The Wapusk Management Board

Wapusk National Park is managed by a 10-member board made up of representatives of Canada, Manitoba, the Town of Churchill, York Factory First Nation and Fox Lake Cree Nation. The Board advises the Minister responsible for Parks Canada on the planning, management and operation of the park. The work of the Board reflects the philosophy, expressed in Wapusk’s Park Establishment Agreement, that people are Keepers of the Land.

We want to hear from you!

Parks Canada and The Wapusk Management Board would appreciate any comments about this issue of Wapusk News, or suggestions for future issues.

Your name:___________________________________
Your phone number or e:mail address:________________
___________________________________________
Your comments:________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

Send your feedback to:
Wapusk National Park of Canada
P.O. Box 127, Churchill, MB, R0B 0E0
Telephone: 204-675-8863. You are also invited to bring your comments to the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Churchill, Manitoba, or send us an e:mail at: wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca

Paddling on the Owl River: Jill Larkin and Heather Stewart

Trip down remote Owl River “For The Birds”

David Britton
Acting Superintendent:
Wapusk National Park and Manitoba North National Historic Sites

This year marked the first year of a collaboration between Parks Canada and the Manitoba Breeding Bird Atlas (MBBA). The MBBA is an ambitious five-year project to engage citizens in documenting the distribution and abundance of all breeding birds throughout the entire province of Manitoba. The project is supported by Bird Studies Canada and a variety of government, not-for-profit and private sector partners. Through this collaboration, Parks Canada gets important information about the breeding birds of Wapusk National Park (NP) and the MBBA gets support to access the logistically challenging park to collect data for the Atlas. This year the collaboration took the form of an exciting canoe/atlassing trip down the remote Owl River in the south-central part of Wapusk NP from June 15th to 25th.

The trip began when Parks Canada staff took the train south to the Herchmer siding where they met up with volunteers from the MBBA who had arrived from Thompson. The starting group was made up of Heather Stewart and Jill Larkin from Parks Canada; Christian Artuso, coordinator of the MBBA, and volunteers David Raitt, Martin Scott and Judith King. Halfway through the trip a helicopter rendez-vous allowed for a resupply of food and Heather and Judith were replaced by volunteer Denis Funk and myself. Putting in where the Owl River crosses the railway line, the group began its 100 km river journey crossing into Wapusk NP about 15km east of Herchmer. Close to the rail line, the habitat is a mix of northern boreal forest and regenerating burn areas, but as the river winds toward the coast, this gives way to a thin band of trees along the river that conceals an expanse of tundra made up of peat plateaus and sedge fens. continued on page 2...
As the habitat changes, so do the birds encountered: forest species like Tennessee Warbler, Wilson’s Warbler and White-throated Sparrow on the upper parts of the river give way to tundra breeders like Smith’s Longspur, Horned Lark and an array of shorebirds including Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper and American Golden Plover. Other interesting bird sightings included the southern strays, Cedar Waxwing and Northern Mockingbird, and several pairs of Golden Eagles, a species not yet documented to breed in Manitoba. There were also a number of noteworthy mammal sightings including caribou, moose, a family of river otters and a wolf feeding on a bull moose carcass on the shoreline.

Each day followed an established rhythm: get up at 3:00 am to grab a quick bite to eat and be ready to start “point count” surveys by 3:30 am. A point count is a standardized way to survey for breeding birds. True to its name, it involves standing at a point and counting all of the birds that you see and hear during a five minute period. While some knowledge of bird song is required, it is a very simple and effective technique to gather data on bird diversity and relative abundance.

Each team would complete 15 point counts with each point needing to be at least 300 meters from the last. On average, it would take 3 to 4 hours to complete the counts, and you would end up covering up to 8 kilometres on the ground. Following the point counts we would meet back at camp for (second) breakfast, then break camp and canoe 15 to 20 kilometres, navigating the frequent small rapids that dot the Owl River, to the next survey point, where we would make camp to be ready for surveys the next morning.

