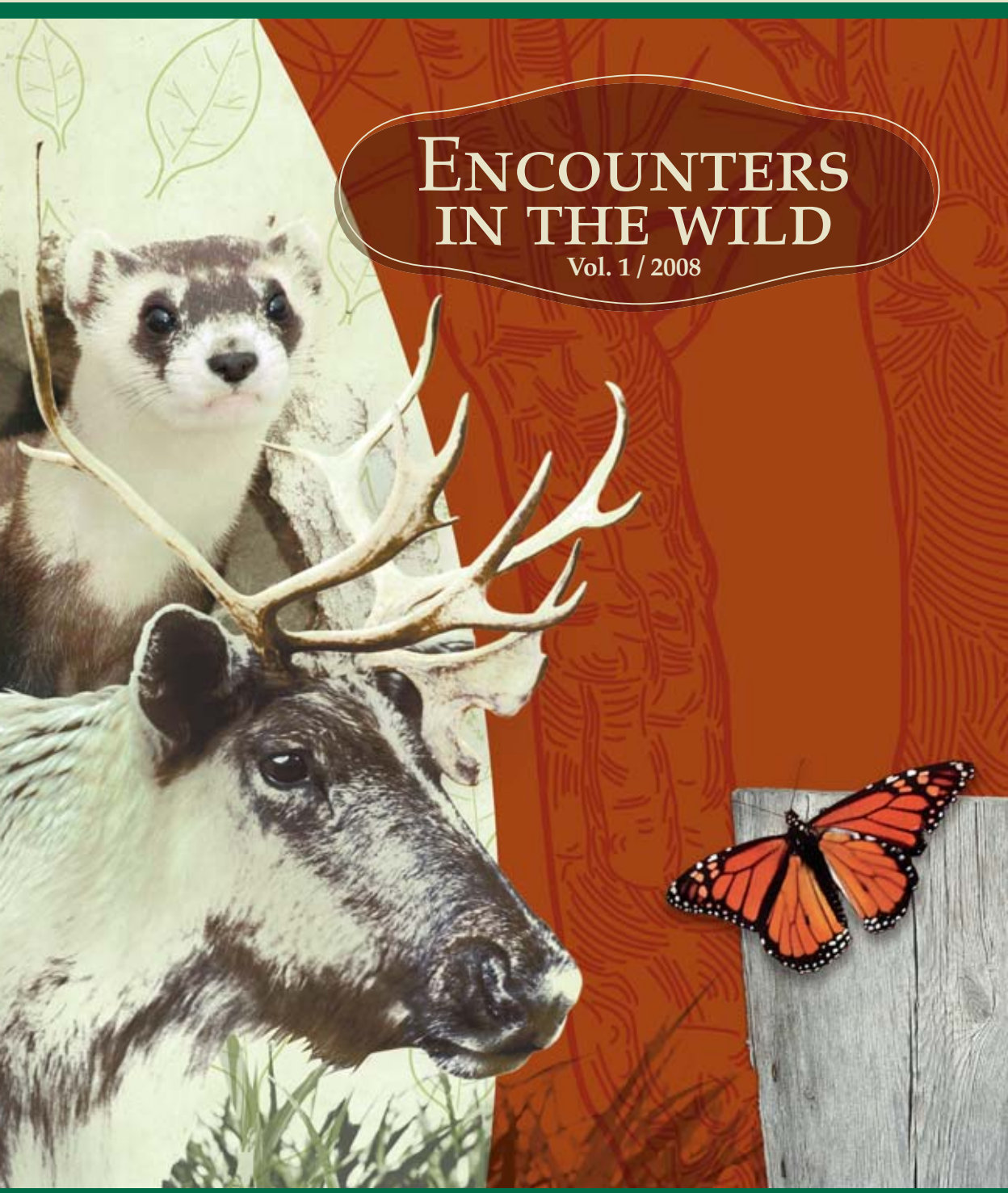

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PARKS CANADA AND SPECIES AT RISK

Under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), Parks Canada is responsible for the protection and recovery of listed species found in national parks, national marine conservation areas, national historic sites and other protected heritage areas administered by Parks Canada. Through its protected heritage areas, Parks Canada currently manages close to 265,000 square kilometres of land that is home to approximately half of the species at risk currently listed in Canada!

Parks Canada helps protect and manage species at risk and their habitats by:

- Leading and participating in recovery teams;
- Developing and supporting recovery strategies and priority actions;
- Educating Canadians on species at risk;
- Collecting detailed information on species' distribution and population status;
- Assessing how activities might affect species at risk within Parks Canada's protected heritage areas and monitoring these activities for their effects.

