



EYES AND HANDS FOR SPECIES AT RISK

Stewardship in action in the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve

Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site is at the core of the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve, an area containing some 30 species at risk. Protecting all those species is a big job. So the park staff and its biosphere reserve partners set out to engage a small army of volunteers, who have stepped up to lend a hand. Volunteers are engaged in hands-on recovery for many species at risk in the region.

Their work is critical, says Parks Canada biologist Brennan Caverhill. A chronic problem for researchers studying species at risk is the difficulty in spotting them in the first place. "As biologists, one of our major problems is just finding species at risk; they're inherently rare," Brennan says. Volunteers represent "thousands of eyes," and reported sightings are invaluable. Volunteer recovery efforts are also invaluable. Our only viable option for the recovery of species at risk is to engage people in recovery actions to enhance populations, and to encourage stewardship efforts for species at risk habitat on their lands.



Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site of Canada

A species at risk hotspot

This area of the province contains three-quarters of Nova Scotia's species listed under the federal Species at Risk Act and the provincial Endangered Species Act. This intense concentration makes the area one of Canada's biodiversity hotspots. That's a big part of the reason the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve was established.

About 70% of the land in Nova Scotia is privately owned. Individual landowners have a huge influence on the fate of our species at risk. With proper information, landowners can help protect species from harm. Many go beyond legal requirements and become active stewards, maintaining vital habitats.



Ribbonsnake © Jeffie McNeil

A targeted approach

In seeking volunteers, Parks Canada engaged three groups: Kejimikujik's repeat visitors, local communities in the biosphere reserve, and local First Nations. Most of Kejimikujik's visitors are from Nova Scotia and are repeat visitors. These regulars often have a strong affinity for the park and want to take the next step and become stewards for species' recovery. Community members and local First Nations share an attachment to the lands that surround Kejimikujik. Many have jumped at the opportunity to protect species at risk on their properties.

Volunteers come through

Over the past three years, 500 volunteers contributed more than 25,000 volunteer hours to species at risk recovery and environmental conservation. This includes initiatives for species such as Blanding's turtles, Eastern Ribbonsnakes, Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora, Piping Plovers, and Monarch Butterflies. For example, over 40 "headstarted" turtle hatchlings have been released at Keji's Grafton Lake, and nearby McGowan Lake.

First Nations have always been there to help celebrate their release with prayer, traditional music and dance.



Blanding's Turtle © Jeffie McNeil



Red Wolf Singers celebrate the headstart turtle release with traditional music © M. Crowley

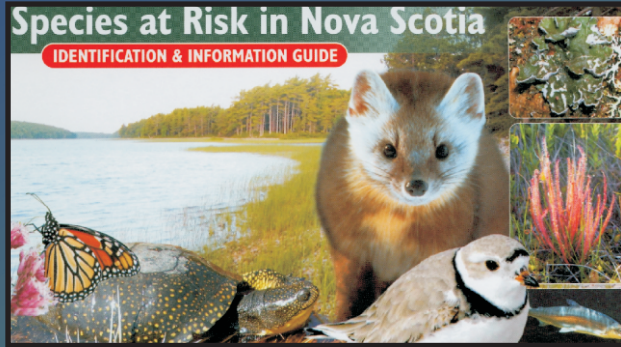


Volunteers are also teaching Parks Canada how to help other volunteers. Not long ago, keen stewards approached Parks Canada scientist Stephen Flemming with an idea. They thought that people interested in nature could use a field guide listing Nova Scotia's species at risk and telling how to identify them. They believed people would be more comfortable informing authorities of possible sightings if they were confident of an accurate identification.

The idea became reality with publication of the Species at Risk in Nova Scotia - Identification and Information Guide. Prepared by our colleagues Brennan Caverhill and Megan Crowley, the guide was created to increase awareness, generate sighting reports, and encourage stewardship. For each of the 42 species at risk, there's an information page containing photos, identifying features, a description of habitat, and other interesting points.



Volunteers observing Piping Plovers © M. Crowley



The development of this guide was a highly collaborative effort, and many organizations and individuals contributed to its creation. A landowner stewardship guide is also being produced as a companion to this guide, which describes best practices for lake shoreline and wetland habitats and opportunities for stewardship. By providing people with tools, they can become actively involved in species at risk recovery.

Volunteers are not just helpful; they are essential



Volunteers weighing hatching Blanding's Turtles © J. McKinnon

Volunteers are essential to the recovery of Canada's species at risk. A small number of Keji staff need to cover large geographic areas, and often have to be in more than one place at a time during the busy field season. Volunteers assist and support Keji staff, and are eager to be involved with hands-on, long-term recovery efforts. These experiences are fun and memorable, and the volunteers can see how they are making a difference. They contribute as much time as they can – from 20 hours to 1000 + per year – and all efforts are valued and appreciated. Many hundreds of volunteers and landowners are now engaged and involved in species at risk recovery in the biosphere reserve.

Beyond its benefits for species at risk, Keji's involvement in the Biosphere Reserve shows how Parks Canada is partnering with its neighbours to maintain the integrity of the greater ecosystem.

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