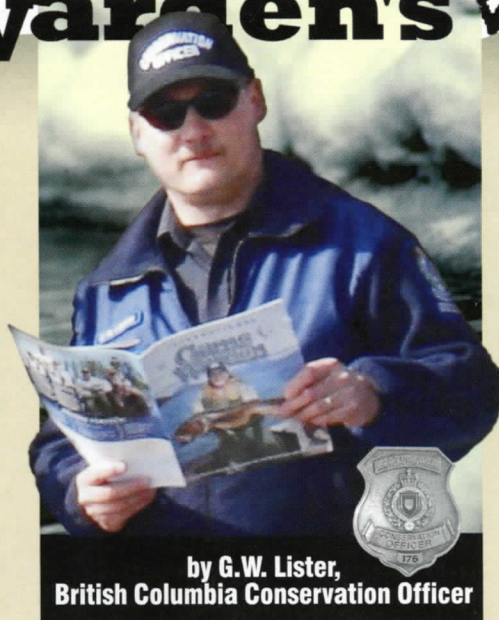


The warden's words

After submitting the Spring column summer can be a slow time for some, and in British Columbia we have had one of the driest summers on record, resulting in campfire bans and the closing of many of the provinces streams due to the drought conditions. Add to that the fact that our natural resource officers (forest rangers) are restricted in their patrol duties because of a safety injunction, and these events have resulted in increased patrols and overtime shifts for many of our conservation officers. I wish I could say that I was raking in the "OT" and run off my feet, but I have been off my feet for another reason.

In late June I had a complete rupture of my right Achilles' tendon and underwent surgery to repair it. So summer was a write-off for me, as I can't drive, work in the yard, go camping, go fishing or do much of anything that requires me to be on my feet for any length of time. For those of you keeping track, this is my second work-place injury in just over 14 months. This one does not have a quick recovery time, and although I should be free of my walking boot around mid-September, I will still be re-learning how to walk without a limp after that, so hunting season is kaput as well. This is my fifth work related time-loss injury of my career, and I only have my left arm, head, neck/spine and hips left to injure. When I do go back to work, I'm sure I'll be constantly on edge, wondering when the next one will happen and what will it be – the frequency seems to be increasing.

ANYWAY, enough about me and my tales of woe. I have no shortage of books to write about, so it's time to get at it. I have a couple of sophomore entries to fill you in on, as well as a novel from a brand new author. I'll give you the



by G.W. Lister,
British Columbia Conservation Officer

straight goods on them, in the order that I read them.

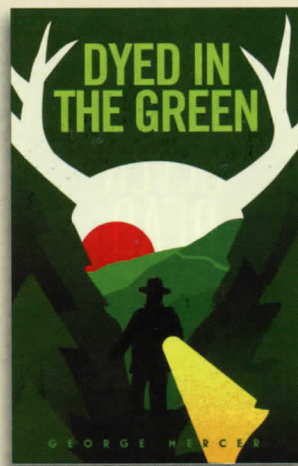
I received a "sponsored ad" on my Facebook for a book titled *Dyed In The Green* which was published in early 2015. It is a novel written by a retired Canadian National Park Warden who worked in national parks all over Canada. The information provided said that the book would be the first in a series of books inspired by the men and women of Canada's national parks. The synopsis for the book states: "National Park Warden Ben Matthews expected challenges with his new posting at Cape Breton Highlands. But he got more than he bargained for. Facing a notorious poacher with a reputation for letting nothing get in his way, and the local communities who viewed poaching as part of their way of life, Ben and the park wardens are drawn into an intricate game of cat and mouse that takes a turn no one could have imagined.

Set along the world-famous Cabot Trail, *Dyed In The Green* is a powerful story of egos, greed and corruption,

pulling readers along on an emotional rollercoaster that weaves bitter rivalries into a gripping story about protecting one of Canada's iconic, special places."

Well I was sold. If the book measured up to this synopsis, it should be a decent read. I was particularly intrigued with the fact that it was a novel about park wardens set in my home country. My fear was that it would just be a Canadianized version of the Nevada Barr novels, which, for the most part, are just murder mysteries with the US National Parks as the backdrop. I don't mind a good murder mystery, but because I prefer to read "warden books", I always hope that the next novel I read doesn't veer too far that way. I contacted George and obtained a copy for review.

The first chapter of *Dyed In The Green* didn't let on where this book would go, but as the chapters began to unfold, it was clear that this was primarily a book about some of the hurdles faced by parks wardens of a decade or more ago. Although no specific time period is ever stated, one can assume that the author is drawing upon his own experiences in the Cape Breton Highlands, and the story is taking place in the 1980's or 1990's. That is further borne out by the author's very good depiction of the working conditions of the wardens, and the fact that the wardens are generalists, and go about their duties without the benefit of cellphones or sidearms. Anyone with any knowledge of the current Warden Service knows that they are now a small, armed and strictly law enforcement focused agency. That was not the case for nearly 100 years, and the challenges of not



only being unarmed, but of not being autonomous from the individual park's Superintendent, and of having only semi-functional equipment are key elements of this story.