Eventually, the trip concluded with a two-day stay at Parks Canada’s fenced compound near the mouth of the Owl River. The bunks in the shed there seemed quite a luxury after nights of sleeping in tents. After a couple of days surveying around this area and an enjoyable hike to the shores of Hudson Bay (even though the tide was out and we couldn’t actually see the water), the group flew out by helicopter, back to Churchill.

One of the goals of the trip was to document Species at Risk in Wapusk NP. Park Management has identified four species listed under Schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act in the park, all of them birds: Olive-sided Flycatcher, Common Nighthawk, Rusty Blackbird and Yellow Rail. All four species were recorded on the trip, three of them inside the park. Common Nighthawks were observed in burn areas in the south-western corner of the park. Rusty Blackbirds proved to be common and widespread and were observed daily both on the river corridor and inland.

Yellow Rails, a secretive sparrow-sized marsh bird were searched for in some promising-looking inland sedge fens, but we didn’t find any in these locations. Surveying for Yellow Rails is always fun – they call from wetlands, mainly at night, and their call sounds like two small stones being tapped together. As a result, the best way to detect them is to simulate their call by – you guessed it – tapping two small stones together! This technique proved to be successful in the coastal sedge fens located between the Owl River compound and Hudson Bay, where a several rails responded to our imitations of their calls. In addition we also recorded one each of Horned Grebe and Short-eared Owl, both considered as species of special concern.

This is the first year of the multi-year agreement between Parks Canada and the MBBA. Plans for future years are already being developed and may include surveys along the Broad River, in the Nester 1 – Cape Churchill area and in the little-known southern edges of Wapusk NP.
Parks Canada Centennial Celebrations in the Churchill Area
Summer 2011

Karyne Jolicoeur-Funk
Interpretation Coordinator: Wapusk National Park

The local community, along with visitors and staff, helped make Parks Canada’s 100th Birthday a memorable one, with multiple events, great weather and wonderful activities throughout the summer.

Canada Day & Bay Dip
Over 100 people came to celebrate Parks Canada’s Centennial by taking a 9:00 a.m. dip into Hudson Bay. This year, the weather was beautiful and, rather than being ICE COLD, the water was simply COLD. First prize went to the fastest team and second prize to the team with the best costumes. Winners went home with trophies, Parks Canada water bottles, York Factory National Historic Site (NHS) tote bags and, of course a Centennial T-shirt! Later in the day, the Parks Canada float, depicting a York Boat, cruised the streets of Churchill in the parade and won a prize for “Best Float”.

Parks Day – July 16th
More than 250 people enjoyed our Parks Day Centennial celebration on the shores of Hudson Bay behind the Community Complex. The event was a great success thanks to the collaboration of multiple community groups: Boreal Gardens, Churchill Métis Local, Frontiers North Adventures, Town of Churchill, Families R Us and staff of the Children’s Centre all helped in offering food, entertainment, games and activities. Events included a Wapusk Discovery Table, jam-making, tea & bannock, live fiddle music, fire-starting, artefact table from Prince of Wales Fort and York Factory National Historic Sites, name chiselling, cookie decorating, games and face painting.

Species at Risk Act
What is Parks Canada’s role?
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!
Laura Curtis
Assiniboine Park Conservancy

