

## Turtle Dedication

Ryan M. Bolton, M.Sc.

The 2010 season marked the sixth year for the turtle program in Ontario, and although it was not without difficulty, it proved to be another successful year for turtle conservation! As in previous years, the focus was to increase hatching success by eliminating mammalian predation of nests. Although essentially a solution to a problem that will always exist wherever there are people, protecting nests is especially necessary in a time when freshwater turtles are facing an astounding array of threats to their survival. The nests of Spiny Softshell, Blanding's, Snapping, Painted, and Northern Map Turtles were protected this year, ensuring that well over 700 hatchling turtles began their foray into the wild in late summer. This year's cohort brings the total number of released hatchlings to nearly 3,000 since 2005!

The summer of 2010 was a particularly hot one, and the effects are amplified when this research requires many kilograms of equipment to be carried and long pants to be worn - there are Lyme disease-carrying ticks at this site! Not to mention the daily 16 km bike ride and 8 km walk through beach sand that are part of my 'zero impact' philosophy of conservation work. Many other external challenges presented themselves this year as well, such as a few floods in the research trailer and a boat motor that decided to take the year off. However, as difficult as it sometimes seems, the aches and pains of the nesting season are soon



*Spiny softshell hatchling emerging from its shell.*

RYAN BOLTON

forgotten as soon as the baby turtles begin clambering out of their eggs!

Fortunately, many volunteers assisted this year and certainly made the project much more engaging. Baby turtles always seem to bring out the eagerness to help in people! Park staff were always on the lookout for nesting turtles and would temporarily protect any nests until they could be collected for incubation. Also, a few friends from home gave their time to come out and see off some of the many Spiny Softshells and Map Turtles that were hatching at the time. A presentation at the park visitor centre also yielded MANY enthusiastic and eager-to-help young conservationists, and it was extremely refreshing to engage some of our youth by letting them release the turtles.

In these difficult economic times, it becomes especially clear how important Wildlife Preservation Canada and the donors that provide support are to wildlife conservation. With this help we can ensure that turtles will always be able to survive in this rapidly changing world!

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## Letter from the Executive Director

This year we are celebrating Wildlife Preservation Canada's 25th Anniversary and the 20th Anniversary of the Canada's New Noahs training program. As there are no "quick fixes" in conservation, WPC makes long-term commitments to the recovery of species threatened with extinction, thus 2010 also marks the 15th year of WPC's involvement with both burrowing owl and swift fox recovery efforts and the 10th year of WPC's involvement with the recovery program for the eastern loggerhead shrike.

It is heartening to read in this issue that after five years of implementing the soft-release technique with burrowing owls in B.C., in 2010 we saw the return of 23 owls to their BC breeding grounds, the highest number ever recorded. Prior to 2005, it was the norm to see less than a handful of burrowing owls returning to BC each year despite releasing hundreds of owls.

Through the Canada's New Noahs program we have built up an impressive "team" of 20 New Noah "alumni" who are continuing Gerald Durrell's legacy working on the front lines of conservation in Canada and abroad. In this issue, you'll read about two graduates of the program and the difference they are making today. We will be posting updates from other New Noah graduates on our website.

Finally at this year's annual dinner/auction on Oct. 27 being held at the Toronto Faculty Club, we will have three former New Noahs as guest speakers, so please be sure to join us if you are in the Toronto area.

Elaine Williams



## Thanks Run Wild Team!

Thanks to Wildlife Preservation Canada's Run Wild Team members who participated in the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon on September 26. Through their efforts, almost \$10,000 was raised for Wildlife Preservation Canada's endangered species programs. The team wishes to thank their supporters. See you next year!

