

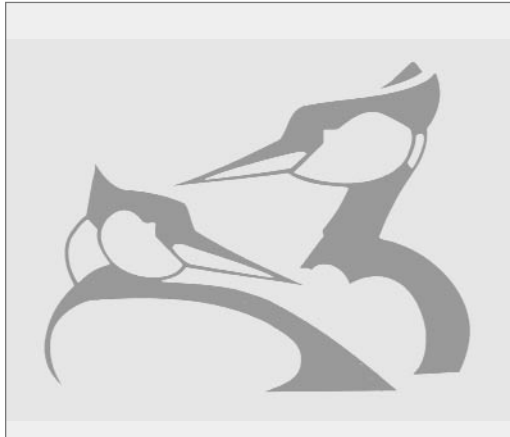
The Trumpeter

A Publication of the Friends of Elk Island Society
Winter, 2003



Website: <http://www.elkisland.ca>

E-mail: membership@elkisland.ca



The Friends of Elk Island Society

presents the

ELK ISLAND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Participate in the National Audubon Society's
104th annual count

Where: Elk Island National Park.

When: December 26th, 2003

Who: You!!

Registration: Elk Island Trades shop (look for signs)

Cost: Park entrance fee.

Bird Count National fee of \$5 covered by the Friends of Elk Island!!!

Details:

- Hike, ski, walk, snowshoe, or drive any of Elk Island's trails or roads
- Record birds observed, mode of travel, and hours spent birding
- Register at the start of your day at the administration area of the park from 9:00am-6:00pm. Light refreshments provided
 - Bring binoculars, field guides, appropriate clothing, and friends
 - Tips provided for those that need brushing up on resident birds
 - Potential for crossbills, grosbeaks, creepers, 7 species of owls, etc
 - Only 40 minutes east of Edmonton on Highway 16

Call Pierre at 434-0274 for more information, directions, or for advanced registration. Alternatively, visit our website at www.elkisland.ca

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FEIS and EINP Welcome Rob Kaye Home

by Georgina Campbell

Often, if an opportunity seems too good to be true, it is! But that is not always the case. Just ask Elk Island National Park (EINP) warden Rob Kaye. He thought a chance to spend a year on an exchange program, working in an Australian National Park, was almost too good to be true. It wasn't! Rob took over new duties at Lake Eildon National Park (LENP) in Victoria, Australia while Australian "ranger" Kane Weeks came to EINP.

Rob was assigned to the main project of Pest Plants (weeds) and Pest Animal Management, along with various other duties at LENP.

His role in Pest Animal Management was a new challenge.

"That aspect made me realize we really don't have a pest animal problem in Canada, compared to Australia," he explains. "Non-native animals, including foxes, rabbits, wild pigs, several species of deer, goats, donkeys, camels, brumbys (wild horses) and feral cats and dogs are 'pest animals', and are a huge problem.

They were brought to Australia by European settlers for domestic use, as a means of transportation and for hunting.

Since Australia had no large native predators and a warm climate, imported animals proliferated until two things happened. The plant eaters decimated native vegetation and habitat and competed with native animals such as kangaroos and wallabies for available vegetation. Predators, such as foxes and cats, decimated the small native mammal marsupial species.

As a result, 19 mammal species have, to date, become extinct in Australia, partly due to fox and cat predation. Australian birds have evolved in a predator-free environment so some nest near the ground. Now they are defenseless against those predators and are being wiped out.

Australia has many millions of feral cats, foxes and camels and hundreds of thousands of the other pest species. Wildlife authorities spend a great deal of manpower and money trying to control the pests, but it is only a stop-gap measure.

"The control measures will probably never be successful," says Rob, "unless they find some biological control such as a bug or a disease to



Home again with friends: Rob Kaye (left) with Laurie Guyot (middle) and Wes Olson (right).

reduce the pest populations."

Rob also had a chance to use his relocation management skills as part of a koala bear management program.

"Koalas were introduced to an off-shore island, Snake Island, several decades ago. They decimated the edible eucalyptus trees, literally eating themselves out of house and home. Authorities are moving many of the koalas back to the mainland and returning them to the wild. Many females, however, were sterilized and left on the island."

