

Pink Mountain and I

Author - Ron Long

I have been interested in native plants and their biology for many decades. To me, tundra plants are by far the most biologically intriguing so, in 1983, when I heard that Pink Mountain provided road access to an alpine tundra environment I went there immediately and was not disappointed.

Pink Mountain is located 180 km north of Fort St John. It is not a high mountain, but being so far north, the summit is classic tundra, one of the harshest environments on Earth.

Since 1983, I returned regularly to photograph and study the plants until, in 2010, I learned of plans to put 40 wind turbines on the mountain. By then I knew that Pink Mountain was special, and the wind farm threatened to destroy the entire summit. Something had to be done.

In 2011, I founded the Pink Mountain Biodiversity Research Initiative, with the objective of quantifying the biodiversity on the mountain. I campaigned for and raised donated funds to make the study possible. I recruited biological specialists from UBC, SFU, the Provincial Museum, and the private sector and arranged for them to donate their time to make studies of plants, mosses, insects, spiders, bees, birds, and other wildlife. In many species categories, we discovered rare or species at risk.

Every year since 2010, I have spent three or four weeks at Pink Mountain, driving up and down to the summit every day, and every day I learned something new. I drew on the donated funds only when necessary and added thousands of dollars from my own pocket. To save money, I used my own vehicle on most trips and covered the cost of repairs to tires,

wheels, paint, and myself. In other words, I stretched the donated funds until they squeaked.

The result of our combined studies is astonishing. We have tentatively identified no fewer than 44 significantly rare species on the summit. The following list remains to be confirmed by further studies but gives a good idea of the special nature of Pink Mountain.

- Grass – one red-listed species
- Rushes – one red-listed species
- Mosses – three red-listed species, one blue-listed species
- Flowering plants – one red-listed species, 11 blue-listed species
- Butterflies – one blue-listed species
- Caribou – blue-listed
- Stone's Sheep – blue-listed
- Barn Swallow – blue-listed

First records:

- Moths – five species
- Other insects – one for BC, one for Canada
- Mason bee

Second Records:

- Two spiders

Third Records:

- Butterflies – seven species endemic to Pink Mountain
- One spider
- Ants – two species new to science
- Northern Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium boreale*) is found in BC (only on Pink Mountain)

The rare species are only the beginning:

- Pink Mountain also supports a plant diversity that is unequalled by any other known location of its size in the province.
- The mountain hosts almost every flowering plant that occurs across the entire Canadian Arctic.
- It is a butterfly hotspot for



Photo: Ron Long

Northern Jacob's Ladder

all of Canada. There may not be another site in the entire country with as many species of butterflies.

- Supports all known species of alpine bumblebees. These are notoriously difficult to study because of their normally remote habitat.
- Supports an unusually high number of raptors for its small size.
- Supports at least five of the eight species of grouse and ptarmigan that occur in B.C.
- Offers opportunities for research on virtually any tundra-related subject and needs to be protected for this purpose.

Some good news: the approval of Site C has removed the need for wind developments in B.C.

Another concern was the two capped gas wells on the summit of Pink Mountain that could have been reactivated at any time. However, in 2022 these wells were declared abandoned so there is currently no commercial interest in Pink Mountain.

The time for protection is now. Threats remain and surprisingly the worst of these is Pink Mountain

Continued page 26

Provincial Park. BC Parks website has stated that the park was created to protect the site of a significant fossil discovery. That discovery was totally misnamed as Pink Mountain Ichthyosaur, which, in fact, was found 60 km north of Pink Mountain on the Sikanni Chief River. The fossil has since been removed and is now at the Tyrrell Museum in Alberta. There never was a reason for a park on Pink Mountain. As a result of my writings, BC Parks has removed most of the incorrect information from their website. Nevertheless the website continues to attract visitors. I have no problem with visiting naturalists but visiting tourists, who have no knowledge of the delicate habitat or rare plants, threaten to love the place to death. Tundra cannot tolerate trampling and especially the use of off-road vehicles.

The Pink Mountain population of Hoary Marmots numbered in the dozens in 1983. On my

last count only three remained. These animals are naive about people and will readily approach vehicles out of curiosity. People are shooting these tame animals. Without protection this population will disappear very soon.

In the current political climate, no protection of B.C. Crown Land is likely without the involvement of First Nations, and I welcome that. In 2022 I had a meeting with Chief Judy Desjarlais of the Blueberry River First Nation. She was impressed with what we had learned about Pink Mountain and this crucial contact provides a way forward towards the protection I have been working for since 2010.

For the last twelve years Pink Mountain has been the focus of my life. I have become intimately familiar with the mountain and can instantly spot any new plant or wildlife. Stick a pin in a map of the summit and I can tell you what is special about that spot. The quiet,

the views, the ever-fascinating plants and the huge sky that seems close enough to touch have all contributed to the pleasure that Pink Mountain has given me. I love the place.

Unfortunately, this story has no happy ending. Twelve years of dedication, the painstaking work of many experts, extraordinary success and the urgent need of protection for a unique-in-BC-location cannot compete with a single obstructing bureaucrat. In 2022 bureaucratic interference became intolerable. The resulting stress has forced me to abandon the project.

See pinkmountain.ca for the full report of the Pink Mountain Biodiversity Research Initiative. If your club is interested in learning more about Pink Mountain, I have a slide presentation that can be delivered either live or via Zoom. Contact Ron Long at rlphoto@shaw.ca

Why should I switch to the e-version of the BCnature magazine?

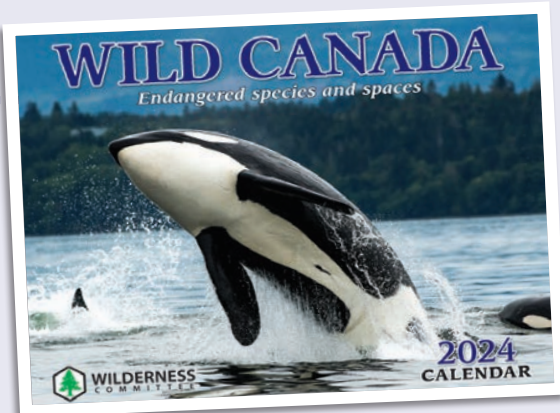
1. Because the e-version is jam-packed with extras such as videos, bird or wildlife sounds, and live links.
2. Saves dollars for both BC Nature and you, the member. BC Nature saves on; postage/print costs;

the member doesn't have to pay the extra \$5.00/year.

3. If Canada Post loses your magazine, and we have to mail another one, it costs us \$5.00 in postage, envelope and the cost of the new magazine.
4. Your e-version is available at any time, and can be read on all devices.

Make the switch today, email info@bcnature.ca to switch to e-version

wilderness & wildlife matter



WILD CANADA 2024 CALENDAR

Purchase a Wilderness Committee calendar and be a part of our campaigns to protect threatened wilderness and wildlife.


Check out our unique wilderness merchandise online:

WildernessCommittee.org


Call 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 today!



Be remembered for keeping Canada wild – include the Wilderness Committee in your will or estate plans today. To learn more: plan@wildernesscommittee.org

 / WildernessCommittee

 @Wilderness

 @Wilderness