

Wild at heart

MANITOBA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY CHAMPIONS CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION

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From lobbying for eco-certification of fisheries to opposing a feral-cat neutering program in the city and to tackling wildlife feeding policies, a dedicated group of 175 Manitobans is working to conserve and protect wildlife resources in the province.

They are members of the Manitoba Chapter of The Wildlife Society, which was formed in 1974 to become the first Canadian branch of the international organization.

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C-Jae Breiter, a research conservation specialist at Assiniboine Park Zoo, is the past-president of the Manitoba Chapter of The Wildlife Society.

The organization hosts three major events annually as well as several professional development workshops throughout the year, says C-Jae Breiter, past-president of the Manitoba chapter.

Breiter, a research conservation specialist at Assiniboine Park Zoo, talked about The Wildlife Society in an email interview.

WFP: What is the main role of The Wildlife Society?

C-JB: The Wildlife Society is an organization that works to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation.

Wildlife conservation emerged as a social and political movement in the United States and Canada during the 19th century. Originally, the movement was led by hunters. Over time, wildlife conservation became a recognized formal discipline and it was decided that there was a need for an organization to establish professional and ethical standards and promote communication within the community. TWS was officially founded in 1937.

It has developed into an international network of nearly 10,000 leaders, within eight sections throughout North America, in wildlife science, management, and conservation who are dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship.

WFP: When was it founded?

C-JB: The Manitoba chapter was officially established Jan. 18, 1974 (it incorporated in 1991). Although three student chapters existed in Canada prior to this date, the Manitoba chapter became the first professional and practising Canadian chapter of TWS.

From its inception, the chapter aimed to be the go-to organization to advise government officials, environmental groups, politicians, and the public on wildlife issues in Manitoba. Today, chapter members are influential at various levels including the Parent Society level, the Canadian Section, and the University of Winnipeg Student Chapter. The Manitoba chapter currently has more than 175 members.

We also have an active conservation affairs committee that prepares responses to current issues affecting wildlife or wildlife professionals in Manitoba. Some of our recent activities include letters to the minister of sustainable

development on fisheries consultations, the Climate Change and Green Plan, and on moose conservation in Manitoba.

Communications of local wildlife news is circulated through newsletters, the organization's website tws-mb.com, and social media.

FP: How is the organization structured internally? What is your current position within the organization?

C-JB: I have been active with the chapter since 2013, filling the role of secretary-treasurer, president-elect, and president.

The executive team consists of 10 very dedicated volunteers elected to take the roles of president, president-elect, past president, secretary-treasurer, undergraduate student rep, graduate student rep, western rep, and northern rep, and two members at large. My goal during my involvement with the chapter has been to streamline our business activities, provide more professional development opportunities and diversify our membership, as well as continue to strengthen the relationship between our organization and provincial legislators and decision makers.

I also work as the research conservation specialist at the Assiniboine Park Conservancy. The Leatherdale International Polar Bear Conservation Centre houses the Assiniboine Park Zoo's conservation and research department that contains two laboratories and office space. Our research priorities are related to the effects of climate change on Arctic species, including polar bears and seals, and research and headstarting of species at risk, including burrowing owls and endangered grassland butterflies.

I completed a bachelor of sciences (with honours) at the University of Winnipeg studying entomology, botany, and species-at-risk conservation. I pursued my masters in science at Concordia University in Montreal and focused my research on developing a tool for non-invasive techniques to monitor caribou in Canada and reindeer in Fennoscandia. I have also gained important experiences while conducting environmental assessments with environmental consulting companies in Manitoba.

FP: Why is it necessary to have such an organization?

C-JB: TWS Manitoba Chapter fills an important role for wildlife professionals in Manitoba and beyond. Our members range from professionals, retirees, and students all across the province.

The diversity and passion of our members, along with our strong ties to science-based management, are fundamental to the success of TWS. The Parent Society also offers a certification program that requires that the member meets the minimum educational, experience, and ethical standards adopted by the Society for professional wildlife biologist. The recognition of this certification program in Manitoba could strengthen and validate the wildlife professional community in the province.

FP: How are you funded?

C-JB: We are funded through the purchase of annual memberships and some fundraising at events.

Our main expenses are related to our three main annual events and award contributions. Every year we offer student-travel awards, photo contest prizes, a Manitoba Conservation Award, and an endowment fund through the University of Manitoba called the Richard C. Goulden Memorial Award. We are always trying to expand our support for local wildlife organizations, students, and early career professionals.