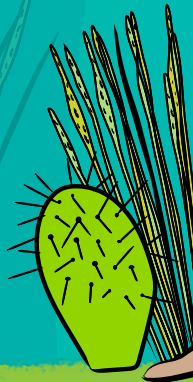


# Let's GO to the Grassland!

FIELD ID CARDS



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HABITAT CONSERVATION  
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**Habitat and Range** Records are all from the Oliver and Osoyoos areas

**Conservation Status** Endangered (**RED LIST**)

I am the only mantis that is native to Canada. I am a master of disguise- you may have trouble distinguishing me from a sagebrush twig or the sandy ground. Females are wingless but males have wings and sometimes fly to lights at night. I am less than 35mm long. My rectangular egg masses are about 7 mm long and are laid on the stems of shrubs where they spend the winter before hatching the following spring. Unlike other mantises who sit perfectly still and ambush prey that come too near, I actively run after my dinner of crickets, flies, moths and grasshoppers. Sometimes I'm even a cannibal, eating my own kind. And watch out—females eat the head off males when they mate! My front legs have spines that help me to catch and grasp my prey. Don't confuse me with my bigger and greener coloured European relative, the praying mantis, who was introduced to the Okanagan Valley in the 1930s to control grasshoppers and has now become more common than me.

**Ground Mantis** (*Litaneutria minor*)



**Habitat and Range** Only the Okanagan in Canada; also native to western USA and Mexico.

**Conservation Status** Status not assessed

**Length** 40 mm long

I am a flightless insect with a large head and long antennae. I spend my days underground in burrows, under rocks or logs in damp or sandy soil. I venture out at night to prey on insects, scavenge dead plant and animal matter, and to eat plant roots. Keep a respectful distance from me; my powerful jaws can deliver a painful bite if I feel threatened. During the spring you may hear my mating call, which I make by rubbing my back legs against spines on the side of my abdomen. Some people say it sounds like pieces of sandpaper rubbed together. I also make drumming sounds by beating my abdomen on the ground.

Jerusalem Cricket (*Stenopelmatus* sp.)



**Habitat and Range** Extreme Southern Okanagan/Osoyoos area

**Conservation Status** Status not assessed

I am the only scorpion found in Canada. Like all scorpions, I am an arachnid and like my spider relatives I have four pairs of legs. I spend my days hiding under flat rocks. I hunt at night, using my venomous stinger at the tip of my tail to subdue my prey, including grasshoppers, crickets, moths, and spiders. In front of my legs I have a pair of enlarged pincers that I use to grasp my prey. My venom is painful to people but not fatal. I glow fluorescent under UV light!

Northern Scorpion (*Paruroctonus boreus*)





**Habitat and Range** Numerous species throughout BC in different habitats

**Conservation Status** Unranked

I am named for my hunting style—like a robber, I pursue and attack unsuspecting prey. I grab my insect prey with my bristly legs then inject them with poisonous saliva from my sharp, straw-like mouth parts. Then I slurp up their juices, delicious! But don't worry, I am harmless to humans. Grasslands are a great place to look for me because I like to hunt in open areas, on sunny, warm days. There are about 40 different types of robber fly in BC's grasslands.

**Robber Fly** (*Family Asilidae*)



**Habitat and Range** Eight species in BC; some restricted to the Okanagan

**Conservation Status** Status not assessed

I am not a snake, nor am I a fly! I am named for my elongated, neck-like prothorax.

Notice my intricately veined wings that are held like a roof over my body when I am at rest. I am considered a "living fossil", because I am so similar to my ancestors from 140 million years ago. If you see a female, you may be frightened by what looks like a long stinger, but which is actually an ovipositor used to lay eggs into rotting wood, soil, plant roots or shrubs. I am delicate insect and I don't fly far, but I am also a fierce predator who will keep the aphids and mites away.

Snakefly (Order Raphidioptera)



**Habitat and Range** Southern Interior lowlands

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

You might think that I'm a moth by the way I look or by my erratic moth-like flight. But I am indeed a butterfly- look at my clubbed antennae (not feathery, like a moth), and I fly during the day. I live in the dry valleys of the Okanagan all the way south to Mexico. You can find me in places with bunchgrasses - my caterpillars' favourite food. As an adult I feed on nectar from many flowers, including rabbitbrush, which I help to pollinate.