You can also be part of the solution! Here's how:

- You can actively help with the recovery and protection of wildlife by familiarizing yourself with the species at risk in your area and minimizing the impact you may have on its habitat.
- You can participate in the public consultations announced on the SARA Registry (**www.sararegistry.gc.ca**) and express any concerns you have about a species or its protection under SARA.
- You can help us in our recovery efforts by volunteering at our sites. Visit **www.pc.gc.ca/speciesatrisk** to learn more about the recovery actions that are taking place in a park near you!

Encounters in the Wild

Have you ever observed beluga whales in the Saguenay St. Lawrence Marine Park, or heard the cry of the Eastern wolf in La Mauricie National Park? Or perhaps you've come across footprints of the reclusive American Badger in Kootenay National Park?

It's moments like these that are the most meaningful and memorable for many Parks Canada visitors. Because at the core of many wilderness experiences are the wild animals and plants we encounter.

About half of Canada's species at risk call Parks Canada home. This is why we have a special responsibility to protect species at risk. Who knows, during your next visit to a national park, a national historic site or a national marine conservation area, you may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of one of these rare and protected species.

The following stories recount just such startling experiences between Canadians from across the country and species at risk. It is these encounters that change us and stay with us for our entire lives.

These are your stories…
about your encounters in the wild.

© MarkKyte

Neil Hartling

© Parks Canada

Brother Bear

River guide Neil Hartling plants his feet and pushes against the boulder. It doesn't budge. Three other people put their shoulders to it. The chunk of rock moves, slightly. They all smile, knowingly. The tracks in the sand show that earlier, a single grizzly had simply shoved the boulder aside.

This, says Hartling, is often how it starts. You don't see the grizzly at first, only signs of its presence. Standing on the shore of the frigid Alsek River in Kluane National Park Reserve, in southwest Yukon, the river rafters marvel at the grizzly's immense strength, and the fact that this feared top predator was after a meal of lowly grubs. It's only several days later in the trip, once they're deep inside this remote land of dramatic glaciers and snow-clad mountains, that they spot the brownish legend with the distinctive hump between its shoulders.

"When the rafters see that first grizzly, I can see that it resounds to their core," says Hartling. "At that moment, when they turn and they look at you, it's partially with a grin, and partially with a look of awe on their faces. It's a moment of arrival: , 'This is why we're here.' The grizzly is the symbol that people associate with the ultimate in pristine wilderness."

It's also why he's there. Over the past 25 years, he's guided dozens of rafting and canoe trips down the Yukon's wild rivers. And in the process, he's encountered more than 100 grizzlies. Now they're like kin – both the grizzlies and Hartling require large expanses of wild space for their survival.

Hartling is acutely aware that his presence in grizzly country – even just floating through it – is a fine balance. Generally, grizzlies and people don't mix. The plains grizzly, once king of the prairies from Manitoba to the foothills of the Rockies, was driven to extinction by the increasing spread of farms and towns. Today, the Northwest grizzlies roam the wilds of Alberta and British Columbia in the south, and north into the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. But they're continually being killed by humans and squeezed out of living space. For all their brawny strength, grizzlies won't cross major roads. The man-made thoroughfares divide their habitat into ever-smaller chunks, and also bring hunters and prospectors into their territory – pushing the grizzlies deeper into what's left of the wilds. Now considered a species at risk, Canada's approximately 30,000 grizzlies are classified as a species of "special concern." In other words, one to watch.

When he's in grizzly territory, Hartling is always watching for them. That, he says, is the key to enjoying sightings rather than conflicts with *Ursus arctos horriblis*.

"Simple bear-safety procedures really do work," says Hartling, and he follows them religiously.

As a result, in almost three decades he's never had a run-in with a grizzly. Instead, he feels he's developed a kind of long-distance friendship.

"I really enjoy watching sows with their cubs. It's extremely touching," says Hartling. "Usually what we see is like a human mom in the kitchen before dinner. The cubs are playing around while the mom is trying to go about her adult life, always with a keen eye out for her cubs."

Inevitably, the mother will catch wind of the rafters and signal her cubs to skedaddle.

"Her behaviour towards us is the kind of fearful behaviour a human would have about a bear," notes Hartling.

While it would always be nice to watch the bears longer, Hartling is glad to see them gracefully lumber into the bush. He knows that theirs is a friendship that only works with distance. As the rafters speak in awed tones of what they've seen, Hartling glances down the Alsek River valley, deeper into grizzly country.