Rob liked the koalas but snakes were a different matter. Despite a natural fear of snakes he was determined to challenge that fear. He deliberately looked for snake experience. He was in the right place! Australia has eight of the ten most poisonous snakes in the world. The second most poisonous, the Eastern Brown Snake, has a reputation for actually pursuing humans for short distances when they are disturbed. They were the most common snakes in the area where Rob worked. He had a number of close encounters while out hiking, one of which was especially close.

"In the end," he says, "I did lose my fear of them. It was a huge challenge and very fulfilling. The whole Australian trip was a wonderful life experience. Australians are very easy going and don't get upset about small problems. We could learn a bit from them."

While Rob found it very hard to leave LENP, he was happy to get back to the swans and the ungulates at EINP!

Geocaching in Elk Island National Park

by Rick Watts

Katy and I have just discovered Geocaching. "What on earth is that?" I hear you ask.

Geocaching is a new sport or game that has grown up in recent years due to the availability of a low cost Global Positioning System (GPS) unit. A hand held unit smaller than a cell phone can be purchased for less than \$150 and can pinpoint your position on the globe to within about 6 meters or less. Quite simply, Geocaching is the art of using a GPS unit to find a hidden cache. You navigate to the area of the cache using coordinates obtained from the Geocaching web site. Once in the general area, you search for the cache by eye. When you find it, you open it up, sign the logbook inside and, optionally, swap a small token or trinket that you have brought with you with something from inside the cache.

The key to this new sport is its simplicity. It's



Katy Watts at 'Bearfoot 1', somewhere in Elk Island National Park.

easy to participate, it gives a focus to your Sunday afternoon walk and, because the cache contains items to be swapped, it's a treasure hunt for the kids. It's popular too, with caches located in over 180 countries and six within 10 miles of my house. Some caches are just yards from the road, others can only be reached after several hours hiking. At least one local-

ly can only be reached during the summer by canoe!

There are currently two known caches within Elk Island National Park, placed there and maintained by caching enthusiasts. They are known to the staff and are monitored to ensure that their impact is minimal.

For more information on Geocaching visit the website at <http://www.geocaching.com>. The two caches mentioned here are called "Elk Island" and "Bearfoot 1."

Trumpeter Swan Population Growing at EINP

by Rob Kaye

We had 18 adult or sub-adult swans in the park this year and we believe 9 cygnets fledged and migrated (or will be). That gives us a total of 27 swans leaving the park for fall migration:

2 adults (breeding pair) + 5 cygnets

2 adults (breeding pair) + 4 cygnets

14 other adults or sub-adults

I am very pleased with the large increase in our swan population over the last couple of years and, crossing our fingers, I am hoping that the program

is starting to see great signs of success. We are just starting to get exponential increases which is often an indication that a reintroduction program is starting to show success.

If we do not experience any unforeseen hurdles that nature may throw our way (ie. increased drought or devastating winter storms in the swans' wintering grounds), I am hopeful the population will continue to grow. I am also expecting that we should look for at least one more breeding pair coming out of our sub-adult population for the spring of 2004.

Mission Statement — Friends of Elk Island Society

The Friends of Elk Island Society is a non-profit, charitable organization that co-operates with Parks Canada to promote understanding, appreciation and respect for Elk Island National Park. The FEIS fulfills this mission by participating in conservation, science-based research, the operation of a sales outlet, special events and providing services to its members.

The FEIS raises funds and administers donations to further the objectives of the Society.

***Our sincere thanks to STAPLES, Sherwood Park,
for their support of The Trumpeter***

The Friends of Elk Island are High Flyers!

by Glynnis Hood

The Friends of Elk Island Society has played a major role in helping Elk Island National Park obtain a unique data base. In November 2003, FEIS provided financial sponsorship for a complete aerial survey of the Park's active and inactive beaver lodges. These surveys are normally budgeted for and conducted by Parks



Park Warden Wes Olson is ready for a long ride as the helicopter criss-crosses Elk Island National Park to survey checking both active and inactive beaver dams.

Canada every 3 years, however, the record-breaking drought of 2002 created a once in a lifetime opportunity for the park to determine the direct impact of drought on the Park's wetlands and the beaver populations that maintain them. The warden service flew a survey in 1999 – just before the drought. Another was flown

during the worst part of the drought in October 2002. However, the next scheduled survey wasn't until 2005 and no monies were available for an earlier survey. The FEIS-sponsored 2003 survey completes the tale of the cycle of drought by showing how beavers and wetlands responded after a year of normal precipitation. This data set has no equal in areas occupied by beaver and will offer rare insights into the Park's aquatic ecosystems.