Author George Mercer has created his own unique, but historically accurate genre with *Dyed In The Green*. While drugs, murder and other crimes are prevalent in this book, they are not the main substance of the story. We are all aware that many hardcore poachers also have a propensity for other crimes, so it is not a stretch to have the two worlds overlap as they do in this novel. The way that the author then takes certain elements of the criminal world and the wildlife poaching world, and drapes them with the fabric of the Cape Breton culture to create his storyline, is really quite creative and imaginative, yet completely plausible and believable.

I really enjoyed *Dyed In The Green*. It was full of interesting regional characters, outsiders trying to fit in but do their job, suspense, action, drama and sorrow. I was drawn into the story and found it very compelling and captivating. Not only was it a book that I found hard to put down, but it was one that left me wanting more when it was done. I have to say that the official synopsis for this book was pretty accurate in all respects.

I'm happy to know that more novels are planned in this series, and I am definitely looking forward to the next one, *Wood Buffalo*, for which there is a teaser at the end of this book.

Dyed In The Green (ISBN 978-0-9879754-0-9) is 350 pages (not including the *Wood Buffalo* teaser) and is available in both a soft-cover trade paperback, and also in eBook format. The book is for sale at close to 80 bookstores across Canada

with a suggested retail price of \$19.99. It can also be ordered directly from George by following this link - <http://georgemercer.com/purchasing/>. The shipping process quoted there is only for shipping within Canada, but you can contact him directly at georgemercer.com@gmail.com for "international" shipping rates. If you are eBook inclined, electronic versions of the book can be purchased online from Amazon.com (\$7.89 USD, \$9.99 CDN) and Kobobooks.com (\$9.99 USD).

RETIRED Idaho Game Warden **Tony Latham** is back with a sequel to *Five Fingers*, his first novel, which I reviewed in the Spring 2014 issue. Published in June of 2015, Latham's sequel is titled *Seven Dead Fish*, and once again he darn near hits the nail on the head. This novel ticks almost all the boxes for me.

Seven Dead Fish picks up several months after the fallout in *Five Fingers*. As a result of the traumatic events in the earlier story, Idaho Game Warden Charlie Cove is now suffering from PTSD, and one of the ways he tries to cope is to begin exploring his native heritage. The relationship he developed with Julie Lake in the earlier book looked promising, but the events that have scarred him have also left her reeling, and she has left town and their relationship is estranged.

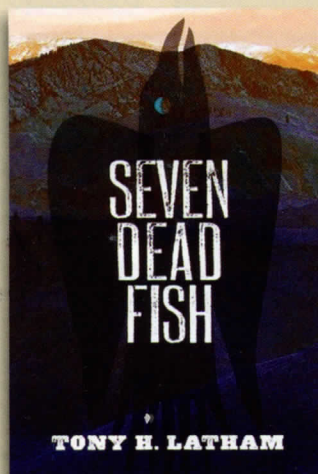
In *Seven Dead Fish*, Charlie Cove becomes involved in a potential murder investigation when he is requested by his friend, A/Sheriff Mendiola, to attend a motor vehicle crash site to look at a severed foot, because of his experience with wildlife forensics. Cove makes some observations that raise the suspicion of his former nemesis, Detective Wayne McGee of the

Idaho State Police. Cove makes some enquiries of his own, which lead to a suspect in a drug cartel related murder, and he soon finds an ally in a female DEA investigator. Despite his best efforts to not get involved with the drug and murder investigations, and to try and focus on why there are seven dead fish with no apparent cause of death in one of the local creeks, he keeps getting pulled back into the case.

Latham assured me that he would continue to write resource-based tales and he has made an attempt to do so in *Seven Dead Fish*, but it strays far enough into the world of the criminal underbelly, that it tends to lean a bit more in that direction. That's quite alright however, as the author manages to balance that by using a resource-based investigation and related patrols as the catalysts that put Cove into situations that result in his interactions with the criminal element. He also tempers it by having Cove become troubled, both inwardly and outwardly, when he is not doing his actual job and is instead assisting the local Sheriff's office and the DEA.

The characters in *Seven Dead Fish* are well developed and they don't act the way they do "just because" – there are compelling reasons for their actions and emotions. Some of the familiar likeable and despicable characters from the first novel return, along with the usual insidious, but expendable cast.

