

Life along the Kootenay, Columbia and Kicking Horse Rivers

By Troy Patenaude

SOME TREES, SHRUBS, & NON-FLOWERING PLANTS AT RIVER'S EDGE



Lodgepole Pine:

- Grow straight and tall, perfect for tipi poles, hence its name “lodgepole”
- Shade-intolerant needles 2-5 cm long and, unique to lodgepoles only, grow in twos
- Very low reproductivity by long, egg-shaped, hard cones in the absence of forest fires



Juniper:

- Grows up to 1 m high in roughly circular patches with prickly needle-like leaves
- Berry-like cones are green in first year, blue-purple in their mature second year
- Used as strong incense, flavoring in gin, and beads for clothing by some native tribes



Wolf Willow:

- Grows up to 1.5 m tall or higher with very sweet, pungent smell
- Resembles a willow, but isn't; more closely related to Canadian Buffaloberry
- Also called Silverberry from gray-silver coating on its stems, leaves, and berries
- Used for food, beadwork, and rope, nets, and fishing line by many native tribes



Horsetail:

- Normally 10-30 cm tall with lots of side branches that give it a frilly look
- Contains considerable amounts of calcium that can be used in healing bone and tissue
- Contains silica, an abrasive compound, which can be harmful, but great as a scrubber
- Used by some native tribes as a diuretic and for gum relief in teething children

SOME WILDFLOWERS AT RIVER'S EDGE



Indian Paintbrush:

- 10-60 cm tall with spike-like terminate flower clusters ranging from white to crimson
- A parasitic flower, attaching its roots to those of other plants for part of their nutrients
- Absorbs selenium from soil and so can be poisonous in some areas
- Used for rheumatism, venereal disease, hair gloss, and paintbrush by some natives



Yarrow:

- 20-50 cm tall with flat clusters of small white flowers
- Strongly aromatic with a pungency similar to sage and mothballs
- One of the oldest and best-known herbal medicines in the world, most often for colds
- Used also as an analgesic, diaphoretic, blood clotter, and for circulatory diseases



Fireweed:

- Up to 1.5 m tall with dozens of small pink flowers on a tall spike
- Grows best in disturbed areas, such as roadsides or burn sites, as a forest regenerator
- Flowers were rubbed into rawhide for waterproofing by some native tribes, and leaves and shoots are very high in vitamin C and beta-carotene



Wild Strawberry:

- Small, three-parted, toothy leaflets with showy white flowers
- Berries with all the flavor of farmed strawberries concentrated into a berry the size of the tip of your little finger
- Used in teas to soothe inflammations and as a tonic for female reproductive system

SOME WILDLIFE SPOTTED AT RIVER'S EDGE



Black Bear:

- Vary in color from almost white to black
- Adult males average 155cm in length, 110 cm height at shoulder, and weigh 125 kg
- Can be distinguished from their cousins, the grizzly, by their tapered muzzles and narrower faces, their lack of a larger hump on shoulders, and their lack of ruff of long hair around their heads and neck
- Can run up 55 km/hour over short distances



Bald Eagle:

- 2 m wingspan, one of the largest birds in the world
- As a mating display, pairs lock feet and fall earthward in flight for several turns
- Parents mate for life and return to same nest year after year
- Preferred habitat is high in trees near water, especially large lakes or rivers
- Young eagles do not acquire characteristic white head until about 3 years of age



Elk:

- Mistakenly called elk (a European moose), but in fact a *wapiti*, the Shawnee Indian word meaning “white deer” or “light colored”
- Male antler racks can measure up to 1.5 m in length, spread well over the back, span 1.2 m, and weigh up to 22 kg
- Antlers are used to battle for access to a female during rut, along with loud bugling
- Wapiti are sociable, seldom alone, and very adaptable to many environments



White-tailed Deer:

- Mature bucks are on average 100 cm high at shoulder and weigh 135 kg
- Tail is brown on top, but when startled or alert, tail goes up to show white underside
- Can cover up to 8 m in a running broad jump, and easily leap over a 2 m fence
- Very adaptable and feed on over 1000 different plants



Red-tailed Hawk:

- Large, thick-bodied predators with broad wings and razor-sharp talons
- Distinguished best from Swainson's Hawk by light flight feathers in all plumages
- Mostly have a reddish upper tail that is spread wide in flight
- Are adept at soaring and often circle for hours
- Opportunistic feeders, but are inveterate mouse-eaters
- Have characteristic and powerful call like a shrill and rasping “*tsee-eeee-arrrr*” scream