The Park's beaver populations have been monitored both by aerial and ground surveys since 1963, making this year's survey an important contribution to one of the most consistently monitored beaver populations in North America. See the next issue of the Trumpeter for highlights of the survey.



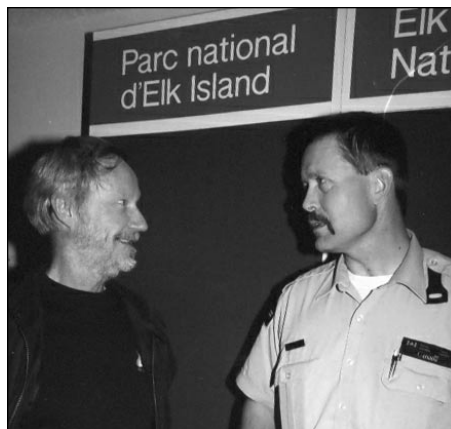
Elk Island National Park Warden Glynnis Hood awaits lift-off as the 2003 Beaver Survey begins. The survey will provide important insights into the Park's beaver populations.

The Beaver Hills Initiative Means Working Together

The Beaver Hills is a largely undeveloped hilly, wooded, area between Sherwood Park, Tofield and Lamont. The Beaver Hills Initiative is a ground-breaking initiative to build partnerships amongst a dozen agencies and governments in the Beaver Hills, and to create a long-term stewardship plan to manage the land in a co-operative manner.

On October 23, Steve Otway Chief Park Warden of Elk Island National Park (EINP), offered members of the Friends of Elk Island Society (FEIS) a glimpse into aims and objectives of the Initiative.

"It is a holistic approach to working with our neighbors to develop and improve ecological, economic and social consequences of mutual develop-



Doug Heckbert (left), owner of Elk Island Retreat Ltd., chats with Steve Otway (right) at the Beaver Hills Initiative discussion.

ment," said Otway.

"This may be the first such undertaking to include industry, municipal and federal governments, environmental groups and a National Park working toward a common vision of a sustainable community."

Partners in the Beaver Hill Initiative include the counties of Strathcona, Lamont, Beaver, Leduc and Camrose; Alberta Parks and Protected Areas; Parks Canada; The Nature Conservancy; and Ducks Unlimited which represent other environmental groups; Agri-Foods

Canada; Alberta's Industrial Heartland group and the Northeast Capital Industrial Association. Many other supporting groups work under the umbrella of these organizations.

Discovering Beavers!

by Mark Degner

When I woke on Saturday morning, October 25th, I was sure glad that the strong winds that had been blowing for the past few days had subsided. It was overcast and looked like it might rain, but otherwise it was a nice late October morning. I arrived at the Beaver Pond Trail parking lot about 15 minutes before the first group of participants was to arrive and just after getting out of my truck, I saw Glynnis Hood coming off the trail with chain saw and safety helmet in hand. The strong winds of the last few days were also on her mind; Glynnis had come out early to check to make sure that there were no trees blown down across the trail that might interfere with the day's guided beaver walks. This was the start of a long day for Glynnis, but one that was thoroughly enjoyed by all who participated.

Besides being the "trail crew" and the leader of the day's beaver walks, Glynnis is a Warden in Elk Island National Park (EINP) and a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Alberta, doing research on beavers in the Park. She is also the Membership Director for the Friends of Elk Island Society (FEIS).

Right on time at 10 AM, a small convoy of vehicles arrived at the parking lot; the Girl Guides were here. Sixteen Girl Guides and their five leaders quickly assembled and we were off on the first of two beaver walks that Glynnis was leading today. I was following along the behind the group and it quickly became obvious that we won't be seeing very much wildlife on the walk, but I know where all of the bison "poop" was on the trail as the girls made sure to point it out as we walked along.



A young beaver-walk-enthusiast examines a beaver pelt during the informative afternoon walk with Glynnis Hood attended by twenty-three people of all ages.

