

# The Individual's role:

## Endangered wildlife a priority for all

BY DAVID WYLYNKO

Endangered species recovery may be traditionally seen as the mandate of governments and universities. But rural landowners and residents are also important partners in this effort. Professional biologists consider this partnership invaluable.

"It must be recognized that the recovery of a species is a broad societal goal that can't always be effectively achieved simply by wildlife agencies," said Steve Brechtel of the Alberta Department of Environmental Protection, who chairs recovery teams for the swift fox and ferruginous hawk. "The job is too big. It must include the participation of landowners and all Canadians."

### Doing their part

In Alberta, one rural couple doing their part for species at risk is Brian and Debra Berg, whose 10,000 acre farm in short-grass prairie country east of Calgary hosts the endangered burrowing owl. In 1996, the couple won the Alberta Cattle Commission provincial environmental stewardship award. Their ranching practices ensure that their cattle have limited access to riparian areas of the Red Deer River and Berry Creek. Public motorized access is limited to existing roads and trails. For the Bergs,

the best way of protecting the owl is to leave it alone, which means leaving owl nesting areas undisturbed. People often wish to traverse their property, which can lead to the owls being disturbed. "The main thing we do for the owls, is that we don't let people come and look

---

*"If the species is to survive, it has to be something the landowners really want."*

---

for them," said Debra Berg.

The Berg ranch also operates under a rest-rotation system that benefits the owl. Under the system, only a portion of their land is grazed in a given year, leaving the rest idle. Even in some areas where grazing is taking place, it occurs in fall, after young owls have been reared.

Overall, Debra Berg believes that rural Alberta landowners respect and appreciate wild species. "It is the people who live on the land who realize they have an obligation to look after the species that live among them."

Rural landowners in Ontario express a similar sentiment. In 1996, when a team of biologists requested permission to restore nesting sites for the threatened spiny softshell turtle on private property along the Sydenham and Thames rivers, most people happily gave their consent.

Biologists continued the work in 1997, and are now striking stewardship agreements with landowners to ensure the turtle habitat remains undisturbed. "It is absolutely critical that landowners cooperate because all the places on the rivers where the turtles can nest are on private land," said Michelle Fletcher of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. "If the species is to survive it has to be something the landowners really want."

### Dramatic reversal in attitude

As well, in 1996 biologists launched a two-year study examining the effects of human disturbance on the massasauga rattlesnake in Ontario's Killbear Provincial Park. During their work, researchers were pleased with the response they received from the public. Once informed about the snake, local cottagers and residents who had previously disliked rattlesnakes showed a dramatic reversal in attitude, and cooperated enthusiastically with the research.

Each year, biologists discover more species at risk whose habitat includes private land. Fostering a cooperative partnership of landowners, institutions, and Canadians at large is central to the recovery of these species. The nation's natural heritage depends on it.

*David Wylynko is a communications consultant with West Hawk Associates, editors of the Recovery newsletter.*

RECOVERY is a free newsletter providing information and views on species at risk. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the policies of Environment Canada.

Contents may be reprinted without permission, although credit would be appreciated. Anyone wishing to be put on the mailing list should send his or her name, mailing address, and language of choice to RECOVERY, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, Canada, K1A 0H3.

The newsletter is also accessible at: <http://www.ec.gc.ca/cws-scf/es/recovery/eng/index.html>

Anyone wishing to submit an article is invited to contact the editors at: [ottawa@westhawk.com](mailto:ottawa@westhawk.com) or (613) 231-6060. The editors reserve the right to determine which articles are published and to edit them for content and length.

Coordinated by the Canadian Wildlife Service. Edited and designed by West Hawk Associates.

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre SAUVEGARDE.

ISSN: 0847-0294



Environment  
Canada

Environnement  
Canada

Canadian Wildlife  
Service

Service canadien  
de la faune