



# We stand for wildlife



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## Let's keep bats in our skies and not just on our doorsteps

*Bat Week is a great time to discover everything that is cool about bats*

Trick or treating is back and we hope to see lots of ghosts and goblins, but especially bats on our doorsteps this Halloween. We love bats, not because they are spooky, but because they are so important to ecosystems and also just because they are really cool – they are [our only flying mammals and also have a bunch of other super abilities](#), such as echolocation. They are also extremely long-lived for a mammal their size (40 years!). But these are not good times for bats. Innovative research by WCS Canada's Western Bat Program has confirmed that the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome (WNS) [is continuing to spread west and has now reached Saskatchewan](#). Research on [the resilience of little brown bats](#), who have been one of the species most severely affected by WNS, also tells us they are unlikely to be able to withstand widespread WNS spread in western Canada. To us, this is all the more reason to continue critical research on bat ecology to [help to protect bats from WNS](#) and other threats and to get people engaged in keeping an eye on how bats are faring. Get to know about these unique animals this Bat Week by visiting [AlbertaBats.ca](#), [WCSbats.ca](#) and the always high-flying [Facebook page of our Western Bat program](#).



Our Western Bat team is keeping a close eye on bats. Photo: WCSbats.ca

## Caribou get a closer look

We've often talked about how the health of caribou populations can tell us a lot about the health of our wild places. From the lengthy migrations undertaken by arctic herds to the dependence on old-growth lichens among boreal caribou, these animals are more than just a symbol of Canada's wild places on our quarter – they are a living, breathing gauge of landscape health. And right now, that gauge is pointing to the red zone as WCS Canada president Justina Ray [explains to Laura Lynch, host of CBC's What On Earth](#). Justina talks about her work surveying elusive boreal caribou from small planes in subzero temperatures and what is happening to herds from Labrador to the mountains of BC, particularly in the face of rapid climate change, as well as why Indigenous-led conservation may be one of the species' best hopes. [Have a listen.](#)



The combined impacts of climate change and resource development could spell trouble for caribou. Photo: Justina Ray/WCS Canada

We take a look at caribou from another angle [in a blog for Canadian Geographic written by WCS scientist Claire Farrell that describes some groundbreaking work](#) to model what the future might look like for caribou in the far north of Ontario. This work demonstrates the importance evaluating cumulative effects when it comes to understanding how new resource projects might affect an at-risk species like caribou. With climate change already driving big changes in the north, the study finds that the addition of mining, forestry and roads can often tip outcomes in a way that conventional project planning focused on local impacts fails to anticipate.

## Planning for a changing climate in the Yukon

The Yukon is one of the wildest places left on the planet. Its wildlife ranges from thundering caribou herds and grizzly bears to rare plants that escaped the last ice age. But things are changing fast even here thanks to climate change. This short video explains what is at stake for the territory as it embarks on ambitious land-use planning for some huge areas and why this planning has to be driven by an understanding of how climate change could reshape many of the things Yukoners take for granted today.



Keeping wild places connected

As world leaders switch between climate talks and revising the Convention on Biological Diversity, Canadians can feel proud that our country is part of the “high ambition” coalition that is dedicated to setting aside more room for nature in protected areas. But as our Director of National Conservation Dan Kraus [explains in a new Muddy Boots blog](#), protected areas can either be like beads on a necklace or stones dropped in an ocean. As important as these areas are, what is equally important is whether connections exist between them and other critical habitat areas, he notes. [As Dan and his coauthors write](#), “Every one of the places we protect for nature relies on how we manage its surrounding areas. As natural resource development continues to press north, opportunities to maintain conservation corridors in Canada's boreal forests are dwindling. In southern Canada, continued habitat fragmentation threatens to further isolate the natural areas that we have managed to conserve, and restoration options are disappearing. With the push toward ambitious national conservation goals there will never be a better time to create conservation corridors.”



Roads can cut off connections for wildlife and lead to increased mortality. Photo: U.S. DOT

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## Boom and bust for snowy owls

If you live in southern Canada, you may have seen snowy owls in winter perched on a telephone pole surveying a snow-covered field. And you may have noticed that more of these birds are around in some winters compared to others. That's because snowy owl births rise and fall in sync with population cycles among their favourite prey – lemmings that inhabit the Arctic tundra where the owls nest. This leads to “irruptive” years when there are more owls than food on the tundra and as a result many owls head south in search of other things to eat. So what happens then? [WCS scientist Don Reid explores that question in a new Muddy Boots blog](#) that summarizes a recent



scientific paper that looks at the owls' boom and bust cycle of life.



## Common Goal, Uncommon Pathways



Cheryl Chetkiewicz

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We are very proud of the work WCS scientist Cheryl Chetkiewicz has done in organizing this year's [Ontario Association for Impact Assessment \(OAIA\) Conference](#), including leading a number of sessions during the conference. Impact assessments are a key process in identifying and avoiding impacts to wildlife and their habitats (see the [Canadian Geographic piece](#) mentioned above for more on why) and are essential in guiding sustainable development. Cheryl, who is the president of the OAIA and chaired this year's conference, has been engaged with a number of federal and provincial environmental assessments in northern Ontario, particularly in the Ring of Fire.

She leads a WCS Canada research effort designed to examine the cumulative effects of future land use and climate change scenarios on wildlife in the far north region to support cumulative effects assessment and decision-making. OAIA provides an important forum for impact assessment practitioners and students to advance innovation, development, and communication of best practice in this important planning process.

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## Growing again

WCS Canada welcomes two more sharp minds to our research team:

**Gretchen Lescord** joins our Ontario Northern Boreal team as an Environmental Scientist. Gretchen has been studying how contaminants accumulate in wildlife and the implications for ecosystem services and conservation. She completed her PhD in Boreal Ecology at Laurentian University, where she studied mercury cycling across an undisturbed freshwater watershed. Her research examines how contaminants, such as mercury and arsenic, accumulate in freshwater fish and the food webs that support them and how this affects ecosystems and fisheries.



**Michael Rudy** joins our Key Biodiversity Areas team as the Regional Coordinator for Alberta and Saskatchewan. Michael is an avid botanist and published photographer with over ten years of conservation experience, including working at the Pika Camp research station in Yukon and a five-year study of five needle pines in the Rocky Mountains, which led to an exhibit at the Muttart Conservatory in Edmonton. Last year, he served as the Botanist for the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre, during which he discovered the first examples of globally imperiled alvar habitat in Saskatchewan.



## Support our work to save wildlife!

At WCS Canada, we stand for wildlife and are in the field every day working to save wildlife and wild places. You can support our work by [making a secure donation](#) right now!

Top banner image of bears: WCS Canada

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