During the walk along the Beaver Pond trail, Glynnis would stop and point out interesting things



Sixteen Girl Guides learned many things about beavers from Glynnis Hood, Elk Island National Park warden and "beaver expert," during their morning walk with her on October 25th.

that she saw; not just things relating to beavers, but also moose, bison, owls and lichen to name a few. We didn't see any beavers at the pond, but their recent activities were easily observed. We learned about the ecology and biology of the beaver and their role in the history of Canada and the local area. The girls eagerly answered Glynnis' questions and were quick to ask her questions of their own. A highlight for the girls was when Glynnis brought out a couple of beaver pelts and a skull for them to examine as she described the biology of beavers.

Before we knew it, almost two hours had past and we were back at the parking lot. It is amazing how quick the time can pass when you are having fun learning about such an interesting animal as the beaver from such a knowledgeable person as Glynnis.

After the hike, I took the Girl Guides and their leaders to the Pavilion that over looks Astotin Lake where Rick Watts, FEIS Chairperson, had a nice roaring fire waiting for us. The girls quickly gathered around the fire and warmed up. They then started roasting wieners and drinking hot chocolate that they seemed to really enjoy after their morning hike.

At 1 PM back at the Beaver Pond Trail parking lot, the next group of beaver walk participants had gathered. Twenty-three people of all ages (including 5 FEIS members) started off down the trail with Glynnis, eager to learn about beavers. And learn about beavers we did. I was really surprised to learn that there are around 1,200 beaver lodges in EINP, although only about 160 are active.

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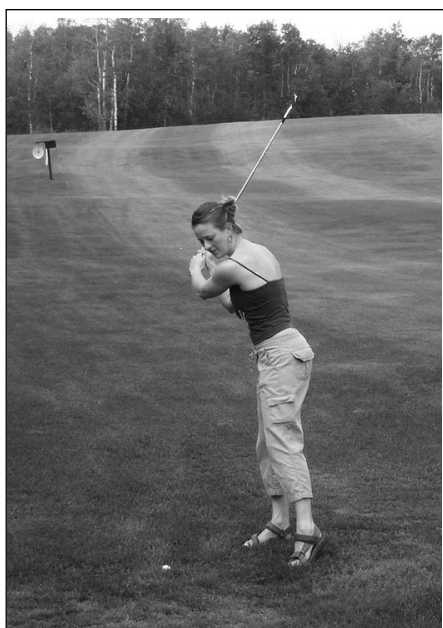
Glynnis said that we might hear a helicopter flying around the Park during the walk, as the Park was currently doing a special beaver survey that is being funded by FEIS.

Again, we didn't see any beavers on the walk, but it didn't matter as the information on beavers that we received from Glynnis more than made up for not seeing any. Just over half way through the walk the rains started. Our pace increased and before very long we were back at the parking lot.

Another beaver walk was over, well almost. Glynnis had made arrangement to show a video on beavers at the theatre at Astotin Lake, so most of the participants jumped into their vehicles and headed there.

So while eating delicious cookies that Glynnis had baked, we watched the video called "Super Beaver". It is a 45-minute video made by Canadian Geographic and Discovery Channel and it featured the beavers of EINP and Glynnis' research. What a great way to finish off a wonderful and educational afternoon of hiking and learning about beavers!

From the Friends of Elk Island Photo Album!



Memories of Summer: Eva Paul definitely had an eye on the golf ball at the Elk Island National Park Texas Scramble, held as part of the Park's employee and family recreation day.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Family Ski Day 2004

The Friends' main winter event has always been Family Ski Day. This year (2003) saw activities centred on Astotin Lake. There was free ski hire, introductory skiing lessons, skating and snow shoe hire. Coffee and donuts were provided by Tim Horton's.

For February 2004, we intend to make the event even more successful with a wider range of activities.

Further information will be available in the next edition of the Trumpeter, on



Have you got YOUR skis ready to go for Family Ski Day 2004?

the website or you can call Rick at 922-5203. Those of you who would be interested in helping out or contributing on the day please also call.

Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____ Fax number: _____ E-mail: _____

Individual membership (\$10.00): _____ Family membership (\$15.00): _____

Donation: _____

If you are donating \$25.00 or more, please indicate whether or not you would like us to send you a tax receipt. Send your Membership Form and payment to: Friends of Elk Island Society Box 70, 9920-63 Avenue Edmonton, Alberta T6E 0G9 (780) 988-4842