



Introduction

Waterfowl lift-off, Foam Lake Heritage Marsh.

We wait quietly near the shore of the shallow lake, feeling the crispness of the early October morning. A warm gold and crimson glow bathes the sky as the sun peeks over the eastern horizon. Suddenly, an explosive thrust of wings breaks the peaceful dawn as Snow Geese in the tens of thousands lift off the water in unison, almost blackening the sky, their loud "whouk, whouk" calls adding to the deafening din. The breathtaking scene ranks among nature's great spectacles, yet it is one that we easily find in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan abounds with wonderful opportunities to see and enjoy wildlife—some 350 different birds, an array of fascinating creatures great and small, wildflowers and plants in a kaleidoscope of colours. Much of this diversity is due to our varied habitats including boreal forest, Canadian shield, wild rivers, some 100,000 lakes, badlands, aspen parklands, Canada's largest sand dunes, and some of North America's largest expanses of native grasslands.

Our location on the Central North American Flyway gives us easy access to sites where migrating waterfowl stage in the hundreds of thousands. For nesting waterfowl, Saskatchewan has long been famous as "North America's Duck Factory", raising a quarter of the continent's ducklings. Saskatchewan is also home to half of Canada's pelicans, half of Canada's designated sites in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, the world's largest inland concentration of Bald Eagles, white-tailed deer with the largest antlers in North America, some of the last remaining sage-grouse in Canada, the only black-tailed prairie dogs in Canada, and a quarter of the world's endangered Piping Plovers.

But appreciating and enjoying wildlife is much more than finding the biggest, best or rarest. Everyday encounters can be just as rewarding—hearing a meadowlark announce the arrival of spring, strolling through a meadow carpeted in wildflowers, or catching a brilliant azure flash from a flying Mountain Bluebird. It's hard to imagine that some wildlife that we almost take for granted now, such as the pelican, pronghorn, and even the ubiquitous Canada Goose, have recovered from once being on the brink. Will today's species at risk such as Greater Sage-Grouse, Piping Plover, or Burrowing Owl be as lucky?

The story of our wildlife is both good news and bad news—we are blessed with so much, but habitat necessary to sustain wildlife continues to be lost in

the name of progress. Southern Saskatchewan already has some of the most altered landscapes in Canada, so it becomes critical to protect what's left of our natural areas. Northern Saskatchewan fares better, with vast areas of pristine wilderness still remaining, although "development" is encroaching on wild places at a frightening speed.

Saskatchewan Wild is a personal photographic journey, a taste of the many wildlife adventures possible in Saskatchewan. It is both a celebration of our wildlife and a reminder of what we might lose if we aren't careful. In our over-urbanized, over-civilized world, it becomes increasingly important not to lose our connection to the natural world. We hope that this book can play a role in fostering a greater appreciation of our wild creatures and wild places, and that by understanding and valuing what we have, we can better protect them.



The spiky flower-head of water smartweed, a plant found in shallow water in lakes, ponds, or creeks.