

# FEIS—TRUMPETER



February 2012

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Chair Corner</i>	2
<i>Board of Directors</i>	2
<i>Inside Story</i>	2
<i>Bird Count</i>	3
<i>Volunteer Opportunities</i>	3
<i>Bison</i>	4
<i>Superintendent Views</i>	5

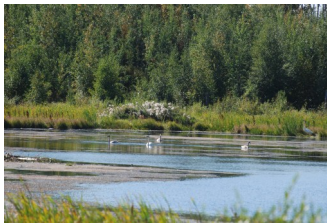


Photo courtesy of Catriona Graham

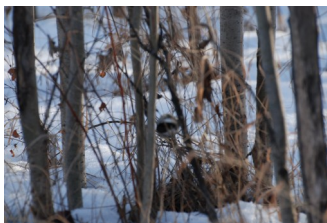


Photo courtesy of Catriona Graham



Photo Courtesy of EINP

If you would like to have your EINP pictures featured in future editions of the Trumpeter, please email them to [info@elkisland.ca](mailto:info@elkisland.ca)

## BISON!

Ok....So, there I was. The head five feet below me turned slowly and the eye sought me out. Through the steam rising off the shaggy brown body, I could feel the creature take in my every feature. I was then dismissed and the eye and head returned to their position staring at the blank gate in front of it. "Three free!" called John from my left. "Ready!" I responded and John's gate in front of the young bison slid open. It ambled forward into the next section. The gate slid closed behind it and the chute section below was empty. "Four free!" I called. "OK, ready!" was the response from my right and I slid my gate open. The next youngster moved in below me. What a thrill. How did I get here? Read on, dear Reader. Read on...



Photo Courtesy of EINP

Bison waiting in chute (above). Gary Harrold, FEIS Chair (below)



Photo Courtesy of EINP

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Our next major event is going to be on Family Day Monday February 20th. Join us for outdoor activities.

Please check out some of our cool new online tools to stay in touch and informed! We invite your postings always! "Like" us on our "new" Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/friendsofelkisland](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofelkisland) and check out our super-cool new tool for organizing events – our Meetup page at [www.meetup.com/elkisland](http://www.meetup.com/elkisland). Join up today!



Photo courtesy of Imran Hayat

## FEIS CHAIR CORNER

After a few lean years, it is a fabulous feeling to see the Friends growing and having the chance to work alongside the staff of Elk Island National Park. We have a Board of Directors that has doubled in size and the opportunity for our involvement as a volunteer organization within the Parks plan is great. Plans for future events are in the works. Opportunities for growth and involvement are numerous, and the feeling of being on the cusp of a new era for the Park and the region fills us with new life. Bison handling, Bird Count, Music in the Park, Health Hikes, Park Program involvement, The Great Grebe Tour revisited and the list keeps growing. We will be keeping you informed as to the fun adventures and events as they unfold.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2012

*So you know who we are, your new Board of Directors is as follows:*

*Gary Harrold – Board Chair*

*Rick Watts – Vice Chair*

*Jocelyn Harrold – Treasurer*

*Marilyn Annis – Secretary*

*Catriona Chernenkoff – Communications Director*

*Gwynne Hayward – Membership Director*

*Liz Watts – Special Events Director*

*Brian Eaton – Conservation, Research and Education*

*Arthur Whiting – Conservation, Research and Education*

*Natalia Riley – Social media / Volunteerism*

*Evelyn Henke – Elk Island National Park Liason (non-voting)*

*Sup. Stephen Flemming – Park Superintendent (non-voting)*

## WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

Have you ever wondered what, or who, makes all those squawks, chirps and croaks? A group of researchers from the University of Alberta and Alberta Innovates and Technology Futures is working on figuring out just that. A team led by Dr. Arthur Whiting deployed 12 automated sound recorders near wetlands spaced throughout Elk Island and in areas near the park to examine the influence of climate, noise, and season on the calling behaviours of frogs and birds. The research is funded in part by the Friends of Elk Island Society, Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, Alberta Conservation Association and the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council.

Amphibian calling occurs solely for the purposes of breeding. Changes in the climate are altering when and maybe how long frogs call. Each spring the wood frog and boreal chorus frog emerge after ice has mostly retreated from the wetlands. The amphibians brave chilling waters to call out for mates. Spring migrants, like amphibians, respond to changes in climate.



Western Toad—picture courtesy of Connie Browne

In addition to climate, anthropogenic noise has the capacity to alter the timing and frequency of amphibian and avian calling. Calling requires energy and calling individual may alter their behaviour to maximize the potential reception of their message. The research team is investigating whether noise pollution affects amphibians and birds nearer to road traffic by reducing their calling frequency and altering when they call to avoid signal interference. The effect that noise pollution has on populations is unclear, but conservation of our natural spaces ought to consider the natural soundscapes.

