

Restored grasslands provide grazing for cattle herds and bring back a variety of species including bugs, birds, and ungulates.



“Restoring native grasslands means restoring the opportunity for biodiversity to be maintained or increased in those areas,” Zimmerling says. “And to take it to the larger level issues, grasslands suck up carbon. If we’re going to have any meaningful impact on conservation overall, we need to have private landowners onside. It starts by having partnerships, building trust.”

## Conservation is sharing knowledge and stewardship

The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) established its Environment and Climate Change Department in 2021. Many of their programs aim to support its 60,000+ Citizens with maintaining their connection to nature and Métis culture and traditions. Jordan York, Environmental Program Manager, says Métis Citizens who hunt, fish, trap, and gather traditional plants provide an essential layer of information vital to conservation.

“Métis Citizens are a people who traditionally have been stewards of the land, reliant on the land to protect and sustain traditions and culture and way of life,” York says. “One of the ways we’re trying to provide opportunities for land stewardship is through establishing Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).” MNA has secured 158 acres of agricultural land consisting of tame and native grasses, as well as wetlands. “It’s going to serve as a pilot conservation site to help us gain experience and build a model to establish conservation sites in other areas of Alberta,” says York. “The long-term goal is to provide MNA Citizens with reasonable access to lands for stewardship opportunities across the province.”

Once MNA has established a management plan and named the site, they will work toward having the community declare it as an IPCA.

“Humans can coexist with the environment sustainably if we share knowledge and note the problems,” adds York. MNA’s Environment and Climate Change Department monitors MNA Citizen’s environmental concerns through a variety of activities such as engagement sessions, plant and fish monitoring projects, annual harvest surveys, and a fish community

monitor program through which Métis Citizens submit online forms about their fishing activities.

York says MNA’s fish surveys, “give us a greater understanding of what they’re seeing on these lakes, the amount of effort they put in, what they’re catching, where they’re going, fish measurements, which species. We ask how they prepared the fish and how the taste was—if the taste is off or just as good as it ever was.”

Data is a huge part of science. If people aren’t out in nature, there are fewer observations and a decreased understanding. MNA has partnered with ACA to collect data using ABHuntLog, a feature of the iHunter app, to record species they’ve harvested or encountered to track wildlife populations, supplementing expensive government aerial surveys.

“We have active land users... there’s value in trying to get some of that information to input multiple perspectives,” says York, who also wants to involve more Citizens who’ve become disconnected from nature. “You can go and look at things from a scientific perspective, but we should also try to look at the traditional ecological knowledge perspective.”

## Conservation is a response to crisis

Long-term surveys show a net loss of 2.9 billion birds across all biomes, according to *Decline of the North American avifauna*, published in [sciencemag.org](https://www.sciencemag.org) (Oct. 8, 2019). Almost 80 percent of grassland species are declining. Bird populations are excellent indicators of environmental health and ecosystem integrity, so this sharp decline is troubling. One bright note, wetland birds showed an overall net gain (13 percent), with a 56 percent increase in waterfowl populations.

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), with its thousands of volunteers—many farmers, hunters, and anglers—across Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta observe waterfowl populations and help restore wetlands. DUC reports that across Canada it has conserved and restored 6.6 million habitat acres since its founding in 1938.

“Ongoing development and habitat loss continue to pose a significant threat to the health and sustainability of waterfowl populations, but there’s no doubt that conservation efforts have made a marked difference,” says Thorsten Hebben, DUC Manager of Provincial Operations, Alberta.

“ I tend to be reserved in terms of what we’ve been able to achieve because I look at what we have left to do. However, conservation organizations can take a great deal of credit for reversing the (waterfowl) population trends. The recovery is a shining example of human achievement. ”

## Humans: the only species to detach from nature

Conservation means bringing people back to a larger role in nature, because it is people who need to act if we want nature to endure. It means reclaiming a connection to nature that marries the miracle with the science. For many, the wilderness is no more than romantic ideal—perhaps an annual, hours-long drive to take a selfie at a mountain viewpoint after a short hike. For others, natural resources provide food, clothing, shelter, and medicine—their experience of nature is being part of it—these are the people more likely to act.