Cougar:

- Males can be up to 275 cm in length, with up to 90 cm long tails, and weigh 80 kg
- Cat of many names; also called “mountain lion”, “puma”, “panther”, & “indian devil”
- Extremely efficient killing machine that can kill prey four times its own size by stalking and pouncing with 5 cm long canines and razor-sharp claws
- Secretive and solitary to the extreme, known as the “ghosts of the wilderness”



Moose:

- Largest member of the deer family; up to 1.9 m high at shoulder and weigh 475 kg
- Name from the Algonquin Indian word, *mongswa*, meaning “eater of twigs”
- Antler racks of bone are shed annually and can extend to 196 cm between widest tips
- Although clumsy looking, within a week of birth young can swim and outrun a person

OTHER COMMON LIFE IN THE REGION AND SURROUNDING ALPINE

Common Trees, Shrubs, and Non-Flowering Plants:

- Coniferous Trees*: Engelmann Spruce, Douglas Fir, Western Red Cedar, Western Larch
- Deciduous Trees*: Trembling Aspen, Black Cottonwood, White Birch
- Shrubs*: Wolf Willow, Green Alder, Bog Birch, Rocky Mountain Maple, Devil's Club, Juniper
- Grasses*: Sweetgrass, Bluegrass, Dark-Scaled Sedge, Wood Rush, Spike Trisetum, Fescue
- Non-Flowering Plants & Lichens*: Ferns, Horsetail, Goose-neck Moss, Usnea & Horsetail Lichen

Common Wildflowers:

- Parsnip Family*: Cow Parsnip, Water Hemlock
- Buckwheat Family*: Mountain Sorrel
- Heath Family*: Labrador Tea, Bearberry, Huckleberry
- Mint Family*: Wild Mint
- Harebell Family*: Bluebell, Alpine Harebell
- Saxifrage Family*: Red-Stemmed Saxifrage
- Dogwood Family*: Bunchberry, Red Osier Dogwood
- Buttercup Family*: Columbine, Chalice Flower, Globe Flower, Alpine Buttercup, Clematis
- Lily Family*: Camas, Solomon's Seal, False Hellebore, Glacier Lily, Western Wood Lily, Wild Chives
- Orchid Family*: Bog Orchid, Lady's Slipper, Rattlesnake Plantain, Calypso Orchid
- Rose Family*: White Dryad, Thimbleberry, Birchleaf Spiraea, Wild Strawberry, Cinquefoil, Wild Rose
- Composite Family*: Yarrow, Daisy, Pearly Everlasting, Balsamroot, Goldenrod, Arnica, Bull Thistle
- Figwort Family*: Indian Paintbrush, Mullein, Toadflax, Lousewort, Beardtongue, Speedwell
- Valerian Family*: Wild Heliotrope
- Oleaster Family*: Canadian Buffaloberry
- Bladderwort Family*: Butterwort
- Primrose Family*: Shooting Star
- Borage Family*: Alpine Forget-Me-Not
- Water Plantain Family*: Arrowhead
- Pea Family*: Hedysarum

Common Birds:

- Hummingbird Family*: Calliope, Rufous
- Chickadee Family*: Mountain & Boreal Chickadee
- Waterfowl Family*: Canada Goose, Mallard, Bufflehead, Blue-winged Teal, Pintail, Mergansers
- Grouse Family*: Spruce Grouse, Blue Grouse, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Ruffed Grouse
- Thrush Subfamily*: Townsend's Solitaire, Swainson's Thrush, Robin, Hermit & Varied Thrush
- Swallow Family*: Tree Swallow, Violet-Green, Rough-Winged, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow
- Corvid Family*: Gray Jay, Stellar's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, American Crow, Raven
- Hawk Family*: Osprey, Northern Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle
- Woodpecker Family*: Downy, Northern Flicker
- Vireo Family*: Solitary, Warbling, Red-Eyed

Common Mammals:

- Lagomorphs*: Pika, Snowshoe Hare
- Rodents*: Least Chipmunk, Hoary Marmot, Columbian Ground Squirrel, Red Squirrel, Porcupine, Beaver
- Ungulates*: Elk, Mule Deer, White-tailed Deer, Moose, Mountain Goat, Bighorn Sheep
- Carnivores*: Grizzly Bear, Black Bear, Cougar, Marten, Gray Wolf, Red Fox, Coyote, Fisher, Ermine, Canada Lynx, Mink, Striped Skunk, Wolverine, Badger, Bobcat
- Bats*: Brown Bats, Silverhaired Bat

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