Juba Skipper (*Hesperia juba*)



**Habitat and Range** Peace River, Central and Southern BC, E Kootenays

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST), but three subspecies are Endangered (RED LIST)

I am a large, yellow butterfly with black stripes, named for my long hindwings that reminded early naturalists of a swallow's tail. Can you see the bright orange spot on each of my hind wings? When I flash my wings these "eye spots" can scare away a would-be predator. You can find me in the dry grasslands in the BC Interior. I lay each of my tiny white eggs on my caterpillar's favourite food: sagebrush or wild tarragon. You can't miss seeing me when I fly around drinking flower nectar, but you'd have a hard time finding my caterpillars who look like bird droppings, or my chrysalids who look like dried leaves.

Baird's Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*)





**Habitat and Range** Southern grassland valleys

**Conservation Status** Threatened (**BLUE LIST**)

Believe it or not, toads like me can live in some really dry places! I am named for the built-in shovels on the inside of my hind feet that I use to dig burrows in dry soil. I may spend up to eight months of the year hibernating underground! I emerge from my burrow at night when the rains arrive and moisten the soil in the spring. Then I hop up to hundreds of meters across the grassland to get to my breeding pond. It's a mad race against time for my eggs to hatch and develop into tadpoles and adults before the pond dries up. My eggs hatch in only four days and tadpoles can become adults in less than a month. Sometimes my tadpoles will even turn into predatory cannibals—eating each other in order to get big fast before the drought sets in. Us adults stay cool in our burrows during the day. Listen for my barking croaks coming from wetlands on warm spring evenings.

Great Basin spadefoot (*Spea intermontana*)



**Habitat and Range** Southern Okanagan

**Conservation Status** Endangered (RED LIST)

Like all amphibians, I am born in the water. Most of us spend our adult life on land, seeking shade in the burrows of badgers and ground squirrels. But some tiger salamanders are rebels when it comes to metamorphosis, and never grow up! Instead of emerging from the water and breathing air with lungs on land, some tiger salamanders keep their fringed gills and spend their entire lives in the water like a big larva- called a neotene. I am one of Canada's biggest salamanders, growing up to over 16 cm. Fish can eat me so I don't fare well in lakes or ponds that are stocked. But I may be a top predator where fish are absent, where I devour worms and insects.

**Tiger Salamander** (*Ambysoma tigrinum*)



**Habitat and Range** Southern BC Interior and Vancouver Island

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

**Length** ~9.5cm

I look like a miniature alligator. I rarely come out in the open but if you are a keen observer, you may find me soaking up the sunshine on rocks or in a clearing. But don't look for me in the winter as I will be hibernating in rock crevices. I live in a wide range of habitat types, including grasslands, dry woodlands, creek banks and ocean beaches. I eat worms, centipedes, scorpions, grasshoppers and many other insects. I don't lay eggs like most lizards; I give birth to 2-8 live young. I am one of only two native lizards found in BC.

Northern Alligator Lizard (*Elgaria coerulea*)





**Habitat and Range** Restricted to dry valleys of the Southern Interior

**Conservation Status** Threatened (**BLUE LIST** & COSEWIC)

If you are a small mammal, watch out. I can track my warm-blooded prey at night following trails of heat that I see with sensitive cells located in pits between my eyes and nostrils. I am the only venomous snake in BC. I use my venom as a last resort to protect myself and rarely bite humans. In fact, I'm very shy and keep myself camouflaged, using my rattle to warn you if you are scaring me and come too close. If you hear my rattle, don't panic and back away to give me space. I spend the winter cuddled up with other snakes in a hibernaculum in rock crevices. I come out of hibernation in the spring and warm up on sunny rocks. Females give birth to 5 baby snakes every two to three years and don't eat during pregnancy or hibernation, fasting for over a year! I am threatened because of habitat loss and because people are afraid of me and kill me. I am an important part of the ecosystem and help to keep rodent populations in check.