A gateway to Churchill and Wapusk National Park in the middle of Winnipeg? That is the plan currently in development for the new Journey to Churchill exhibit at the Assiniboine Park Zoo. As part of the Assiniboine Park Conservancy’s overall $200 million redevelopment plan, approximately 10 acres of the zoo will be devoted to the Journey to Churchill exhibit which will feature the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre (IPBCC), the Aurora Borealis theatre, an underwater viewing area for seals and polar bears, as well as a new restaurant, gift shop, and children’s play area. The IPBCC, which is scheduled to open late fall 2011, will serve a variety of functions, including: offering public education about polar bears and the impact of climate change on their survival; housing research programs focused on northern wildlife; and housing and transitioning orphaned cubs when deemed necessary by Manitoba Conservation. Through amendments to the Polar Bear Protection Act the IPBCC can receive polar bear cubs that are found within the Polar Bear Alert Program Area control zones and which would otherwise not survive in the wild. These bears will be moved to the IPBCC and from there to other facilities to act as ambassadors for Churchill, Manitoba and the species. Advising the management of the IPBCC is a Committee of eight stakeholders including Wapusk National Park. Marilyn Peckett, Superintendent, Manitoba Field Unit, Parks Canada, is the first Chairperson of this committee. “As the oldest parks service in the world, Parks Canada has amassed a wealth of knowledge and experience, offering proven international leadership in conservation,” says Marilyn. “We are honoured to collaborate in an advisory role with the IPBCC and share the mutual objective of connecting people to our special places, like Wapusk National Park.” The Journey to Churchill exhibit is scheduled to open in October 2013 and is designed to recreate a journey from the boreal forest to the coast of Hudson Bay. The journey starts at Wapusk National Park, a section that exhibits animals typically found in Wapusk including caribou, arctic fox, snowy owl, and polar bears.

New Research Centre and Exhibit at Assiniboine Park Zoo will support International Polar Bear Conservation efforts

Wapusk National Park Management Board meets at Broad River

David Britton
Acting Superintendent:
Wapusk National Park and Manitoba North National Historic Sites

From August 11th to 13th this year, the Wapusk National Park Management Board met for the first time inside Wapusk National Park (NP). The Management Board was created when the park was established in 1996. Its purpose is to ensure that the communities and government jurisdictions that supported the creation of the park continue to have ongoing input into its management by providing advice to the minister responsible for Parks Canada. The Board is made up of representatives from the Town of Churchill, York Factory First Nation, Fox Lake Cree Nation, the Province of Manitoba and the Federal Government. The meeting took place at the Parks Canada multi-use fenced compound located on the banks of the Broad River, about six kilometres from the Hudson Bay coast in Wapusk NP. Built in 2010, the compound consists of a cabin and shed with a water/wastewater facility, surrounded by a protective fence to keep the occupants secure from polar bears. The facility provides park staff and researchers with a safe base of operations while working in the national park. While use of the cabin facilities is reserved for park management purposes, the fenced compound offers new possibilities for safe camping for visitors to Wapusk NP. A similar compound was also built further south in the park, near the mouth of the Owl River.

This was the Board’s first opportunity to see the facilities at Broad River. Having them experience the multi-use compound first-hand was important because of its potential to offer new visitor opportunities and contribute to increased visitation to the park. The Board spent part of the meeting discussing possible future visitor activities such as canoeing, dogsledding and hiking. The Board also discussed the next steps in the process that will lead to the review of the Wapusk NP Management Plan during 2012 and received updates from Parks Canada staff on the research and visitor activities that took place in the park during the 2011 operating season.

While staying at Broad River, the Board was able to experience the land and its wildlife both on foot and by canoe. Highlights for the Board members included two fairly close observations of wolves near the compound, a couple of very distant polar bears and a very enjoyable hike from the compound towards the Hudson Bay coast that included observations of shorebirds and swans, fox and wolf dens and a polar bear day bed.
PARKS CANADA WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU

Public and Aboriginal Consultations on the proposed National Parks of Canada Wild Animals Regulations

Parks Canada guides the activities in Canada's national parks through various policies and legislation in order to achieve its mandate to preserve, protect and present Canada's natural and cultural heritage. As Canada grows and evolves, changes in circumstance sometimes merit a review of existing legislation. The development of new national parks and national park reserves in Canada's North has invited a review of existing legislation to meet the special circumstances of the northern wilderness environment. An important part of the process of changing legislation is to provide the opportunity for people who will potentially be affected by the changes, and other interested Canadians, to give feedback on the proposed changes.