"Whenever I see a grizzly, I can't help but remember that it's all about habitat," he says. "There are fewer and fewer areas in our country where there's enough remote territory that grizzlies and humans can live without conflict."

And so, Hartling and the other rafters continue downriver, filled with the spirit of the bear.

Safety in Grizzly Country

In grizzly territory, the key to safety, for both you and the bears, is to avoid surprise close encounters. Here's how:

- **Make lots of noise and travel in a group**. Let bears know you're there so that they have time to flee.
- **Don't camp in natural bear travel ways**. For example, on a river avoid the narrow shoal between the river and a cliff.
- **Never approach a bear**. Always maintain a distance of at least 100 metres.

© Parks Canada - photo O. Schmidt

Brad Dixon

© Parks Canada

Home On the Range, Again

Brad Dixon stops his red four-wheeler alongside the barbed wire fence and peers out across an expanse of tinder-dry grasslands. He's looking for a heifer separated from the herd. Sixty black, beady eyes stare back at him. Overhead, a ferruginous hawk's screech breaks the impromptu staring match – the black-tailed prairie dogs dip and dive into the closest holes and out of the raptor's reach. For anyone else, it would be a day to remember in prairie wildlife paradise. For Dixon, it's just another workday on his Diamond T Ranch.

Visitors from around the world come to Grasslands National Park in southern Saskatchewan to see the semi-desert landscape and its who's who of prairie species at risk: burrowing owls, sage grouse and the crowd-pleasing colonies of prairie dogs. For Dixon, these are the animals who share his home and ranch: 11,000 hectares of mixed-grass prairie, completely surrounded by Grasslands National Park.

Soon, there could be another rare species in the mix – the legendary black-footed ferret. The house cat-sized carnivore is one of the most endangered mammals in North America. It was 1937 when the last wild black-footed ferret was spotted in Canada. For decades, these predators were thought to be extinct, wiped out – like the plains grizzly bear – by prairie settlement.

But in 1981, something amazing happened: a farm dog in Montana arrived home with a black-footed ferret in its mouth. The dog had found a surviving black-footed ferret population of about 120 animals. Some of these ferrets were trapped for a captive breeding program – the equivalent of a species on artificial life support. Starting in the 1990s, the captive-bred descendants of those ferrets were re-introduced to the wild in Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota. Now, Canada could be on the verge of a historic re-introduction of these small prairie hunters involving captive-bred ferrets from the Toronto Zoo.

Dixon's ranch would be key to the reintroduction's success. Black-footed ferrets hunt only one prey: prairie dogs. The ferrets even use the prairie dog burrows as nests. Second only to the Park, Dixon's ranch is home to Canada's largest population of prairie dogs. There are more than 100,000 of them here. Presently, the rancher is the only private citizen on the federal government's black-footed ferret recovery team.

"This is a way I can show the Canadian public that as a rancher I might not fit their stereotype," he says. "We're not here to hurt species, we're here to feed our families

and run a business. I enjoy having this piece of property be as it was 100 years ago. To have all these species that no one else has is a feather in my cap. It means I'm doing it right."

For Dixon, the notion of another species at risk taking up residence on his land is only an extension of the complex mix of people, livestock and wild animals that is, and has long been, the texture of his daily life.

"I remember being about five years old and going out with a university student onto the ranch to videotape the sage grouse's legendary mating dance," says Dixon, recounting the sight of the male's chest puffed-up near to bursting to display a shield of short blue feathers.

Indeed, Dixon's a rare breed himself – as is his way of life. Grasslands National Park was created in the 1980s through the purchase of private ranchland. Today, Dixon's closest neighbour, a rancher in his 80s, lives five kilometres away. If this fellow rancher sells his land to the Park, then Dixon's closest neighbour will be a 20-kilometre drive from the Diamond T Ranch. The nearest town is across the border in Montana.

The ranch's spread is arid land in which every possible acre counts. In the spring, Dixon's herd of 500 Red Angus-Hereford-cross cattle compete with the prairie dogs for foraging rights to the lush, week-long burst of snow-fed green grass that carpets the land before it dries out, brittle and brown.

So why does Dixon stay, when so many others have moved on to cities and desk jobs? The land is in his blood, he says.

"I find it very hard to think of moving away from this place. My wife and I have talked about it. But it almost becomes part of you. It's a good way of life. It's nice to have this kind of elbow room."

Dixon's grandfather bought the ranch in 1928. His father married the hired man's daughter. Now, Dixon is carrying on their legacy.