*WPC Board Member Ian Glen and his daughter Courtney, Run Wild Team members.*





# Burrowing Owl Update

## Wise owls - and keeping them that way

*Dawn Brodie, Lauren Meads and Mike Mackintosh*

*This has been another successful year for the Burrowing Owl re-introductions in British Columbia. Since 2005, the B.C. Burrowing Owl Recovery Team has been using the “soft-release” techniques pioneered by WPC project leader Danielle Todd in Saskatchewan to increase survival and productivity of captive-bred owls. Positive results are evident in the 2010 field season. This year, in addition to ensuring the owls are healthy, the team worked on keeping them wise. Read the latest developments in the report from the team.*

Two geographically distinct facilities are maintained in British Columbia to breed Burrowing Owls in captivity for release to the grasslands. The yearling released owls are monitored throughout the spring and summer season to their fall migration by field staff of the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC, WPC’s local partner organization committed to Burrowing Owl conservation and environmental stewardship.

This year has been another successful year for the Burrowing Owl re-introduction efforts in British Columbia. This year we saw the most returning owls to the Nicola Valley Region of BC. Twenty-three owls were identified, some wild-born owls from previous years and others captive released that had successfully migrated. Eleven of the returned males were captured and fitted with geolocators as part of the Prairie Initiative headed by Troy I. Wellicome, PhD., former WPC Canadian Collection grant recipient. The owls will be recaptured the following spring and the information stored in the geolocators will reveal their migration routes and wintering grounds.

In April this year 99 yearling owls were released to the grasslands around Kamloops and the Thompson Nicola area with the help of volunteers. The owls were released as pairs into soft-release cages that were developed by Aimee Mitchell, Msc., which improves the survivability of the released owls and increases the percentage of them having a successful clutch. This method of releasing captive raised owls is now a standard in release protocol for Burrowing Owls. This year in the Nicola Valley the released and



LAUREN MEAD

*Banded juvenile Burrowing Owls before being returned to nest*

returned owls produced 168 juveniles. All Burrowing Owls are fitted with alpha/numeric, green/black bands that are unique to BC and an aluminium US Fish and Wildlife band.

This year a new site was introduced in the Okanagan near Osoyoos. In the fall of 2009 volunteers installed 25 artificial burrow systems at the Elkink Ranch and in 2010 four pairs were released into soft-release cages there. One pair had a successful clutch and successfully fledged six juveniles. Expansion of the program into the Okanagan rangeland will continue as this was historically burrowing owl habitat. This is in conjunction with the new breeding facility in the Okanagan near Oliver on the burrowing owl rehabilitation site.

We may be biased, but we believe that burrowing owls are intelligent - every year we learn a little bit more about their cognitive powers. Of course we would not want them to be bored either. So, at Port Kells

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# Canada's New Noahs - Today's Difference

*The Canada's New Noahs program was begun in 1990 to address the need for Canadian conservation biologists. Over the last 20 years, this innovative, hands-on training program has built a pool of experienced, dedicated conservation professionals who are continuing the work of Wildlife Preservation Canada's founder, Gerald Durrell, in Canada and around the world. Each year WPC selects one young Canadian scientist for the Canada's New Noahs program, which entails first a rigorous training program at the International Training Centre in Jersey, Channel Islands, followed by a placement in Mauritius, working with some of the most endangered birds and reptiles in the world. Graduates of the Canada's New Noahs program include Jessica Steiner, Species Biologist for Wildlife Preservation Canada, who has managed and grown the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program since 2007. Here are just two of past Canada's New Noahs current adventures.*

## David Stepniski - CNN #9

"I think I heard it." As we pass over Caw Ridge in the snow-capped rocky mountains of Alberta, I hear a distinctive "beep....beep....beep". The sound fades in and out of our headsets that are connected to the telemetry receiver in our small Jet Ranger helicopter. The beeps that are coming over the airways



DAVE WILLMORE

*David hiking in Alberta*

are from a collar worn by a female caribou. We can tell by the slow rate of the beeps that this caribou is alive and well. The caribou that we are monitoring fall within the West Central caribou range of Alberta, where I have been working as a senior wildlife biologist for the provincial government for the last six years. I am pleased to be one of many biologists across Canada working towards management and conservation of these and many other threatened species and I reflect on the wonderful opportunities that have moulded me into the biologist that I am today.