Western Rattlesnake





**Habitat and Range** Okanagan

**Conservation Status** Endangered (RED LIST)

You can't mistake me for any other owl. I run and jump around during the day, catching small mammals, big bugs, and even scorpions! I use abandoned burrows made by badgers or coyotes for my nest and shelter, which I enlarge by kicking out dirt with my feet. I used to be a common summer resident in the Okanagan grasslands before losing most of my habitat to agriculture, ranching, and development.

We disappeared from BC (we were extirpated) but thanks to captive breeding we have been reintroduced, including at Lac du Bois Grassland Provincial Park, which is one of the only places in BC where my habitat is protected.

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)



**Habitat and Range** Throughout much of BC

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST) / Federal List (COSEWIC): Threatened

Don't be fooled by my name - I'm no hawk and I'm not nocturnal. I have a tiny bill and I catch insects by keeping my large mouth open as I swoop through the sky. I am crepuscular, meaning that I'm most active at dusk and dawn, when you may hear my nasal peent flight call or a loud whooshing sound when males make dramatic dives. I am so camouflaged I seem to disappear when I land on the ground. Females lay 2 eggs directly on the ground where they look like surrounding rocks. I spend my winters in South America.

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)



**Habitat and Range** South - Central Interior grasslands

**Conservation Status** Threatened (**BLUE LIST**) / Federal (COSEWIC): Species of concern

I am the largest shorebird in North America. My bill is 23 cm long! I use my bill to probe for worms, crustaceans, molluscs and insects in the mud or at the water's edge. I also like to pick berries and eat grasshoppers in my summer breeding areas in the grasslands. Males and females scrape a shallow depression on soil as a nest. I lay four eggs that I incubate for a month. My chicks are ready to leave the nest in just 5 hours after hatching. I protect my chicks from possible predators by crouching on the ground, then lifting up my wings and running towards the intruder. If you see me do this it means "give me space!" I migrate all the way to Central American wetlands and beaches for the winter.

Long-Billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)



**Habitat and Range** Southern Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys

**Conservation Status** Endangered (**RED LIST**, COSEWIC)

The only place where you will find me in BC is in the sagebrush steppe of the South Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. You may see me running on the ground to catch my insect prey or perched on shrubs where I sing and sing and sing! I make my nests in dense, tall shrubs, which protects me and my family from predatory birds such as Northern harriers and Loggerhead shrikes. I often position my nests in an eastward direction so that they warm up in the cold mornings but are shaded from the hot afternoon sun. I head south to winter in the deserts of the southwestern USA and Mexico.

**Sage Thrasher** (*Oreoscoptes montanus*)





**Habitat and Range** Central Interior; *columbianus* subspecies found only in the Kimberly region

**Conservation Status** Secure (**YELLOW LIST**); *columbianus* subspecies Threatened (**BLUE LIST**)

I am a chicken-like bird of the open prairies and grasslands, especially in areas with large bunch grasses and shrubs. When I crouch on the ground, I am so camouflaged you may have trouble finding me. But you can't miss the males when they go to their communal dancing grounds, called leks, where they show off their purple skin patches and yellow eyebrows to attract females.

I nest on the ground under sagebrush in a shallow depression lined with grass and sage leaves. I eat flowers, buds, insects and sagebrush leaves. Much of my habitat in BC has been lost and I am no longer found in some regions where I formerly lived. For these same reasons, my cousin the Sage grouse, has been extirpated from (is no longer found in) BC.

**Sharp-Tailed Grouse** (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)



**Habitat and Range** Breeding range in Interior and northern grasslands

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

My home is in the grasslands and fields throughout much of North America. In fact, my scientific name means grass dweller. Listen for my whistling song during the day and late evening. I nest on the ground- sometimes in agricultural fields where my nests may be accidentally destroyed by farming activities. I hop and run through grasses and shrubs, scratching the ground with my feet to find the seeds that I like to eat.

Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)



**Habitat and Range** Breeding range in Interior grasslands

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST); Georgia Depression population on Vancouver Island Endangered (RED LIST)

If you are in my habitat you will know me from my joyous, flute-like song. I live in grasslands, cultivated fields and pastures where I feed on invertebrates and seeds off the ground. Although I eat grain from farmers' fields, I also help farmers by eating pests that damage crops. My nest is built on the ground, covered by a waterproof dome made of woven grass and with an entrance tunnel that may be almost a metre long. We were once a common sight in the Garry Oak meadows of Vancouver Island but we are now Endangered there due to habitat loss.

