

The Squirrel Camp Newsletter

Winter Research Edition

Photo: Kelsey Low

Greetings from Winter Squirrel Campers!

This year represented the 37th year of research in the Kluane area. During the 2017/2018 winter field season, we had 8 graduate students (Masters and PhD level) from 4 universities across Canada, and 5 volunteer technicians from Canada at the US, living and working at Squirrel Camp!

Why so busy? You may have noticed that **hare and lynx numbers have been high** over the last few years. We are taking advantage of this critical time in the lynx-snowshoe hare cycle to learn as much as we can about how these species interact and co-exist before they disappear. And, although they don't cycle, squirrels are an interesting piece of this puzzle, as we think they are an important food source for lynx when hares are hard to find (next winter?). The spring also introduces a new batch of squirrelers!

Fun Field Stories - Winter 2018



The story of the pesky wolverine... Learning how to escape our traps by pushing the door open, this clever glutton terrorized our trapline; no bait was safe. But, it led to some cool, once-in-a-lifetime wolverine sightings for us!

The story of the non-traditional lynx family... Two adult females, one kitten, all in one trap! How did they all fit?? How are they related?? Finding them in our trap was exciting and intriguing and reminds us that we have so much to learn about these animals!



Fall/Winter Crew 2018



Thank You to the Champagne & Aishihik and Kluane First Nations, and the community of Haines Junction for your support, kindness and hospitality! Stop in at camp, any time, to say hello!

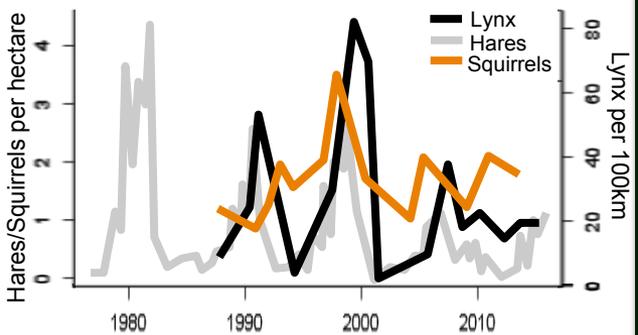


Photo by: K. Chan



LYNX

This year, we collared 33 lynx and observed many more in the forest. Using trail cameras and GPS collar data, we are trying to estimate how many lynx there are in the valley and where each one of them lives. In addition, this year we used small implants (under the skin) in a handful of lynx to measure lynx heart rate and body temperature throughout the winter. With all of this information, we hope to understand more about the food requirements, kill rates, and population dynamics of Canada lynx in the Kluane region! How many bunnies do you think a lynx kills in a day? in a week? in a year?

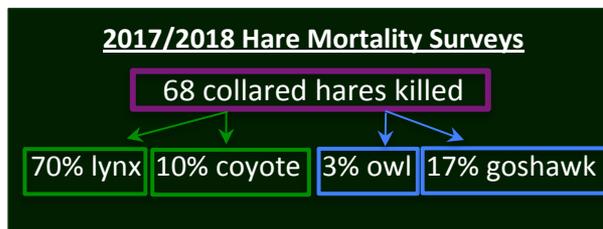
We need our collars back to recover critical data! If you find a collar in the woods, please return it to your local CO office. Also, if you come across a lynx with **orange and blue ear tags**, please contact Ally Menzies at allysonmenzies@gmail.com, as this animal has a small datalogger in its abdomen that has valuable data on it.

Photo by: A. Spratt



SNOWSHOE HARES

It appears that snowshoe hares in the Kluane area are declining; hare numbers on our study grids have decreased by almost 50% since last spring. One of our projects is to determine how, where, and why snowshoe hares are being killed. This winter, lynx were the main culprit for snowshoe hare mortality, with only a few kills made by other species (see below).



FAQS

How many lynx are there in the Kluane region? Since their populations cycle, this number always changes. But, in 2017, we estimated that there were approximately 35 lynx in every 100 sq km across our study area.

How many hares does a lynx eat? Our best guess to date (using sound recorders and activity loggers on our GPS collars) is that they kill 1 to 2 hares per day!

How many cones does a squirrel have in their territory? This can vary greatly from squirrel to squirrel and from year to year. Cone counts from numerous squirrel territories from fall 2018 revealed up to ~12,000 cones in a midden.



RED SQUIRRELS

Unlike most other mammals of their size, red squirrels stay “awake” all winter (i.e., they do not hibernate). However, winter is a quiet and lazy time for squirrels - only leaving the comfort of their warm nests to eat their hoarded cones and make sure no one intrudes on their territories. Later in winter, however, squirrels have to ramp up their activity to find mates! They must reproduce when it is still cold outside to give their offspring enough time to grow, establish territories, and collect cones to survive the winter!