



We Stand for Wildlife



A very different library

Sound can be an important tool for understanding wildlife behaviour, especially in a remote ocean environment

Shsssh! We're going to visit the library and you need to be very quiet. Not in this library! It is loud and boisterous with grunts, whistles, chirps and squeaks galore. That's because it is an international library of underwater sounds. WCS Canada Arctic scientist Dr. Bill Halliday can't wait to visit – virtually. Bill explains why he thinks this library is not just great for listening but a critical source of information for conservation in a [new Canadian Geographic blog](#). Bill also highlights WCS Canada's own recordings of whales, seals and fish available in [our own smaller sound library](#) (really the tip of the iceberg in the hours and hours of recordings our Arctic team has collected). Climate change is rapidly reshaping this environment and less ice will mean more noisy ships and other noise. Using sound to better understand this threat in remote underwater environments in Canada's Western Arctic is vital for developing solutions to protect marine animals.



Dr. Steve Insley prepares a sound recorder for deployment in the Western Arctic Ocean. Photo: WCS Canada



Want to listen to whales yourself?

[This audio interview with Bill features some sounds from the deep.](#)

A closer look at the critical minerals rush



*The De Beers diamond mine (now closed) was the first major industrial development in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. What will be the impact of more mines on the area's vital carbon storage services and habitats?
Photo: De Beers Canada*

There is certainly no shortage of talk these days about exploiting potential deposits of critical minerals (e.g., nickel, cobalt, lithium) across Canada to feed the new green economy. But what is often overlooked in these discussions are the natural values, like carbon storage, that might be impacted by this new mineral rush. WCS scientists [recently responded to claims made about the need to exploit minerals in Ontario's Ring of Fire area](#), located in one of the planet's largest and most intact peatlands.

[Our response in Northern Ontario Business](#) points out that “Ontario will only be able to boast an environmentally responsible mining sector if mining projects are based on a careful assessment of net benefits and impacts. Simplistic boosterism isn't going to solve the climate crisis or get communities onboard with new mines and roads. A solid scientific assessment of risks and benefits, and an equitable process with First Nations that respects their jurisdiction, is the only credible recipe for success.”



*Caribou are very sensitive to landscape disturbance, including new roads.
Photo: Susan Morse*

Keeping a roof over wolverines' heads



Wolverine dens can be hard to detect but can often be found under uprooted trees. Our wolverine team often has to use radio receivers to track the elusive creatures across their vast territories and to monitor activity in dens. Photos: WCS Canada

As WCS Canada wolverine scientist Dr. Matt Scraftford [points out to CBC radio](#), when your roof starts leaking, you may have to move. And that’s what can happen when an early spring turns the insulating top blanket of snow on a wolverine den into a waterfall and mothers have to risk moving young kits to a drier spot. It’s just one example of the growing threats facing these members of the weasel family. Wolverines, Matt notes, are built for snow and cold: big furry feet, powerful jaws to crunch through frozen meat and bone, thick coats and a short stocky build to retain heat. But wolverines could well lose their “competitive advantage,” Matt notes, if winters become warmer or wetter. Then add the significant impacts of human activities, like logging, mining and roads, and the need to take steps to protect key habitats, particularly den sites, becomes even clearer. There are lots more insights into [the hidden world of wolverines in this eight minute piece that is part of a series looking at the impacts of climate change on the north](#).

Don't keep your distance

Two years into the pandemic, we have all learned about “social distancing” as well as something about its social and mental-health costs. But in [a story for the National Observer](#), our Director of National Conservation talks about another kind of distancing – our ever-increasing distancing from nature. [As Dan Kraus notes](#), too few people today have experienced the simple joys of getting dirt on their hands, mud on their shoes and leaves in their hair thanks to spending time in nature. Yet that time in nature can be immensely valuable, both in terms of its restorative effects for our health and teaching us about why nature matters. The good news is that during the pandemic, many of us got back in touch with the outdoors and felt the benefits. Now we need to [keep rebuilding our relationship with nature](#), whether it is with a regular walk in a local park or a once-in-a-lifetime canoe trip down a wild river. It will do both us and our planet a world of good.



Eyes and ears

Online community science platforms like [iNaturalist](#), [eBird](#) and [eButterfly](#) have exploded in popularity during the pandemic. With people reconnecting with the natural world, these handy apps have become a great tool for figuring out what that little brown bird in the tree is or whether that tiny flower is really a rare orchid or a common violet. But these platforms are also becoming increasingly useful research tools due to the reams and reams of data they now contain thanks to the explorations of nature enthusiasts.



WCS scientist Peter Soroye checks out the Aylmer Wildlife Management Area, which has been designated as a [Key Biodiversity Area](#) in Southwestern Ontario.

[In a great new piece in the Narwhal](#), WCS Canada Key Biodiversity Areas scientist Peter Soroye talks about his enthusiasm for these community science platforms and how they can be used to advance conservation efforts.

Whether it is understanding where species are in near-urban landscapes or recording sightings in places

few people ever get to, these platforms can provide valuable insights into how species are faring, he notes, and can also help advance scientific studies with richer data sets.

Taking the heat off biodiversity as the Prairies warm

WCS scientists spend a lot of time in some of the remotest corners of Canada, working to improve protection for our remaining big wild spaces and wildlife. But that doesn't mean they aren't also thinking about what is happening in their own backyards and urban environments. Dr. Chrystal Mantayka-Pringle [recently talked to CBC](#) about how people can help wildlife right in their own neighbourhood cope with climate change, including by creating more natural habitat in their yards. Just by sharing space with nature, we can all make a difference, even in areas we perceive as less “wild” but which are often surprisingly rich in biodiversity, she points out.

A bird in the hand



A WCS Canada researcher holds a recaptured blackpoll warbler carrying a tiny geolocator backpack. Photo: Hilary Cooke/WCS Canada.

Finding one particular songbird in a vast area of boreal forest is like finding a needle in a haystack. Fortunately for our scientists, when it comes to re-locating tiny blackpoll warblers outfitted with geolocator tags, we are helped by the fact that many of these birds return to the exact same spot every spring. And that loyalty to place is helping us to unlock the mysteries of these birds amazing migratory journeys – up to 20,000 km roundtrip every year!

Heading out to boreal forests in Yukon in spring, the team sets up its nets and waits. “It’s agonizing because you’re waiting for 12 months before you even know whether the birds come back,” WCS

scientist Dr. Hilary Cooke [told Audubon Magazine recently](#). But come back they do (although in steadily decreasing numbers) and Dr. Cooke and her team have played an important role in helping to unravel the mystery of blackpoll migration – which can also involve one of the longest open-water crossings by a songbird as well. That’s because the birds outfitted with geolocator tags have to be recaptured so that the data in the tags can be analyzed.

[As Audubon notes](#), blackpolls lengthy migration “connects vastly different ecosystems: boreal forest, open ocean, Amazon rainforest, and everywhere in between.” And they are telling us that all is not well with these systems. Like with so many other birds, blackpolls have experienced steep population declines in the past four decades.

Our Yukon team is an anchor point at one end of the global migration tracking project [described by Audubon](#) and the team’s bug-filled spring days spent recapturing these little birds are providing vital info about an amazing but, until now, largely hidden journey.

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!

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Top banner image: Common murre (Uria aalge) by mauribo/Getty Images