He says there's a wildness to the life here, the independence of being your own boss, of being tied to the sky, the weather, just like the animals are. It's something that might be hard for those who live in cities – the vast majority of Canadians – to really understand.

But it's exactly the kind of elbow room the black-footed ferret also needs. Once, the ferrets and prairie dogs could be found from the southern Canadian prairies all the way to Mexico. Today, only about two percent of their wild prairie habitat survives.

Rounding up the heifer to bring her safely back to the herd, Brad Dixon knows that, after an 80-year absence, he might also be helping to bring the black-footed ferret home to Saskatchewan.

Return of the Bison

The black-footed ferret won't be the first animal re-introduced into Grasslands National Park. In December 2005, after a 120-year absence, plains bison were brought back to the area. Prior to European settlement, the prairies were home to millions of free-roaming bison. The re-introduced bison came from Elk Island National Park's well-established herd. Now, a herd of about 100 animals is once again at home on the open plains of southern Saskatchewan.

Marie-Claude Charbonneau

Gift of the Monarch

She looked up, sunlight filtering through the trees, and listened. The sky was blue blue blue. A slight breeze. But the sound wasn't the wind in the treetops. It was different – a kind of quiet roar. That's when Marie-Claude Charbonneau understood just how many butterflies there were. She was hearing the beating of *millions* of monarch wings.

The El Rosario sanctuary in the mountains of northeastern Mexico is one of only about 12 permanent over-wintering sites that make up the Monarch Butterfly Biodiversity Reserve. Each year, the entire North American population from the Rockies east (there's a separate western population) migrates en-masse to this 56,000-hectare area – about the size

© Parks Canada

of Toronto – of the Mexican highlands. Tens of millions of monarchs blanket the oyamel firs, turning each tree into a pulsing mass of orange and black.

It was here that the 16-year-old found herself, a fellow Canadian traveller joining the fluttering royalty of the insect world. Ten years later, Charbonneau says the experience of sharing the monarchs' incredible journey gave her wings of a sort – it opened her to the world.

The Gatineau, Quebec-area teenager was part of a unique monarch-inspired student exchange. Led by the Canadian Museum of Nature, this program was built on the fact that the monarch's survival requires co-operation and care at both ends of its migratory route. A dozen Canadian and Mexican teens spent a week in each another's countries, learning about their different cultures and their shared journey with the monarchs.

After spending a day in the noise and pollution of Mexico City, Charbonneau and the rest of the teens in her group boarded pickups to visit the butterflies. As the trucks climbed into the eastern mountains of Michoacan State,

the roads turned from paved to packed dirt. In villages, laughing children chased the vehicles. Higher in the mountains, they saw people cutting down the fir trees.

Finally, they arrived at a place that seemed to be all butterfly.

"The monarchs cover everything, not just the trees. There are also injured and dead butterflies all over the ground," says Charbonneau. "On a spiritual level, it made me aware of the awesome power of life."

And of life's fragility, she says.

Although they number in the millions, the monarchs' famous migration – the farthest of any insect – is threatened. This makes it the only species at risk protected for its behaviour. This iconic butterfly's population levels naturally go through dramatic ups and downs. Tough winter conditions can almost wipe them out. During the past several decades, their numbers have plunged by as much as 90 percent in bad years. Then, with a couple of good breeding seasons, the population bounces back.

The concern now is that the long-term odds are being stacked against these international travellers. In Mexico, their winter habitat, though officially protected, is illegally logged. In Canada, monarch butterflies and caterpillars feed on only one plant: milkweed. But the plant is banned as a weed in many Canadian towns and cities – and sprayed with herbicide by farmers, municipal workers and homeowners.

Not in Charbonneau's backyard, though. In Mexico, she worked in an oyamel fir tree plantation, helping restore the monarch's winter refuge. Now, at the other end of the

butterfly's journey, she's created a tiny refuge of her own. Beside the swimming pool is a special wild area full of milkweed – and monarchs.

"When I see a monarch there, it's not just the butterfly," she says. "It reminds me of all the sounds, smells and sights of its winter home in Mexico. Those are unforgettable."

And for Charbonneau, the monarch is also something more than a memory of a captivating time in a far-off place. The butterfly's return each year is a reminder of how we're intimately connected to a world beyond our immediate surroundings. It's a global awareness she brings to work every day. As an employment counselor in a small Quebec city, she helps refugees and recent immigrants, many of them from Latin America, find their way in a new land.