## 2011 BIRD COUNT

Boxing Day was our Annual Bird Count with Bird Studies Canada and 29 species were counted by 34 participants.

Ruffed Grouse: 6 Gray Partridge: 1 Great Horned Owl: 2  
 Downy Woodpecker: 11 Hairy Woodpecker: 8 Pileated Woodpecker: 4  
 Blue Jay: 10 Black Billed Magpie: 64 Common Raven: 39  
 Boreal Chickadee: 19 House Sparrow: 11 Pin Grosbeak: 7  
 Black Capped Chickadee: 136 Red Breasted Nuthatch: 1 Snow Bunting: 10  
 Common Redpoll: 368 Hoary Redpoll: 12 American Crow: 3  
 ThreeToed Woodpecker: 1 Brown Creeper: 9 Red Crossbill: 1  
 Pine Siskin: 11 White-Winged Crossbill: 8 Gold Crowned Kinglet: 5  
 Bohemian Waxwing: 10 Rock Pigeon: 44 American Robin: 1  
 White Breasted Nuthatch: 16 Snowy Owl: 2

Chili, coffee and baking was available to warm everyone. There was also a reception for participants at the Superintendants residence for those lucky to attend.

Photo courtesy of Imran Hayat



Picture courtesy of Dennis Moore



## UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE FEIS - by Natalia Riley, Social Media

Happy Winter!

As we begin 2012, an exciting buffet of volunteer opportunities are being developed with the Friends of Elk Island (FEIS) and Elk Island National Park (EINP)! Staying true to the FEIS' role of promoting understanding, appreciation, and respect for EINP, as well as supporting the current needs and activities of the Park, here are some of the ideas we're currently exploring!

- Plains bison ecology and management
- Amphibian monitoring
- Forest bird monitoring
- Red-necked grebe monitoring
- Invasive plant control
- Site and native plant restoration

Each of these programs is grounded in the important conservation work already being researched and studied here at EINP. However, in some areas, we are only just *beginning* to understand its ecology and history. Only with your help, can we effectively protect, and even, *re-connect* ourselves to this remarkable place. I invite you to please stay connected – if you haven't already renewed your membership, have comments, or would even just like to send us an updated email address, please contact us at FEIS, anytime, and we will keep you informed of how things are progressing with this important work. Stay tuned!

P.S. Please check out some of our cool new online tools to stay in touch and informed! We invite your postings always! "Like" us on our "new" Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/friendsofelkisland](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofelkisland) and check out our super-cool new tool for organizing events – our Meetup page at [www.meetup.com/elkisland](http://www.meetup.com/elkisland). Join up today!



Bison in the Snow  
 Picture courtesy of Jocelyn Harrold

## BISON HO! THE 2011-12 PLAINS BISON TRANSFER TO MONTANA—by Natalia Riley, Social Media

*Unseasonably warm December weather, magnificent plains bison, and dozens of excited EINP volunteers and staff all working towards a fantastic goal – ensuring the recovery of plains bison in Montana!  
Thanks to everyone who made the day run so smoothly, and for allowing the FEIS to participate!*

For two days, past and present members of FEIS were invited to participate in the handling of a shipment of plains bison to Montana, an international conservation effort involving two organizations – Parks Canada and the American Prairie Foundation. After two months of quarantine, the bison head to the American Prairie Foundation Reserve on the Great Plains, north of the Missouri River.

The *Edmonton Journal* reported that this was, “...the second shipment of genetically pure plains bison - free of any cattle genes - for this initiative, helping restore the American grasslands...”. This was a homecoming of sorts for this species, as the majority of the Park’s original plains bison population came from the Montana-based, Pablo-Allard herd, circa 1907!

Liz Watts, Special Events Director for FEIS, provided the following, colourful, first-hand report from her experience volunteering on one of these days:

*On Friday, December 16, I was privileged to be part of a group of volunteers allowed to assist with the handling of a group of ‘teenage’/yearling plains bison. Twenty-three of these magnificent beasts were persuaded to enter the handling facility and negotiate a series of gates and chutes, operated by enthusiastic, albeit amateur volunteers, as well as skilled, professional Parks Canada staff.*

*The weather was perfect, cool and crisp, with no wind and every sound crystal clear. Instructions were simple and easy to hear, with no fuss and no panic from the handlers or the bison. In fact, I found the animals themselves to be eerily quiet - a little heavy breathing and the occasional huff, but otherwise nothing! It was as if they were too dignified to acknowledge the intrusion into their lives, the needles or the general disruption into their otherwise contented existence.*

*Following the work on the chutes, we had a tour of the indoor portion of the facility where the animals are gently ‘squeezed’ in special chutes so that they can be closely examined, and samples taken from appropriate places - again all is calm and silent! The facility itself is small and nestled in the centre of the handling complex, which if seen from the air resembles the internal structure of a nautilus shell. The whole complex is a work of art and functions with a natural rhythm that is the plains bison and Elk Island National Park.*