The greatest opportunity to grow in my career was the chance to go overseas as Wildlife Preservation Canada's 9th New Noah. Along with applying the conservation principles and techniques from the training in my present job, it is what I have learned from interacting with so many different people in dif-

ferent situations that has shaped me to the greatest degree. My present work with the Alberta government requires an understanding of different cultures, industries and non-governmental agencies in order to best serve the public of Alberta and work towards conservation of several species at risk in the region. While overseas as a New Noah, we are diplomats for Canadian conservation efforts. In this role, I quickly learned the importance of maintaining relationships with all the people we interact with, including educators, research scientists, government representatives, co-workers and, most importantly, the public.

The passion that drives us in Canada to work towards conservation of species such as the burrowing owl, the Vancouver Island marmot, or the woodland caribou is the same drive that people in Mauritius have towards species such as the pink pigeon and Mauritius kestrel. Since my time as a New Noah, I have returned to Mauritius to work as a warden on Round Island, travelled to New Zealand to help with the Kakapo program, and traveled to Belize to see first-



DAVID STEPNIISKY

*David encounters a yearling caribou*



hand how they are using zoo education as a successful tool towards conservation of native species. The desire to save species from extinction is a universal one that we share with many people in many countries.

As Wildlife Preservation Canada celebrates its 20th year of the New Noah program, I am proud to be part of this dynamic team of international wildlife professionals. I am also pleased to be able to take what I have learned from my time with WPC and work in my home country towards conservation of caribou, trumpeter swans, grizzly bears and barred owls (to name a few). I truly believe that with the continued support of organisations like Wildlife Preservation Canada, the future is bright for our species at risk in Canada.

### Lance Woolaver, CNN #8

In 2009, my wife, Rina Nichols (WPC's Species Recovery Biologist 2004-2008) and I moved to Madagascar with our two little boys Glen & Jeremy, so that I could begin work as Scientific Coordinator for the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust's Madagascar Programme.



*Lance and his sons Jeremy (top), and Glen in Madagascar.*

RINA NICHOLS

Rina and I are not strangers to Madagascar having worked there in 2001-2002, during which time we discovered the wonders of Madagascar's unique wildlife and culture. We were most impressed with the people of Madagascar, particularly the local Durrell team, most of whom were old friends and still working for Durrell when we returned in 2009.

I am responsible for coordinating all the research management activities for Durrell in Madagascar. The project here is Durrell's largest overseas conservation programme. Part of the challenge facing

*Madagascar Pochard*

me during the past year in Madagascar has been visiting all nine sites and the 45+ staff, meeting the local teams, learning how the projects work, and finding solutions to the obstacles facing conservation efforts.

It's a very rewarding, but challenging job. Even the logistics of travelling to the field sites can be quite daunting! Most of the field sites require an average of 2-3 days travel by planes, boats, taxi-brousse and oxcart, with a healthy dose of hiking, just to arrive



*Alaotran Gentle Lemur, one of the species Lance's team is helping local communities manage.*

on site. Rice and beans and fish are daily staples and the mid-day heat is stifling. Bandits, crocodiles and malaria are common encounters during fieldwork. But the local Durrell field teams are highly dedicated and skilled people, and a pleasure to work with, making things much easier for me during my travels.

Most recently I have been involved in the conservation efforts for one of the world's rarest birds, the Madagascar Pochard, *Aythya innotata*. The Pochard was thought to have gone extinct, to have disappeared forever. In 2006 a small population of fewer than 20 birds, only six of which were females, was rediscovered by Lilyarison René de Roland of the Peregrine Fund on a lone, isolated mountain lake in northern



LANCE WOOLAVER



## Canada's New Noahs ~ continued from page 5

Madagascar. Although the Peregrine Fund have been protecting the lake and the birds, the species was still in a precarious state and facing the severe risk of extinction due to such a small population size at a single location.