What is the purpose of the proposed Regulations?
The proposed Regulations are intended to protect all wild animals and their habitat, and to regulate the use, possession and transportation of firearms and other weapons. The proposed Regulations respect obligations under various land claim agreements, impact and benefit agreements, and park establishment agreements such as the Wapusk Park Establishment Agreement (April, 1996). The Regulations also enhance visitor safety in national parks where polar bears are present by allowing certain categories of park users to carry and use firearms for their protection and the protection of others.

How do the proposed Regulations apply to Wapusk National Park?
Parks Canada understands the safety risk associated with activities in Wapusk National Park as a result of the presence of polar bears. If you wish to learn more about how the proposed Regulations may affect your activities in the park, please contact Sheldon Kowalchuk, Resource Conservation Manager, Wapusk National Park at (204) 675-8865, or sheldon.kowalchuk@pc.gc.ca.

Why are new Regulations needed?
The current National Parks Wildlife Regulations were in place prior to the establishment of most northern national parks and national park reserves, and do not reflect the unique northern context, particularly in relation to the presence of polar bears.

You are invited to submit your comments in writing by mail, fax, email or online. If you would like to submit comments or suggestions electronically, you can access the online comment form at www.parkscanada.gc.ca/consultations-animals. You may also download the online comment form and send it to the following address:

Consultations
Parks Canada Agency
Legislation and Policy Branch
25 Eddy Street, 4th floor (25-4-Q)
Gatineau QC K1A 0M5
Phone: 1-888-773-8888
Fax: 819-997-0835
E-mail: consultations.animaux-animals@pc.gc.ca.

Deadline for receipt of comments is December 31, 2011. Feedback received during this consultation period will be incorporated into the proposed Regulations as appropriate. Information on how the proposed Regulations were amended following the consultations will be available at www.parkscanada.gc.ca.

The journey continues through the Gateway to the Arctic Building that will showcase the marine mammals of the region and the Aboriginal and northern communities of Manitoba. Visitors will then proceed past a larger enclosure for polar bears and finish this part of their zoo experience in a gathering place that is meant to evoke Churchill itself. Throughout the entire journey there will be elements that entire zoo visitors to visit the North and see the animals and landscape in person. "Our goal is to connect people with Churchill using this unique exhibit so they will be able to get an up close and personal experience," says Tim Sinclair-Smith, Director of Zoological Operations. "We hope to educate the public by telling a story that will give them some insight into the wildlife and environment of the region and the challenges they face".

The entire exhibit is also designed to get visitors to think about their actions and make positive changes that will help preserve northern ecosystems. This will be done through interpretive materials that highlight current concerns about climate change and habitat degradation. The exhibit also draws attention to research that is being conducted within the zoo, at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, and at field sites within Wapusk. Additional research plans are under development to include sea ice studies in collaboration with the University of Manitoba, studies of animal behaviour, and development of non-invasive methods to learn about wild populations. "Among other things, the IPBCC and Journey to Churchill present an amazing opportunity to develop research techniques that can then be used in the field," says Stephen Petersen, Head of Conservation and Research for the Assiniboine Park Zoo. "In the past I have been involved in research that used non-invasively collected scat samples to learn about animal movements. In the zoo we could validate some of these methods before spending a lot of money to implement the technique in the field."

This re-development is anticipated to make the Assiniboine Park and the Assiniboine Park Zoo a source of pride for all Manitobans, an international centre for conservation and research, and a starting place for visitors to explore the natural wonders of Manitoba. Assiniboine Park Zoo’s goal as a result of the re-development plans is not only to attract more visitors to the zoo but also to promote the natural treasures that can be found by visiting Wapusk National Park and Churchill.
People and the Landscape of Wapusk National Park
An Archaeological Expedition in Wapusk

David Hems
Cultural Resource Manager: Manitoba Field Unit, Parks Canada

Wapusk National Park (NP) is renowned for its biological diversity. It is perhaps because of this that it is also a landscape that has been travelled and made use of by people for thousands of years.