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)



**Habitat and Range** Cariboo, Thompson, Okanagan, and East Kootenay regions of B.C.

**Conservation Status** Endangered (RED LIST)

I am an ecosystem engineer. By digging burrows with my powerful legs and long claws I change my grassland home- increasing soil oxygen and moisture levels and plant diversity. My burrows also provide homes for many animals including burrowing owls, rodents, lizards, snakes, and invertebrates.

I am a relative of the weasel and a fierce predator. My favourite food is ground squirrel but I will hunt for and eat just about anything that I find on my digging missions. I am named for the black "badges" on my cheeks.

**American Badger** (*Taxidea taxus jeffersoni*)





**Habitat and Range** Southern and Interior; BC/Alberta border  
(Rocky Mountain subspecies)

**Conservation Status** Threatened (**BLUE LIST**)

I am a vegetarian, eating mostly grasses, leaves, and bushes. In the summer I live high in the mountain meadows where my favourite foods are abundant. But I don't like deep snow so I head down to the grassland valleys in the fall. I am a master rock climber and I like to keep close to cliffs and canyons so that my young and I can escape from predators, such as wolves, bears, cougars, and coyotes. Most of the year I live peacefully in a herd, but during the fall mating season (the "rut"), watch out! Males battle for females in fierce head butting contests that can last for up to 24 hours and deliver 900 kg of force! Don't try that at home! You can tell females and males apart by the male's bigger, more massive, and more curled horns that form a full C-shape.

Bighorn Sheep

(*Ovis canadensis*; California subspecies *O.c. californiana*;  
Rocky Mountain subspecies *O.c.canadensis*)



**Habitat and Range** Most of BC excluding Vancouver Island, Haida Gwai, and high mountains.

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I am a successful member of the dog family. While many species suffer from habitat loss and human impacts, I have done really well and expanded my range. I now live not only in grasslands and deserts but also forests, mountains, and even cities across North America. Maybe it is because I am so clever. Or maybe it is because I am not a picky eater. In the grasslands I especially like to eat small mammals. I dig dens in the soil for shelter and where my pups are born. These burrows are important for other grassland animals who rely on them to escape the summer heat or winter cold. A group of coyotes is called a band.

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)



**Habitat and Range** Ranges throughout much of BC with several subspecies

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I am named for my large, mule-like ears, which help me to listen for predators, including coyotes, cougars, and wolves. I eat grasses and shrubs and change my diet depending on what is available seasonally where I live. Can you guess what I like to eat in the grasslands?

I have no upper teeth- only a broad, hard palate. When I am frightened I stamp my front foot and snort or flee. I can run fast- up to 70 km per hour! I also have a bounding move called a stott when all four of my feet spring up and land at the same time. I can easily jump two metres high, so you may need some very high fences to keep me out of the orchards. I have a white rump and the tip of my tail is black. My cousin, the white-tailed deer, shows a white flash under its raised tail when it bounds away.

**Mule Deer** (*Odocoileus hemionus*)



**Habitat and Range** Southern Okanagan

**Conservation Status** Threatened (**BLUE LIST**)

My “pockets” are fur-lined and in my cheeks. I use them to stash seeds that I collect at night. I store huge quantities of seeds in my underground network of tunnels. That way I have plenty of food all year round and don’t have to leave my burrow when it is too hot or too cold. I spend most of the winter in a deep resting state (torpor) in a cozy grass nest up to 2 metres below ground. I don’t need to drink! I get all the water I need to survive from the seeds, leaves, and insects that I eat.

Great Basin Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus parvus*)





**Habitat and Range** S. Okanagan and Similkameen Valley

**Conservation Status** Threatened (**BLUE LIST**)

**Size** Length 34-40 cm

I am the smallest rabbit in BC, only found in the southern Okanagan. I spend most of the day resting in a shelter that I dig underneath the protective cover of dense shrubs, rocks, or buildings. I venture out at dusk to nibble on grasses, forbs, sagebrush, or juniper berries. I'm always on the watch for predators, such as coyotes or birds of prey, and ready to take a quick leap into the safety of dense brush or a burrow. In the spring I dig a nest and line it with grass and fur. In this nest my baby bunnies are born- up to eight of them! They are born blind and hairless but grow fast and are independent after a month. My name in the Syilx (Okanagan) language is **npəpqʷupaʔs**, which means "little white patch on the bum."

