
EDITORIAL

Whenever I attend Saskatchewan Natural History Society (SNHS) Board meetings, I am continually impressed with the number and quality of projects that the Society has on the go.

The December 1991 issue of *Blue Jay* contained scenes of the Athabasca Sand Dunes taken from a slide show on the dunes that was supported by the SNHS, in an effort to increase public awareness about this magnificent ecosystem. In this issue, Bernard de Vries reports on his findings on rare plants in the west block of Cypress Hills Provincial Park. This endeavour was sponsored by the SNHS in response to clear-cutting taking place in the provincial park.

It would take up too much time and space to list everything that the SNHS is involved with, but here is a sampling of activities this volunteer-driven organization is involved in.

Project Burrowing Owl began in 1987 to protect this species' nesting sites on private and public land by encouraging landowners to participate in a voluntary agreement to leave the nest sites undisturbed. In 1992, the SNHS will initiate an annual province-wide communication plan to bring the needed publicity to encourage more landowners to sign the voluntary agreements. A toll-free number (1-800-667-HOOT) is now in service so that anyone who wishes can report sightings of Burrowing Owls or request more information on how to sign up for the program.

In another ambitious study, the SNHS will examine Saskatchewan agricultural policies. In many ways, the present policies encourages the agricultural sector to destroy wildlife habitat. Saskatchewan's policy must be changed to deter subsidized environmental degradation and to encourage agricultural stewardship practices. The study will make recommendations on

how these policies could be changed for the better.

The Pasquia Hills region of the province contains a number of provincially rare plants — some of which are noteworthy western outliers of a characteristically eastern deciduous forest and others representing disjunct southern subarctic floristic elements. Due to logging operations, action is needed now to be sure of saving intact any sizable remnant of the forests and associated habitats, including the unique species of the area. SNHS is taking an inventory of rare species to ensure these are not lost under logging machinery.

The Piping Plover habitat research project proposes to investigate the breeding habitat selection by these birds in Saskatchewan. Effective techniques for measuring the suitability of nesting and feeding sites for this species will be developed. The resulting Habitat Suitability Index will greatly improve the capability of conservation agencies to locate suitable Piping Plover habitat, assess likely development impacts and design an effective conservation strategy for the species on the prairies.

All of these studies add greatly to the accumulated knowledge of the ecosystem of which we are part. Pretty impressive stuff for part-time naturalists. Reports from these studies and others that the SNHS has commissioned will appear in upcoming issues.

The September 1992 issue will be a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the *Blue Jay*. Stuart Houston has done a considerable amount of work to compile information on the early days of the *Blue Jay* and the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, the basis that has made it possible for the SNHS to do so much important work now.