*To round off the day, we socialized around the fire pit and in the well-heated tent, while hot dogs, homemade chili, soup, cookies, nibbles and copious quantities of hot drinks were supplied.*

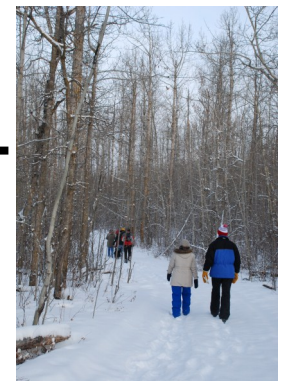


Photo courtesy of Jocelyn Harrold

## CHRISTMAS CAROL SONG FEST



On the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2011, we had our first ever Christmas Carol Song Fest in the Astotin Lake Theatre. It was a dark, cold night and we met in the parking lot at the Lake and walked up by flashlight to the theatre to hear warm sounds of songs of the season. Hot punch and baking completed the evening.



## JANUARY HEALTH HIKE

We held our first Health Hike on January 15<sup>th</sup>, the weather was a little on the chilly side at -18C. Seven brave hikers started at the Tawayik Lake Cookhouse and hiked the Simmons Trail and 4 stayed behind to keep the fire going in the cookhouse, as well as warm up the Chicken Rice soup and vegetarian chili.

## MY IMPRESSIONS, SO FAR – Stephen Flemming, Superintendent

Our trip to Elk Island was memorable. I was to take up my new position as Superintendent of Elk Island National Park on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, but getting here proved to be a bit of a challenge. A major snow storm in Nova Scotia on the 10<sup>th</sup> closed the Halifax Airport for most of the day. Then, as we boarded at around 7pm (12 hours later than scheduled), our son Dominic got sick as he stepped on the plane, delaying the flight for almost an hour while they confirmed he was cleared to fly. Who knew that air sickness could take hold before you actually got in the air! Six hours later, arriving in Edmonton, we found that our rental van was completely frozen – we couldn't open the doors. Apparently, washing vehicles at -27C is not in the rental company manual, but they had an ambitious young fellow that took the initiative anyway. So then, with a new dirty vehicle in hand, we finally made our way to the Superintendent's Residence at Elk Island, arriving around mid-night. It looked like the best place we had ever seen. We slept. A day late, and bit on the tired side, I began my new role at Elk Island. Yet, despite this inauspicious beginning, the last year has been very busy and very fulfilling.

The transfer of wood bison to the Russian Republic of Sakha this past January (2011) was very special. It may have been very cold when we handled the animals for disease testing, but it was very warm between our two countries. Among the special events was the privilege to host for dinner in my home (Sup's Residence), the Sakha Minister of Environment and his team. There was much talk; much laughter; a presentation of the President's Medal to Norm Cool, which was very heart-felt; and of course, much toasting! We also had Daily Planet film the entire move from Elk Island to Russia. It was aired as a three part series during Environment Week, and was partially re-aired in December as one of the program's highlights for the year – Nice!

During the summer, we held several successful public events at the park. The Friends of Elk Island played key roles in most of them. Canada Day, Parks Day, and Labour Day Weekend were all very busy co-productions. Whether we were orchestrating things for Dark Sky viewing, serving cake, or shaving off my beard (still owe you all for that one!), hundreds of people were given that extra special touch.

Just before Christmas, bison figured prominently again – this time it was plains bison being prepared for a trip to Montana. Many past and current members of the Friends of Elk Island helped us out with the handling of bison for disease testing. Between Friends' members and helpers from partner organizations of the Beaver Hills Initiative (including several Councilors and Mayors), we had over 100 volunteers for the bison handling week. That was a highlight for me – 100 people of all ages and walks of life doing something real for conservation while making it a social event at the same time. This event, co-hosted by the Friends of Elk Island and the Park was a great success, with lots of media coverage.

Over the course of the year, I spent a great deal of time listening. One thought frequently expressed was that many people longed for the Elk Island of the past, where there was "lots going on every weekend." Looking into this sentiment further, I learned that not all of these past activities were consistent with Parks Canada's evolving policy regarding ecological integrity, nor were all of these activities sustainable from a facilities standpoint. Still, it is possible that something was lost over the years. From what people tell me, the lost element may have been music and dance as part of family activities. If true, and if these kinds of cultural activities can help us re-connect people with nature; it may be that we need to take a second look at these activities. Your ideas and thoughts are most welcome.

The partnership between the Friends and the Park is one that we have only begun to explore. Going forward, I see us working together on projects designed to entice the public to the park; educate them, so that they might better understand; and involve them in active conservation projects, so that deep connections can be made. Together, we can help people to make a difference – to leave their mark on Elk Island. You too can leave your mark, by participating in hands-on projects and by facilitating information sessions so that others might participate. I look forward to the next year. If the bison round-up was any indication, it is going to be fun!



Photo courtesy of Imran Hayat