**Nuttall's Cottontail (Mountain Cottontail)** (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*)



**Habitat and Range** Southern Okanagan valley

**Conservation Status** Engangered (**RED LIST**)

The hot dry southern interior has more bat species (14!) than any other region of Canada. I am a bat that is closely associated with the sagebrush steppe of the southern Okanagan. I don't use echolocation to hunt like other bats. Instead I use my big ears to listen for the movements of beetles, crickets, scorpions and other delicious invertebrates rustling in the vegetation and on the ground.

**Pallid Bat** (*Antrozous pallidus*)



**Habitat and Range** Exists in relatively isolated populations in the southeastern corner, and north central portions of B.C.

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I spend my summers grazing in mountain meadows and on avalanche tracks. In the fall I migrate to lower elevations and I spend the winter in areas where snow isn't too deep, including woodlands, grasslands and wetlands. I am a social animal, living in herds of more than 20 female cows, calves and yearlings. We hide our newborns in dense cover and watch out for our predators, which include wolves, cougars and bears. The fall is rutting season when the males fight for dominance by bugling and butting heads. My close relative, the Roosevelt elk, lives on Vancouver Island and the southern coast on the BC mainland.

Rocky Mountain Elk (*Cervus elaphus nelsoni*)





**Habitat and Range** Southern Interior mountains and steppe

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

**Size** Height: 30-50m; needles 12-25cm long, in bundles of 2 or 3

I am a tall, pine adapted to life in the arid zones of the Southern Interior grasslands. I have a taproot that can grow over 40 meters deep to provide me with water. Not only does my thick bark help protect me from fire, I actually need periodic fire for my cones to open and spread their seeds. The seeds in my cones are rich in oil and provide food to many birds and squirrels. Traditionally my wood was carved to make canoes and baby cradles, and my pitch used as medicine and chewed like gum. Today my wood is commercially important in the construction industry. My red-brown bark has thick plates outlined in black that look distinctively like a jigsaw puzzle. Try identifying me on a hot day. You will know its me by the delicious vanilla – butterscotch smell of my bark.

**Ponderosa Pine** (*Pinus ponderosa*)





**Habitat and Range** Southern Okanagan Basin and Rocky Mountain Trench

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I am a common shrub in sandy soils of the arid interior shrub-steppe grasslands and open ponderosa pine forests. My species name means “three teeth” and refers to my leaf shape. Can you see why? I closely resemble big sagebrush and we often grow in the same areas. One way you can tell us apart is by our yellow flowers - mine grow individually, not in a cluster - on short branches. My twigs are covered with dense, woolly hairs and I curl up my leaves to save water during the midday heat. My leaves and branches are an important food source for deer and other hoofed mammals. My seeds are a tasty treat for chipmunks, ground squirrels, and deer mice. I can live over 100 years! Another name for me is bitterbrush.

Antelope-Brush (*Purshia tridentata*)



**Habitat and Range** Central and Southern Interior, southeastern B.C.

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

My sunflower-like flowers add a splash of colour in late spring to the dry, stony slopes of grasslands, open forests and subalpine plateaus. I am named for the shape of my large leaves (up to 30 cm long) and the smell of my long taproot, which has a resin that is reminiscent of balsam (fir tree) sap. My leaves are covered with fuzzy, silvery hairs, which protect me from intense sunlight and drought. The First Peoples of B.C. knew how to prepare me as food and medicine. All parts of me are edible, including my roots, shoots, stems, flowers and seeds. My sunflower seeds produce a nutritious oil and can be ground into flour and my woody taproot can be baked or steamed and ground into a coffee substitute or burned to treat headaches. I'm an important food for native wildlife such as deer, elk, and mice. Domestic sheep like to eat me so much that I've declined in some areas.