In 2009, a joint team of Durrell, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, and Peregrine Fund went to the lake to collect eggs from the wild to begin a captive breeding programme, as a safety net and as a founder population for future reintroductions. I was part of the team that collected eggs from the wild nests. In order to avoid transporting the delicate eggs over extremely difficult roads, we hatched the eggs by the lakeside in canvas tents using portable incubators. We then transported the newly hatched ducklings for seven hours over ridiculously bumpy roads (I use the term loosely!) to temporary rearing facilities in a town called Antsohihy. In the end, 24 eggs were collected from the wild and all hatched successfully and were transported to the rearing facilities, effectively doubling the world population for this species in one mission. It was an extremely intense and emotional experience; finding the nests, collecting and hatching the eggs in the forest by the lakeside and then transporting the ducklings through rivers and over crumbling bridges to finally reach the temporary sanctuary of the rearing facilities.

And this was one of many challenges the programme has had to face. Due to the urgency of the extinction risk, the eggs were collected before a captive rearing facility had been built. This meant that the young ducklings needed to be reared in a modified hotel room in Antsohihy and then transported again to temporary captive facilities at Durrell's Chelonian Captive Breeding Facility in Ampijoroa. Even this was not without some drama as bandits had targeted our staff in Antsohihy and went one night to their hotel to rob them. Fortunately the robbers were not that bright, and went to the wrong hotel. The team was alerted and able to evacuate early and move the ducklings to the Durrell Facility at Ampijoroa.

Now that the establishment of birds in captivity has reduced the likelihood of imminent extinction, the next goal is the construction of a dedicated captive breeding facility, where young can be produced for re-establishing wild populations. At the moment, the Pochard are being kept within modified Side-necked Turtle enclosures at Ampijoroa, which are not ideal. In addition to the lack of space for accommodating breeding pairs, there is a high risk of contagious disease from nearby domestic birds in adjacent villages, and from wild nesting colonies in a nearby lake. My immediate challenge is to scout out an ideal site that has adequate water and access, yet is isolated enough to reduce risk of contagious diseases. Over the next several years, my experiences with avian re-introductions (Pink Pigeons and Echo Parakeets as a New Noah in Mauritius, California Condors in California, and Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes with WPC) will be put to the ultimate test in the recovery of the world's rarest bird, the Madagascar Pochard.

When I was a young boy and reading Gerald Durrell's books, I dreamed of working in one of those magical places. It's just as amazing as he describes.



*Lance and pochard duckling*

OWEN JOINER



## Burrowing Owls ~ continued from page 3

Breeding Facility, new things are happening to stimulate the mental powers of our owls, and to help to keep them healthy and strong. Early this spring, Director Rose Tirshman began to experiment with ways to simulate natural conditions - and to stimulate their bird brains. Over the summer she has added beds of gravel and sand to help the birds to keep their bills and talons trim. We're adding more rocks too, just like at the spots where they will be released next spring. But she has also introduced several "toys" to the enclosure. Some of these, such as the ping pong balls, have been ignored, but she has found that the pine cones and mounds of grasses are regularly moved about by the birds. The water sprayer (controlled by timer) is greatly enjoyed by the juveniles on hot summer days.

We also get to watch much of the action as Monika Tolksdorf has installed a camera that catches the goings-on when we leave the enclosure. (Catch it at [www.burrowingowlbc.org](http://www.burrowingowlbc.org)). Burrowing owls may be pretty clever, but they also like to be a bit mysterious!

How do you thank the ranchers for their continued support? We give them salt blocks. This promotes cattle grazing around the Burrowing Owl sites and

gives the sites a range of tall and short grasses, which benefits Burrowing Owl hunting opportunities. Without the ranchers and the local community our conservation efforts would not be successful.

Two field researchers, Dawn Brodie and Lauren Meads were able to travel to Hermiston, Oregon, to help install artificial burrows on a military site of 20,000 acres. This was in conjunction with the Global Owl Project, the US Fish and Wildlife and the Umatilla Chemical Depot (Army). They have had great success this year with about 30 wild pairs of owls producing about 70+ offspring. Over the 4 days 60 new burrows were installed for a grand total of 115 artificial burrows and 10 natural burrows. It was a great trip and we were able to communicate with each other about our successes, failures and future strategies. We are stretching our information on the owls' migration corridors.

With the ongoing support of Wildlife Preservation Canada we have been able to continue our efforts in the re-introduction of the Burrowing Owl into BC by combining education, community involvement and conservation.

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