Parks Canada protects and presents cultural resources in National Parks and National Historic Sites across the country, and Wapusk NP is no exception. Key to this challenge is finding and studying the cultural resources that are found in the park. As Parks Canada explores the introduction of new visitor facilities and activities in Wapusk NP, it is important that its cultural resources are identified, that they are protected if potentially threatened and that the stories surrounding these reminders of the past are told.

As part of this effort, in July, 2011, Parks Canada archaeologists conducted a research expedition into Wapusk NP to add to our knowledge of the park’s cultural resources.

A major focus of the expedition was to record and map in greater detail the largest archaeological site that has been discovered in the park so far – known as 20K26. This site is located on a beach ridge and contains a range of cultural feature such as cairns (markers on the landscape), caches (places where stores of supplies for travellers were buried), hunting blinds (small rock walls to conceal hunters from animals), stone hearths (places where fires were made) and tent rings (circles of stones that held down the walls of a tent). Cultural remnants such as these can give us an understanding of past human use in relation to the breathtaking landscape of Wapusk NP.

While working at the 20K26 site in 2011, we were able to identify many tent rings which had not been discovered before. In addition, we found traces of an entirely different human habitation on a lower elevation ridge to the north of the main study area, adding to our knowledge of past site use.

The differences between the main site and the newly-discovered portion of the site were striking. Parks Canada Arctic archaeologist Margaret Bertulli, who led the project, reasons that, based on the size of the tent rings in the main site, many of these habitations were made after the arrival of Europeans. However, the portion of the site at lower elevation may well be from an earlier period.

Interestingly, to further demonstrate the importance of the beach ridges as travel corridors through various time periods, evidence of use by Canadian and American military during the years from 1946 to 1957 is also present at the 20K26 site. These remains include mortar flights and a vehicle trail extending to the south end of the ridge. Along this trail, a tire from a military vehicle can still be seen.

During our 2011 expedition, we visited 24 archaeological sites in Wapusk NP representing a range of...
human occupations and site types. All of these sites were located along beach ridges. Besides studying 20K26, we visited areas between Klohn and Napper Lakes, along more ancient inland ridges covered in forest and moss, where we searched for early stone tools. We also recorded in detail a site near the recently-constructed Broad River fenced compound which may provide future opportunities for visitors to experience first-hand the cultural resources of Wapusk NP. Throughout the expedition, we examined a range of cultural resources, from older archaeological sites to more recent hunting and trapping cabins and research locations. All of these sites and the stories they tell are helping Parks Canada tie together ancient and modern use of the Wapusk National Park landscape by people — understanding the past as we plan for the future.

Beach Ridges as

Of great importance to past human inhabitants of Wapusk NP are the beach ridges that run roughly parallel to the coast of Hudson Bay. The gradual rising of the Hudson Bay Lowlands (60 cm–1m per century), coupled with the low elevation of the region, has left noticeable beach ridges along the eastern shore of Wapusk National Park from Cape Churchill to Broad River. As the land has slowly risen, freed from the weight of glaciers following the last ice age, wind, storms and waves have built ridges along the high tide line each year. These beach ridges are sparsely vegetated and often have ponds in the low areas between them. It is easy to imagine how these well-drained, easily travelled elevated ridges, with adjacent supplies of fresh water, would serve as important corridors for both animals and people. Another attractive feature is that many of the small rocks that make up the beach ridges contain chert, a type of quartz which was often used to make stone tools by past travellers through Wapusk NP. Adding it all up, it’s no surprise that most of the park’s archaeological sites have been found on beach ridges.