**Arrow-Leaved Balsamroot** (*Balsamorhiza sagittataminor*)



**Habitat and Range** Southern Okanagan basin and Rocky Mountain Trench

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

You might not recognize me when I'm not flowering, when my short-lived, thin fleshy leaves hug the ground and my short woody base is only a few centimeters tall. But when spring comes I am unmistakable! I may seem to appear by magic, a glorious show of 5 cm-wide bright pink to white flowers scattered on otherwise bare ground. My thick, branched taproot helps me to obtain water in my dry grassland and sagebrush steppe habitat. Many indigenous peoples ate my roots, digging them up in the early spring when my leaves were still small and before my root became bitter. My root was also an ingredient in a pudding made of saskatoon berries and salmon eggs. I am the state flower of Montana.

**Bitterroot** (*Lewisia rediviva*)





**Habitat and Range** Southern and Central Interior arid grasslands and shrub-steppe

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I am a hearty and drought-tolerant grass, growing in tall and wide bunches, sometimes over a meter high. I have slender, silvery green, stiff stalks and my roots have a waxy layer that helps to keep me from drying out. First Peoples spread me on the floors of pithouses like hay and dried soopolallie berries upon me. I was stuffed in moccasins in winter and used as tinder to start fires. I was also used as a medicine to help treat sores and arthritis. My large bunches provide shelter and food for small animals, and important forage for large grazers such as elk, bighorn, deer and domestic animals.

I help to stabilize soils and can tolerate mild levels of grazing and fire. But too much of either will kill me. I also don't compete well with invasive grasses.

**Bluebunch Wheatgrass** (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*)





**Habitat and Range** Introduced from Europe. Common east of the Coast-Cascade Mountains in dry, disturbed, lowland areas

**Conservation Status** Exotic (non-native), Noxious Weed

I am native to Europe but was first noted in Canada in 1859. Today I am a major concern in the Kootenay, Okanagan, Thompson, and Cariboo areas because of my impact on rangelands and livestock. I am a short-lived plant, growing over a metre tall every 1-2 years. A single plant can produce 2,000-4,000 seeds a year! My seeds are densely covered with barbed prickles that can grab onto wool, hair, and clothing, dispersing me far and wide. It can be stressful to cattle when their faces and bodies get covered with my prickly seeds. Not only that, but I am toxic and can cause liver damage in cattle, deer, pigs, horses, and goats. I thrive in areas that have been affected by fire. Look for my small maroon flowers growing on curved "wands" and the soft downy fuzz covering my stems and leaves. My leaves hang down and have the shape of a dog's tongue.

*\*Invader Alert! Be sure to check your clothing and shoes for my seeds and dispose of them properly so that you don't accidentally spread me to new places!*

Common Hound's-Tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*)



**Habitat and Range** Southeastern B.C. in the low elevations of the East Kootenays and Okanagan Basin

**Conservation Status** B.C.: Secure (YELLOW LIST)

Closely related Lyall's Mariposa Lily is Threatened (BLUE LIST)

I am magnificent and add beauty to the dry slopes and open woodlands where I grow. It takes me three to five years to first produce flowers from my underground energy storage bulbs. So enjoy me where I grow but never dig me up to bring home as I don't transplant well. My creamy yellow-white flowers have fringed edges, pointed tips, and are hairy on their lower half. Like most lilies, I only have three petals. If you think I have six petals you are also counting my narrow sepals, which protect my flower bud before it opens. Look for the small spot near the base of each of my petals. These are my nectar-producing glands that attract a variety of insect pollinators. My roasted bulbs were eaten by the Ktunaxa First Nations and other indigenous peoples.

Three-Spot Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus apiculatus*)



**Habitat and Range** Frequent at low to mid elevations in dry, open areas along the Peace River, and in central and southeastern B.C.

**Conservation Status** B.C.: Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I dominate the grasslands in the Cariboo-Chilcotin, where I form expansive golden fields in the fall. You may also find me growing throughout the Canadian Prairies. My long, sharp-pointed seeds (awns; 6-9 cm long) can twist and untwist as humidity changes, which helps them to burrow into the soil --or into your socks! I am a bunchgrass that grows tall and narrow, nodding over. When ungrazed I can grow 80 cm tall and my roots can extend one metre below the soil surface. My close relative is the needle-and-thread grass, also known as speargrass or coyote grass by First Nations children, who played with their long (up to 30 cm long) seeds like darts.

