

Spotlight on BC Nature Federated Clubs

WildResearch *By Paul Levesque*

In the spring 2013, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) held its annual meeting to assess species for inclusion on the list of species at risk of extinction or being extirpated from Canada. Once the meeting was over, there were 676 animal and plant species federally listed as at risk. As a nation, we are losing our biodiversity. We are not cool with this, we don't like the declining population trends, and we are going to do something about it.

At WildResearch, our first priority has been to create a healthy and active community with a passion for learning and understanding conservation issues. Our membership learns about conservation through meaningful, hands-on experience through our varied programs. Our activities meet the interests of our members, while upholding our conservation goals. We create an inclusive environment for our members by communicating on a personal level at each phase of the experience: from general membership services to our programs and events. We advertise to folks that would benefit most from our activities, while being most likely to influence future conservation policy and actions.

Our approach has been well received. Founded in 2010, WildResearch's membership base has increased on average 31% annually from 2011 to 2013 and we now have over 220 members. A recent survey of the membership showed that our members are relatively

young, with 64% under the age of 40 (Figure 1). Respondents also reported on their level of education; 47% have or are working towards undergraduate degrees, and another 47% have even higher levels of postsecondary education.

Our first project was the Iona Island Bird Observatory (IIBO) in Richmond. Iona Island Regional Park has been well known for decades as a premier hotspot for rare birds in BC. The park has been designated as an Important Bird Area by Bird Studies Canada and BC Nature because it is a critically important migratory stopover site. IIBO started with very few resources: a small handful of experienced biologists, a dream, and a plan. We quickly set up operations, advertised the project through our networks at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, and started training volunteers. Our volunteers learned extremely quickly, and within a year there was a core group of experienced bird banders. We worked aggressively to fundraise, and have received generous monetary support from Bird Studies Canada's Baillie Fund, the provincial government's Public Conservation Assistance Fund, and the Sitka Foundation. With these funds, we have been able to hire full-time biologists to operate our Migration Monitoring Programs and have installed a beautiful banding hut. We now have a large pool of dedicated, well-trained volunteers who are actively involved in monitoring resident and migratory songbird populations at IIBO.

Our next project was motivated by recent observed declines in aerial insectivore populations. The once "common" Common Nighthawk is now listed federally as Threatened. The Common Poorwill has slipped between the cracks; it was assessed



By C. Rock

Yellow Warbler

in 1993 by COSEWIC, but was deemed Data Deficient in the absence of population data. In 2010, WildResearch started the BC Nightjar Survey to fill in the data gaps for Common Poorwill and to strengthen our knowledge of Common Nighthawks. Surveys conducted to date in south central BC have been included in the *BC Breeding Bird Atlas*, and we are working to expand the project across the province.

We are also involved with the *BC Butterfly Atlas* to map and inventory butterfly diversity throughout BC. Our volunteers have been actively surveying our square in West Vancouver over the past two years. In the spring we partnered with the UBC Botanical Garden and held a training workshop for more than 40 butterfly enthusiasts. Interest continues to grow for this program and we are looking forward to 2014.

The real secret to WildResearch's success? We find the best way to inspire folks about conservation science is by having fun. We host pelagic birding trips on the M.V. Frances Barkley to fund our conservation programs. On our trips, 100 birders join us to sail 40 km offshore to La Perouse Bank in search of pelagic seabirds. The pelagic birding trips have been very popular, and our recent September 15 trip sold out by the end of May! We also host regular social events and workshops for our members to keep the community together.

In the future, we look forward to continuing to provide high quality conservation programs to our membership! If you like what we are doing and would like to get involved, visit www.wildresearch.ca. ♦