As Zimmerling puts it, “The work that we and our partners do is critical to ensuring there is some place for species to live in the future. There is no problem that human beings can’t solve with enough time and enough resources.” 🏞️



illustrations:  
Danielle Erickson





For wild game recipes,  
how-to videos, the  
Harvest Your Own  
podcast and more, visit:  
[www.harvestyourown.ca](http://www.harvestyourown.ca)



**Everyone has their favourite pizza**, whether it's classic cheese or something fancy and artisanal. The beauty of pizza is that it can be adjusted for any flavour palate or availability of ingredients. If you aren't harvesting your own wild game, do what we did and ask a hunter to share their harvest. Often, they will be thrilled to share some of their protein. A big thanks to Todd Zimmerling, President and CEO of Alberta Conservation Association, for sharing his harvest with us for this recipe.

This easy-to-make pizza will take those family pizza nights to the next level and can be made in a standard oven if you don't have a pizza oven.

While making dough can be a lot of fun, it takes time and precision. Measurements were provided in grams due to the different hydration levels of flour. If you wish to forgo this step and go straight to adding toppings, buying pre-made pizza crusts or dough balls from your local store are good options. 🏠

## Wild Game Pizza

Prep time 19.5–27.5 hours (if making your own dough),  
cook time 2–15 minutes, makes five 10-inch pizzas

► recipe courtesy of Willy Colbourne  
(Note from the editor: Happy Birthday!)

### Ingredients

#### Pizza Poolish Starter

- 200 g (200 mL) warm water, 110°F
- 5 g (3.5 mL) honey or maple syrup
- 5 g (8.69 mL) dry yeast
- 200 g (394 mL or 1.58 cups) "00" flour

#### Pizza Dough

- Pizza Poolish Starter
- 300 g (300 mL) room temperature water
- 250 g (329 mL or 1.31 cups) strong flour
- 250 g (493 mL or 2 cups) "00" flour, you can substitute all-purpose flour
- 20 g (1.1 tablespoons) salt

#### Pizza Toppings

- pizza sauce
- mozzarella
- fresh basil
- wild game (we used venison garlic sausage and venison pepperoni)

### Directions

#### Pizza Poolish Starter – Prep time: 5 minutes; proof time: 16–24 hours

The day before making pizza, make your Pizza Poolish Starter. In a large bowl, mix water, honey, and yeast. Next, add flour and mix well. Let stand for one hour at room temperature then cover and place in the fridge overnight (16–24 hours). Do not leave over 24 hours or it will become acidic.

#### Pizza Dough – Prep time: 5 hours

About five hours before you plan to eat, make the Poolish into dough. Remove Poolish from the fridge and let stand at room temperature for one hour. Add room temperature water into the Poolish and mix well, then add in your dry ingredients with salt being the last. Mix well and let the mixture stand for another 30 minutes. Form a single dough ball. To add surface tension to the dough, remove the dough from the bowl and place it on a lightly floured surface. Pull the dough towards you with both hands until your dough ball has a smooth surface. Once the desired texture is achieved, place the dough back into the bowl, coat with olive oil and leave covered in the fridge. After one hour, remove the dough ball from the fridge, divide into five equal parts (about 250–280 g or the size of a baseball or snowball) and add surface tension to each ball as above, cover and proof for two hours at room temperature.

#### Pizza – Prep time: 5 minutes; cook time per pizza: 2 minutes in pizza oven or 15–20 minutes in standard oven

*Note: If using a standard oven, preheat to 550°F.  
If using a pizza oven, preheat at 750°F for 30 minutes.*

After the dough balls have proofed, place a ball on a well-floured surface. Starting from the centre, carefully press the dough outwards with your fingers until it is roughly a pizza shape, 8–10 inches in diameter. Start by adding the sauce and then the toppings, finishing with cheese. Place on a ventilated pizza pan and place in the oven to cook. If using a pizza oven, watch that the edges are evenly cooking by turning every 30 seconds (or few minutes in standard oven), this will also help ensure the bottom is crispy.