**Porcupine Grass** (*Hesperostipa curtiseta*)



**Habitat and Range** Widespread and often abundant in the Interior lowlands in dry, open habitats. Also found in Garry Oak ecosystems on Vancouver Island and the Southern Gulf Islands.

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I am a small and hardy, cold-tolerant cactus native to much of North America and growing as far north as the Peace River Valley near Fort St. John. My “stems and branches” are my fleshy pads, and my “leaves” are modified into sharp spines, which protects my juicy tissues from thirsty and hungry herbivores. In the spring and summer you can’t miss my showy yellow flowers with their numerous, paper-thin petals and red-stalked stamens (the pollen producing male part of the flower). After being pollinated, I produce a spiny, pear-shaped berry. I was an important food for First Nations and am still eaten in many parts of the world. Once my spines are removed, my roasted or boiled stems make a delicious and nutritious green vegetable. My fruit is sweet and can be made into jelly.

Brittle Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia fragilis*)





**Habitat and Range** Southern Interior basins

**Conservation Status** Secure (YELLOW LIST)

I am a hardy, aromatic shrub in the sunflower family. I grow up to two metres tall. I have 20 close relatives in B.C., found mostly in the arid interior but also in the far north and in the Peace River region. My cousins include the wormwoods, sageworts, mugworts, and tarragon. Many of us were used by indigenous peoples as medicines and in ceremonies. Some of us were put in bedding to get rid of bedbugs, fleas, and lice or were burned to keep mosquitos away. Others were made into teas to treat colds, aches and pains. My bark was woven into mats, bags, and clothing. Grazing animals tend to avoid eating me because of my bitter taste, preferring to browse on grasses and other plants that I grow near. As a result, I have spread and increased in abundance since European settlement in some areas due to overgrazing by domestic livestock.

**Big Sagebrush** (*Artemisia tridentata*)



**Habitat and Range** Widespread and frequent at low and mid elevations east of the Coast-Cascade range in the arid southern interior. Grows along roadsides, in grasslands and open forests.

**Conservation Status** Exotic (non-native), Noxious Weed

My seeds secretly hitched a ride in soil on a ship from my native home in Eurasia in the 1800s. Since then I have aggressively spread throughout North America, wreaking havoc in the arid grasslands. The Invasive Species Council of B.C. calls me a major concern in the Omineca, Peace River, Kootenay, Okanagan, Thompson, and Cariboo regions. I have infested hundreds of thousands of hectares in B.C. where I out compete native grasses and other preferred food sources of elk, deer, and domestic livestock. Grazers don't like the taste of me at all! I am in the sunflower family and have thistle-like purple flowers with black comb-like tips around the flower head. You may see my flowers blooming from July to October. I have a deep taproot and can grow up to 150 cm tall. I have sweet and abundant nectar that attracts honeybees. Each of my plants can produce over 400 seeds.

*Invader Alert! Check your shoes and clothing for seeds or any other part of the plant and remove and dispose of them carefully. Help stop the spread! Warning: My sap can cause skin irritations in some people.*

**Spotted Knapweed** (*Centaurea biebersteinii*)



**Habitat and Range** Grows in between plants in open, arid lands

**Conservation Status** No status; easily disturbed by vehicles, footsteps, and livestock

I may look unimpressive, dry, and lumpy, but I am an ecosystem in miniature, with a critical role in the open, arid lands. I'm made up of lichens, mosses, liverworts, bacteria, and algae. I hold this place together! Without me the soil would erode and blow away, lose water and nutrients, and make it more difficult for plants to germinate and grow. If you see me it's a sign that you are in a healthy ecosystem. I transform into a bright and colourful soil surface after rainfall. I take decades to grow but one misplaced step can crumble and destroy me. Watch your footsteps and don't bust the crust!

Microbiotic Crust

*(Other names include: cryptobiotic, cryptogamic, and biological soil crust)*

# Grassland Identification Cards

Check out our other ID cards:

**Forest**  
ID CARDS

**Ocean**  
ID CARDS

**Pond**  
ID CARDS



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