



Park Post

MAY 2014



Female Brown-Headed Cowbird being monitored as part of a study in Alberta

Erin Cameron

COWBIRDS: NATIVE SPECIES OR BIRD MAFIA?

Cory Olson – GRPF Grasslands Ecologist

Mother's day is upon us and there are good reasons why one park resident will not be celebrating. While nearly all songbirds spend considerable effort to build nests and care for offspring, the brown-headed cowbird takes a different approach. You will never find a cowbird building a nest or caring for young. They are brood parasites, reproducing by laying their eggs in the nests of other songbirds. A substantial number of host birds, seemingly unaware of the situation, incubate the cowbird egg, and then feed the hatchling until maturity.

Not surprisingly, some birds object to this uninvited guest, and use a range of tactics to deal with the intruder – such as relocating to a new nest, tossing the egg or nestling overboard, puncturing the eggs, or burying the egg in nest material. This contributes to a high mortality rate – only about 3% of the approximately 40 eggs females lay in a season result in adult cowbirds! However, some hosts do successfully raise the cowbird parasite, giving the cowbird nestling critical resources that would otherwise have fed its own offspring. Could this be a sign of diminutive bird intelligence? Not necessarily. Cowbirds who find their young being rejected often depredate the host

bird's nest, resulting in complete failure of the host's brood. Perhaps it's better to go along with what the mafia wants than risk its revenge!

Cowbirds are a common site in Glenbow Ranch, and you might have guessed that these birds are often found near the cows. They seem to live a life that could be envied – relaxing in the warm prairie sun, while taking a leisurely ride on the back of a cow. Cows are not only great perches, but the insects they attract and stir up while foraging provides a bountiful food source to complement their diet of seeds (and bird eggs). Historically, it was the bison that provided this taxi and catering service.

Should we revile these nest intruders? Perhaps not. Cowbirds, after all, are a native species in the grassland and parkland regions and have co-existed with other songbirds for millennia. Their range and numbers have increased over the last few years in response to habitat degradation and the expansion of agriculture, which has created problems for some other native birds. However, perhaps this is a sign that we need to do a better job of protecting native grassland ecosystems.



APRIL AGAIN

Heather Simonds

*April again! the willow wands are yellow
Rose-red the brambles that the passing wind knows,
Comes a robin's note like the note of a 'cello,
And across the valley, the calling of the crows,-*

'April again!' -Virna Sheard

Are you excited about the arrival of spring, or, like most prairie and foothills dwellers, merely cautiously optimistic?

At Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park, March closed the door leaving more than a skiff of snow behind for April to sop up. With ice blocks on the Bow, lingering snowdrifts along the fence lines, and too much brown everywhere, it is still hard to uncover signs of spring awakenings on the western Canadian prairies.

For weeks now, we've seen the robin and heard the crows calling across the land that, "April is here again". There is no doubt spring is in the air and, if you care to jaunt down Yodel Loop closer to the Bow River, by now you will surely see the yellow on the willows. If your timing is early in the morning or later in the afternoon, you might even look back and see the sweet spring light on the hills. Both of these times of day have spring nipping at your nose.

While the park landscape is dynamic any time of the year (yes, try us in the winter when there are three cars in the parking lot), a spring visit has its specialities. As April leans into May, come early or stay later; you will be sure to find more than robins chirping and crows cackling. The willows will be dressed in green finery and the landscape will be begging you to linger.



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THROUGH YOUR LENS

 Joanne Brown



To submit your photos e-mail tara.mcfadden@grpf.ca



RIVERSONG RUN AT THE RANCH

The Run at the Ranch will be returning on July 19 as part of Parks Day celebrations at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park.

Through a partnership between 5 Peaks Adventures, Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation (GRPF), and the Rotary Club of Cochrane, the run is returning in a different format. The Riversong Run at the Ranch will be part of the 5 Peaks trail running series and will offer running distances for everyone.

Also new this year, is combining the run with national Parks Day celebrations. In addition to the run, the day will include lots of hands-on activities for runners and non-runners to enjoy in the festival area. There will be lots to see and do including, hot dogs, ice cream, face painting for the kids, and displays from sponsors and local non-profits.

"The Riversong Run at the Ranch is going to be a great way to enjoy Parks Day," said Susan de Caen, Executive Director of the GRPF. "We're looking forward to creating a real festival atmosphere around the run. It's going to be a great day at the Park!"

Support for the Run at the Ranch is high with Riversong Cochrane being named the title sponsor and over 200 runners already registered.

Race Distances Include:

- 🌸 1 KM Children's Challenge
- 🌸 3 KM Cochrane Firefighter's Kids Race
- 🌸 6-8 KM Rose Wellness Centre Sport Course
- 🌸 10-12 KM Big Sky Landscaping Enduro Course
- 🌸 21 KM Goodlife Fitness Half Marathon

For more information and to [register www.gprf.ca/events](http://register.www.gprf.ca/events)



Photo: From Left to Right

Mark Kosak (5 Peaks Adventures), Cam Hart (Riversong Cochrane), Tara Christanson (Riversong Cochrane), Tara McFadden (GRPF), Tom Wilk (Rotary Club of Cochrane), Chad Blash (Riversong Cochrane), Nicole Westman-Jones (Riversong Cochrane)

Photo Credit: RYAN MCLEOD/COCHRANE EAGLE



RIVERSONG RUN AT THE RANCH

5 PEAKS

trail running series

at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park



★ JULY 19TH, 2014 ★

CATEGORIES:

- Free Children's Challenge
- Timed Kids Race
- Sports Course
- Enduro Course
- Half Marathon



Register: Race 3 - Run at the Ranch
at WWW.5PEAKS.COM





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MacKay's

\$1.00 off a 32oz take home ice cream

Home Quarter

Purchase your favorite size of pie and receive a free coffee

The Rose Wellness Centre

5\$ will be donated to the GRPF when a GRPF member gets a massage

Big Hill Pizza

10% off Food order and when a Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation Pizza is ordered, Big Hill Pizza will donate \$1.00 to the GRPF

Wholesale Warehouse

10% Off

Drycleaning by Dave

2 for 1 Sweaters & Pants - \$1.00 OFF Laundered Shirts

Spray Lake Sawmills Family Sports Centre

2 for 1 drop-in day pass (KID Zone, Sticks & Pucks, etc.)

Mountain View Optometry

10% off prescription eyeglasses

Visit www.grpf.ca/perks for all the details!

CITIZEN SCIENTIST

Be a GRPF Citizen Scientist

Ever see something cool at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park and thought someone should know? Now you can help GRPF monitor wildlife in the Park with our Wildlife Checklist.



Mountain bluebird

For more information and to help, visit www.grpf.ca/citizenscience or pick up a Wildlife Checklist at the Visitor Information Centre.

WILDLIFE CAMERA

Remote cameras are being used to research wildlife corridor and habitat use at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park. This project is a partnership between Alberta Parks ecologists and University of Calgary and Mount Royal University researchers.



Species: Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

Date: April, 2014

Location: East end of the park

PARK INFORMATION

Visitor Centre Hours

Hours of Operation: Saturday & Sunday
11 AM – 3 PM (Pending Volunteers)

Get involved with the Park

Join the GRPF Membership Program, subscribe to our e-newsletter or get updates from our website at www.grpf.ca.



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www.grpf.ca/donate or contact

Tara McFadden at 403-851-9053

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