### Tips

#### Make it your own.

Experiment with different kinds of sauces, meats, veggies, and more.

#### Keep for later.

Freeze the pizza in a vacuum-sealed pack for an on-the-go meal. Thaw the pizza outside the bag and reheat in the oven for a quick bite on busy days.

#### Invest in your recipes.

If you want to step up your game without investing in a pizza oven, try a pizza stone. They are easy to use and clean, and will create a soft and fluffy interior and crunchy exterior. Preheat the stone to get it up to temperature and then using a pizza peel place your pizza directly onto the stone.

#### Make some dough.

YouTube is a great place to start if you are looking to make your own dough.





# CAPTION THIS...

We asked our social media followers to write a witty caption for these trail camera photos. Of the many submissions we received, these were our favourites.

I know you wanted to meet online, but this is ridiculous!

Captioned by: @onefiercflower



Nothing to see here folks.  
Move along now.

Captioned by: Zane Moorhouse

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YouTube:  
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Who's serve is it?

Captioned by: Darlene Anne Mytton







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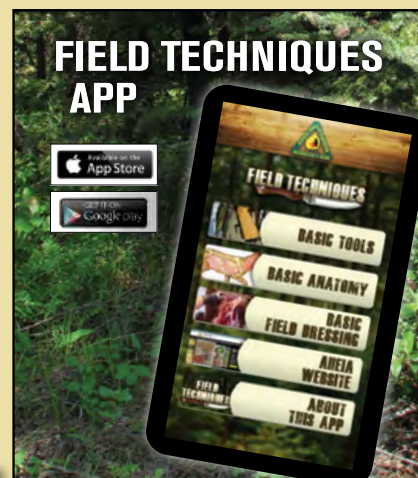
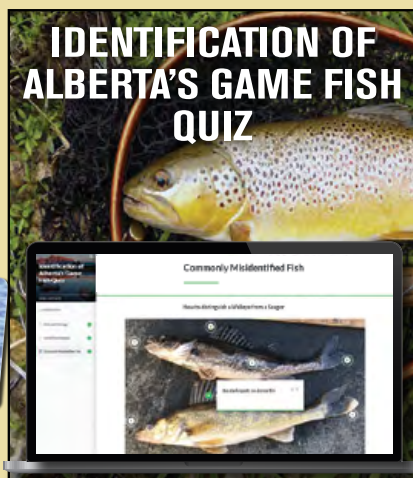
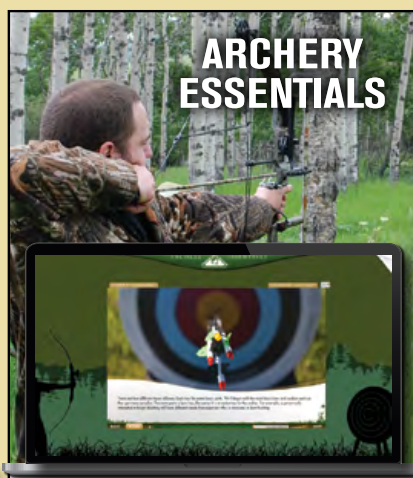
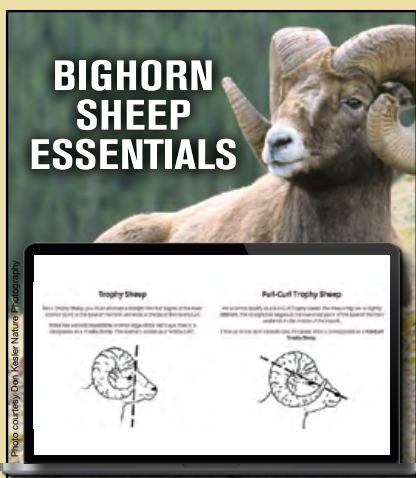
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of conservation in Alberta.

## Member Groups

