



South Okanagan  
Similkameen  
Stewardship Program

# Living in Nature Series

## *Ponderosa Pine and Wildlife*

Open ponderosa pine forests, like those found in the mid- to lower-elevations of the South Okanagan and Similkameen valleys, are home to a wide variety of wildlife species. This is partly because the ponderosa pine makes an outstanding wildlife tree. Wildlife trees are standing dead or living trees which have special characteristics that provide habitat for wildlife. There are about 55 species of birds and mammals—common and endangered—that depend on large ponderosa pine for homes, food, and shelter.

*Ponderosa pine, also referred to as yellow or bull pine, can be identified by the following characteristics:*

Height: 25-30 metres (80-100 ft)  
Age: Up to 400 years



*Large reddish-brown cones with sharp prickles at the end of each scale*



*Needles:  
10-20 cm (4-8") long  
In groups of 3*



*Bark is like a jigsaw puzzle and easily flakes off. On hot days, the bark can smell like vanilla.*



*Straight trunk with diameter up to 2 meters.*



*Deep roots to access moister soil. Deep roots allows them to survive most wind storms.*

*Photo collage by  
Paula Rodriguez de la Vega*

# *What Makes Ponderosa Pine so Valuable to Wildlife?*

*Large trees like the ponderosa pine are highly valuable as wildlife trees, whether dead or alive. Often, the larger a tree is, the better it is for wildlife.*

Ponderosa pines are drought tolerant and can grow in grassland habitats, which provide the much needed structure to otherwise treeless areas. This one provides perches for birds of prey to rest and hunt.



*Paula Rodriguez de la Vega*

## *Some of the critters that use ponderosa pine*

*Common Goldeneye  
White-headed Woodpecker  
Pygmy Nuthatch  
Great Blue Heron  
Hoary Bat  
Big Brown Bat  
Northern Flicker  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Barrow's Goldeneye  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
American Kestrel  
Flammulated Owl  
Red-naped Sapsucker  
Buffleheads  
Lewis Woodpecker  
Northern Saw-whet Owl  
Great Horned Owl  
Mountain Chickadee  
Mule Deer  
Brown Creeper  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Western Bluebird  
Silver-haired Bat  
Northern Pygmy-Owl  
California Bighorn Sheep  
Red-tailed Hawk*



*Paula Rodriguez de la Vega*

Nesting cavities are excavated by woodpeckers. Mature trees are larger and allow for bigger nest cavities. Larger cavities allow for a wider variety of cavity nesters to move in after the woodpeckers have gone. Some examples of these secondary cavity nesters are Flammulated Owls, Big Brown Bats, and Flying Squirrels.

Ponderosa pine cones have large, heavy seeds (as many as 100,000 seeds/hectare/year). The White-headed Woodpecker, which is federally listed as endangered, eats ponderosa pine seeds and roosts and nests on the pines.



Jason Struck



Jenny Oldenettel

Flammulated Owls (federally listed as special concern) nest in cavities made by White-headed Woodpeckers or other primary nesters.

These claw marks were made by a black bear. They often climb large trees to escape from danger and to rest.

Note the puzzle-shaped, deeply incised bark. It creates perfect habitat for insects, which benefits many insect-eating birds.



Paula Rodriguez de la Vega

Ponderosa pine trees can remain standing for up to 40 years after they die. These dead pines (also known as snags or wildlife trees) provide food and shelter for many wildlife species. If you have snags on your property and it is safe to leave them standing, leave them alone, sit back, and enjoy the wildlife that use them.

Other recommended reading:  
Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program (WiTS): <http://www.wildlifetree.org/>  
SOS Stewardship Program Series: <http://www.conservancy.bc.ca/sosstewardship>

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