Before the advent of the modern GPS (Global Positioning System) that researchers use now, archaeologists in Wapusk NP used a variety of methods to mark the locations of their discoveries. Some of these methods were less than accurate, making it difficult for us to find these sites today. Fortunately for us, in a land so flat and devoid of vegetation, previous inhabitants had devised their own very effective method of marking and locating important sites. A number of the larger places of past human use contain cairns or markers that aided greatly in finding them. In other cases, natural land formations served the same purpose. Although not particularly large or high, these markers stand out in the environment and served as site location aids to our research team in much the same way as they must have done in the past.
Public and Aboriginal Consultations on the proposed National Parks of Canada Wild Animals Regulations

Parks Canada guides the activities in Canada’s national parks through various policies and legislation in order to achieve its mandate to preserve, protect and present Canada’s natural and cultural heritage. As Canada grows and evolves, changes in circumstance sometimes merit a review of existing legislation. The development of new national parks and national park reserves in Canada’s North has invited a review of existing legislation to meet the special circumstances of the northern wilderness environment. An important part of the process of changing legislation is to provide the opportunity for people who will potentially be affected by the changes, and other interested Canadians, to give feedback on the proposed changes.

Parks Canada wants to hear from you.

Until December 31, 2011, public and Aboriginal consultations on the proposed National Parks of Canada Wild Animals Regulations (the Regulations) are taking place. These proposed Regulations would replace the current National Parks Wildlife Regulations.

Why are new Regulations needed?

The current National Parks Wildlife Regulations were in place prior to the establishment of most northern national parks and national park reserves, and do not reflect the unique northern context, particularly in relation to the presence of polar bears.

What is the purpose of the proposed Regulations?

The proposed Regulations are intended to protect all wild animals and their habitat, and to regulate the use, possession and transportation of firearms and other weapons. The proposed Regretations respect obligations under various land claim agreements, impact and benefit agreements, and park establishment agreements such as the Wapusk Park Establishment Agreement (April, 1996). The Regulations also enhance visitor safety in national parks where polar bears are present by allowing certain categories of park users to carry and use firearms for their protection and the protection of others.

How do the proposed Regulations apply to Wapusk National Park?

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You will also find a draft version of the proposed Regulations and all relevant supporting material at www.parkscanada.gc.ca/consultations-animals.

The journey continues through the Gateway to the Arctic Building that will showcase the marine mammals of the region and the Aboriginal and northern communities of Manitoba. Visitors will then proceed past a larger enclosure for polar bears and finish this part of their zoo experience in a gathering place that is meant to evoke Churchill itself. Throughout the entire journey there will be elements that entice zoo visitors to visit the North and see the animals and landscape in person. “Our goal is to connect people with Churchill using this unique exhibit so they will be able to get an up close and personal experience,” says Tim Sinclair-Smith, Director of Zoological Operations. “We hope to educate the public by telling a story that will give them some insight into the wildlife and environment of the region and the challenges they face.” The entire exhibit is also designed to get visitors to think about their actions and make positive changes that will help preserve northern ecosystems. This will be done through interpretive materials that highlight current concerns about climate change and habitat degradation. The exhibit also draws attention to research that is being conducted within the zoo, at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, and at field sites within Wapusk. Additional research plans are under development to include sea ice studies in collaboration with the University of Manitoba, studies of animal behaviour, and development of non-invasive methods to learn about wild populations. "Among other things, the IPBCC and Journey to Churchill present an amazing opportunity to develop research techniques that can then be used in the field,” says Stephen Petersen, Head of Conservation and Research for the Assiniboine Park Zoo. “In the past I have been involved in research that used non-invasively collected scat samples to learn about animal movements. In the zoo we could validate some of these methods before spending a lot of money to implement the technique in the field.”

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Advising the management of the IPBCC is a Committee of eight people representing the zoo, the province of Manitoba, and other stakeholders including Wapusk National Park. Marilyn Peckett, Superintendent, Manitoba Field Unit, Parks Canada, is the first Chairperson of this committee. “As the oldest parks service in the world, Parks Canada has amassed a wealth of knowledge and experience, offering proven international leadership in conservation,” says Marilyn. “We are honoured to collaborate in an advisory role with the IPBCC and share the mutual objective of connecting people to the IPBCC and from there to other facilities, both in Canada and around the world.”