Monarch Spotting

One of the best places in Canada to see monarchs en-masse is in Point Pelee National Park. Early every autumn, thousands of monarchs pass through the Park on their epic 3,000-kilometre flight to Mexico. Why Point Pelee? As the butterflies search for the shortest point to cross Lake Erie, Point Pelee's shape funnels the monarchs to this tip of land. If the weather is cold, the monarchs will roost in trees near the tip and wait for warmer temperatures and more favourable winds to cross the lake.

© Parks Canada - photo H. Dempsey

Stopping for Caribou

Central Manitoba, 1959 – In the pre-dawn winter darkness, Ellen boarded a Grey Goose Lines bus with the other bleary-eyed passengers. She chose a seat and settled in for the 16-hour trip from Flin Flon to Winnipeg. Heading south down Highway 10, the bus's headlights formed a sparkling tunnel of light in the fine, wind-driven snow.

The motion of the wheels over the road lulled some of the passengers back to sleep. Ellen's thoughts, however, drifted softly from the Christmas she'd spent at home to the classmates she'd soon see again at boarding school in Winnipeg. Suddenly, the bus jerked to a stop. The motor went silent.

Ellen leaned her head into the aisle, along with other passengers craning their necks, to see what was happening.

"Everyone come up to the front of the bus," the driver called softly. "You're going to see something not many people ever see, and you might never see it again."

At the front of the bus, Ellen stood and peered out the windshield. First, she saw only snow. And then, there they were – less than a bus-length away, snow swirling around them, their thick brown fur and antlers growing clearer in the dawn light – a herd of woodland caribou.

Today, the fabled woodland caribou, the emblem on the back of Canada's 25-cent coin, is a species at risk. These deer-like animals live in Canada's boreal forests and mountain regions from Newfoundland in the east to British Columbia in the west, to the Northwest Territories in the north. Unlike Canada's more northerly barren ground caribou, which number in the tens of thousands and are known for their legendary migrations across vast stretches of tundra, the woodland caribou are homebodies. They live in small groups and stay in their home territories. In Manitoba, there are 10 distinct populations of woodland caribou. They range in size from the approximately 30 members of the tiny William Lake group just north of Lake Winnipeg, to the largest grouping, the Atikaki-Berens population of about 400 animals, based east of Lake Winnipeg and into Ontario.

The bus driver levered the bus door open. The passengers stood still and silent as frigid Arctic air seeped in. *Click, click, click* – the caribous' tendons made a distinctive clicking sound as they walked. Ellen counted the caribou as the herd crossed the road. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty. There were larger ones with antlers, smaller ones without, some calves tagging along behind their mothers. Then, like the closing of a dream, the last caribou disappeared into the dense forest beside the highway, searching for another site to browse lichen among the black spruce and tamarack trees.

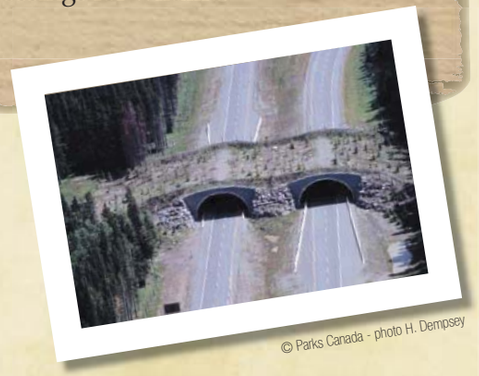
Ellen returned to her seat, and looked out her window, squinting in the hope of maybe catching a final glimpse of the caribou. The only movement beyond the window was the swirling snow that filled the air.

Now, almost 45 years later and living in Toronto, just the memory of those ghost-like caribou causes Ellen to pause.

"I will never forget that incident," says Ellen Herie. "I'll always be grateful to that driver for giving us that once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Roads and Wildlife – A Deadly Mix

Across Canada, roads are one of the main threats to species at risk and wildlife in general. As a result, Parks Canada is leading the charge in finding ways to help wildlife safely cross roads. Banff National Park, for example, has created the world's largest network of *ecopassages* – underpasses, bridges and tunnels that provide safe road crossings for wildlife.



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SHARE YOUR ENCOUNTERS IN THE WILD!

From taking a walk in a local park to living in the great outdoors, we all have our stories to share – we'd love to hear yours! We're looking for your tales of experiences with Canada's species at risk. Whether the experience was thrilling, intriguing, or funny – here's your chance to share your encounter with other Canadians.

Go to **www.pc.gc.ca/speciesatrisk** to:

- Read and share stories
- Search for species at risk found in protected areas near you
- Browse through our photo collection
- Learn facts about our featured wildlife
- Play games in our Youth Zone Adventure section

Your next encounter may just start there!