One thing that I didn't even notice until I started to put together this review, is that our hero was named Charley Cove in the first book, and now he is Charlie Cove. I don't know if that was a completely subconscious change, perhaps resulting from a different editor, or if the author is subtly trying to manipulate things here. I tend to think it's the former, as I also noted some odd spelling errors in the book, which indicate that a bit more proof-reading was in order. Although spelling errors are distracting to me, most readers probably



don't even notice, and overall the book is well written, has a very well developed plot and there are no loose ends or blind alleys to frustrate the reader.

Seven Dead Fish (ISBN# 978-1514822487) is 240 pages and is available from Amazon.com in both the soft cover print version for \$14.46 USD and the Kindle version for only \$4.83 USD. For Canadian readers, the soft cover is \$19.54 and the Kindle version is \$6.15 at Amazon.ca.



LASTLY, is the fifth entry in retired Alberta Fish & Wildlife Officer **Murray E. Bates** "Game Warden" series, appropriately titled *Game Warden V - The Lighter Side*.

I provided short reviews of Murray's first three books in one of my early columns (Spring 2007) and made mention of *Game Warden IV* in the Winter 2013-14 issue. They are really good books and are full of insight and information.

Since that time, Murray has been inducted into the Olds (Alberta) Agricultural College Alumni Hall of Fame, due in large part to the success of his previous publications. He is the first Fish & Wildlife Officer to have had this honor bestowed upon him. Murray attended the college from 1967 to 1970 and he credits much of his success as a Wildlife Officer to the education in Agriculture & Animal Science that he received there. Congratulations Murray!

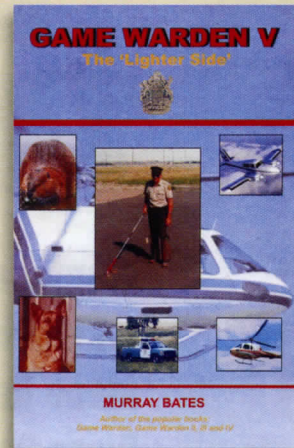
As far as *Game Warden V* is concerned, I do not think that it measures up to the previous books. There are a number of reasons for this. First, in the introduction of the book, the author asserts that Alberta "Conservation Officers" (formerly Park Rangers) are not "game wardens" and as such should not be members of NAWEOA and he explains why. This assertion immediately

contradicts his statements that he wants this book to portray the "lighter side" of the job, so in effect dooms the book before it even starts.

Next, I am a bit of a "grammar Nazi", as I find spelling mistakes, incorrect grammar, and punctuation errors to not only be distracting, but (and this depends on the quantity and frequency) also an indication that the book was either rushed, or was not a priority to the author or his editor. Unfortunately *Game Warden V* could have benefited from a very thorough proofread by a fresh set of eyes before it went to press. After just a few pages, my perception of the book was already jaded by the lack of attention to detail.

Next, some of the stories, especially in the earlier part of the book, are not really as light and humorous as I expected they would be, and in fact fall a bit flat. The author also has the tendency to go off on a tangent, which leads to yet another tangent or two, and eventually, after many pages, he gets back to the original point of the story. The introduction and the first two chapters of the book comprise the first 30 pages of this 75 page book, but really didn't get my motor running.

I feel like I'm beating up on poor Murray Bates here, especially when he was good enough to contact me and send me the book. But my readers want me to be honest in my assessments. So I shelved the book and read something else, and came back to *Game Warden V* with a fresh perspective and I put the first 30 pages out of my mind. The



latter half of the book still tended to ramble, but I found the actual stories to be a bit more entertaining, although I was still distracted by the grammatical issues.

What I noticed was some of the tangents that the author went off on would have made fine stories of their own, while the story he intended to tell was sometimes of a secondary quality. The

entire book consists of only six chapters, but if the author had not tried to package similar stories together in each chapter, and had embellished the stories a bit more, he could have written twenty shorter chapters with a bit more variety, and possibly made the book a bit longer as well.

Finally, if you've read his previous books, you would have noticed one recurring theme regarding the failed amalgamation of Park Rangers and Fish & Wildlife Officers in Alberta, which had a detrimental effect on Murray's career and left him bitter. Rightly so, but it is briefly brought up again in this book and I think it would have been better left unmentioned in a book subtitled "The Lighter Side".

Game Warden V - The Lighter Side is available directly from Murray for \$19.95 (CDN) which includes shipping and handling anywhere in the US or Canada. Murray can be contacted by email at pcwilb@explornet.ca, by phone at (403) 638-8066 or by mail at Murray E. Bates Publishing, RR 2, Sundre, Alberta T0M 1X0.

Until next time, 🐾

GW

If you would like Gerry to review your book, you can contact him at:

GW (Gerry) Lister, The Warden's Words Phone: [604] 485-4393
4060 Joyce Avenue, Powell River, E-mail: moosecop@moosecop.net
British Columbia, Canada V8A 2Z5 Website: books.moosecop.net