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The local community, along with visitors and staff, helped make Parks Canada’s 100th Birthday a memorable one, with multiple events, great weather and wonderful activities throughout the summer.

Parks Canada staff & family

Staff Celebration
Staff from the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Churchill, York Factory NHS, Prince of Wales Fort NHS and Wapusk NP, along with their families, celebrated the Centennial with a group potluck and birthday cake.

Parks Day

Parks Day – July 16th
More than 250 people enjoyed our Parks Day Centennial celebration on the shores of Hudson Bay behind the Community Complex. The event was a great success thanks to the collaboration of multiple community groups: Boreal Gardens, Churchill Métis Local, Frontiers North Adventures, Town of Churchill, Families R Us and staff of the Children’s Centre all helped in offering food, entertainment, games and activities. Events included a Wapusk Discovery Table, jam-making, tea & bannock, live fiddle music, fire-starting, artefact table from Prince of Wales Fort and York Factory National Historic Sites, name chiselling, cookie decorating, games and face painting.

Parks Canada staff & family

Parks Day – July 16th

“Parka” the Parks Canada mascot and “Buggy Bear”, the Tundra Buggy ® Adventures mascot

Canada Day & Bay Dip

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Bay Dip

Wapusk’s four listed “Species at Risk”

Common Nighthawk
Rusty Blackbird
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Yellow Rail (These birds are notoriously hard to spot and even harder to photograph)

The team reaches the Hudson Bay Coast (left to right: Jill Larkin, Christian Artuso, Martin Scott, Dave Raitt, David Britton, Denis Funk)

Species at Risk Act

What is Parks Canada’s role?

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 285,000 square kilometres of land that is home to approximately half of the species at risk currently listed in Canada!
As the habitat changes, so do the birds encountered: forest species like Tennessee Warbler, Wilson’s Warbler and White-throated Sparrow on the upper parts of the river gave way to tundra breeders like Smith’s Longspur, Horned Lark and an array of shorebirds including Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper and American Golden Plover. Other interesting bird sightings included the southern strays, Cedar Waxwing and Northern Mockingbird, and several pairs of Golden Eagles, a species not yet documented to breed in Manitoba. There were also a number of noteworthy maternal sightings including caribou, moose, a family of river otters and a wolf feeding on a bull moose carcass on the shoreline.

Each day followed an established rhythm: get up at 3:00 am to grab a quick bite to eat and be ready to start “point count” surveys by 3:30 am. A point count is a standardized way to survey for breeding birds. True to its name, it involves standing at a point and counting all of the birds that you see and hear during a five minute period. While some knowledge of bird song is required, it is a very simple and effective technique to gather data on bird diversity and relative abundance.

Each team would complete 15 point counts with each point needing to be at least 300 meters from the last. On average, it would take 3 to 4 hours to complete the counts, and you would end up covering up to 8 kilometers on the ground. Following the point counts we would meet back at camp for breakfast, then break camp and canoe 15 to 20 kilometers, navigating the frequent small rapids that dot the Owl River, to the next survey point, where we would make camp to be ready for surveys the next morning.

Eventually, the trip concluded with a two-day stay at Parks Canada’s Broad River camp to be ready for surveys the next day. After a couple of days surveying around this area and an enjoyable hike to the shore of Hudson Bay (even though the tide was out and we couldn’t actually see the water), the group flew out by helicopter, back to Churchill.

For the past four years, Parks Canada has been focused on learning more about bear-human interactions in the park. Researchers, licensed business operators and Parks Canada staff who are permitted to carry firearms in Wapusk NP are required to complete detailed bear-human interaction forms whenever they encounter a bear. Parks Canada captures all of the information on these forms in a database called “Kestrel”. This information is also provided to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to be uploaded into the Polar Bear Human Information Management System (PBHIMS). The PBHIMS is an international database which records information on interactions between humans and all species of bears, and it was developed in response to the predicted increase in interactions between humans and bears throughout the north.

From 2007 through 2010, there was an average of 10 documented cases each year in Wapusk NP where humans and bears came into close contact, and where the people involved took action to deter the bears. At this point, it is too early to draw any conclusions from these data. It is hoped that, through continuing to document these events, we will be able to learn if these interactions are increasing over time.

Sheldon Kowalchuk
Resource Conservation Manager, Wapusk National Park and Manitoba North National Historic Sites

Encountering a polar bear in Wapusk National Park (NP) can occur any time throughout the year, but the chances increase during the ice-free season when the bears are forced ashore. Polar bears often congregate along the Hudson Bay coast, and it is common to see 20-plus bears at Cape Churchill and multiple bears at various other sites inside Wapusk NP. The same coastal habitat used by polar bears is also home to research camps, which increases the chance of interactions between humans and bears. During the first three years of the park’s operation, an average of 60% of park visitors had an interaction with a polar bear. Managing these encounters is not only important for humans, but also for the bears that make their home in Wapusk NP.

Sea ice, which provides critical habitat for polar bears of the Western Hudson Bay subpopulation, is melting earlier than in the past, and it is predicted that human encounters with polar bears will be more common in the future as the bears spend more time on land. The Wapusk National Park Management Plan outlines a number of new potential visitor opportunities, and helping to ensure that visitors can experience this remote park in a safe manner is a priority, especially given the increased amount of time that bears are likely on shore.
The Wapusk Management Board

Wapusk National Park is managed by a 10-member board made up of representatives of Canada, Manitoba, the Town of Churchill, York Factory First Nation and Fox Lake Cree Nation. The Board advises the Minister responsible for Parks Canada on the planning, management and operation of the park. The work of the Board reflects the philosophy, expressed in Wapusk’s Park Establishment Agreement, that people are Keepers of the Land.

We want to hear from you!

Parks Canada and The Wapusk Management Board would appreciate any comments about this issue of Wapusk News, or suggestions for future issues.

Your name:___________________________________
Your phone number or e:mail address:________________
___________________________________________
Your comments:________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
Send your feedback to:
Wapusk National Park of Canada
P.O. Box 127, Churchill, MB, R0B 0E0
Telephone: 204-675-8863. You are also invited to bring your comments to the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Churchill, Manitoba, or send us an e:mail at: wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca

Trip down remote Owl River
“For The Birds”

David Britton
Acting Superintendent:
Wapusk National Park and Manitoba North National Historic Sites

This year marked the first year of a collaboration between Parks Canada and the Manitoba Breeding Bird Atlas (MBBA). The MBBA is an ambitious five-year project to engage citizens in documenting the distribution and abundance of all breeding birds throughout the entire province of Manitoba. The project is supported by Bird Studies Canada and a variety of government, not-for-profit and private sector partners. Through this collaboration, Parks Canada gets important information about the breeding birds of Wapusk National Park (NP) and the MBBA gets support to access the logistically challenging park to collect data for the Atlas. This year the collaboration took the form of an exciting canoe/atlassing trip down the remote Owl River in the south-central part of Wapusk NP from June 15th to 25th. The trip began when Parks Canada staff took the train south to the Herchmer siding where they met up with volunteers from the MBBA who had arrived from Thompson. The starting group was made up of Heather Stewart and Jill Larkin from Parks Canada; Christian Artuso, coordinator of the MBBA, and volunteers David Raitt, Martin Scott and Judith King. Halfway through the trip a helicopter rendez-vous allowed for a resupply of food and Heather and Judith were replaced by volunteer Denis Funk and myself. Putting in where the Owl River crosses the railway line, the group began its 100 km river journey towards the Hudson Bay Coast, crossing into Wapusk NP about 15km east of Herchmer. Close to the rail line, the habitat is a mix of northern boreal forest and regenerating burn areas, but as the river winds toward the coast, this gives way to a thin band of trees along the river that conceals an expanse of tundra made up of peat plateaus and sedge fens.

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