

The researchers will look at mobility of individuals in cold climates

# Institute makes cold living warmer

by Randal Smathers

Scattered in a few offices and labs across campus are men and women who are trying to make our winters more bearable. Their work is just one of the many programs administered out of a couple small rooms in the Biological Sciences Building. The group in charge is known as the Boreal Institute for Northern Studies (BINS) and they are celebrating their 25th anniversary this November. Research teams sponsored by the Institute are examining virtually every aspect of life in Canada's north. If despite all this you've never heard of BINS before, don't feel too bad, as you are probably in the majority of students in this regard.

The Institute was founded in 1960 and has been actively involved in scientific research involving the north ever since. In February 1985, the Boreal Institute's mandate was updated to meet a growing interest in Canada's northern frontier. Their first task is to promote northern research and disseminate this knowledge. The Institute fosters communication among Arctic-oriented researchers, both at the U of A and elsewhere. Finally, it is to encourage northerners to become involved in the Institute's activities.

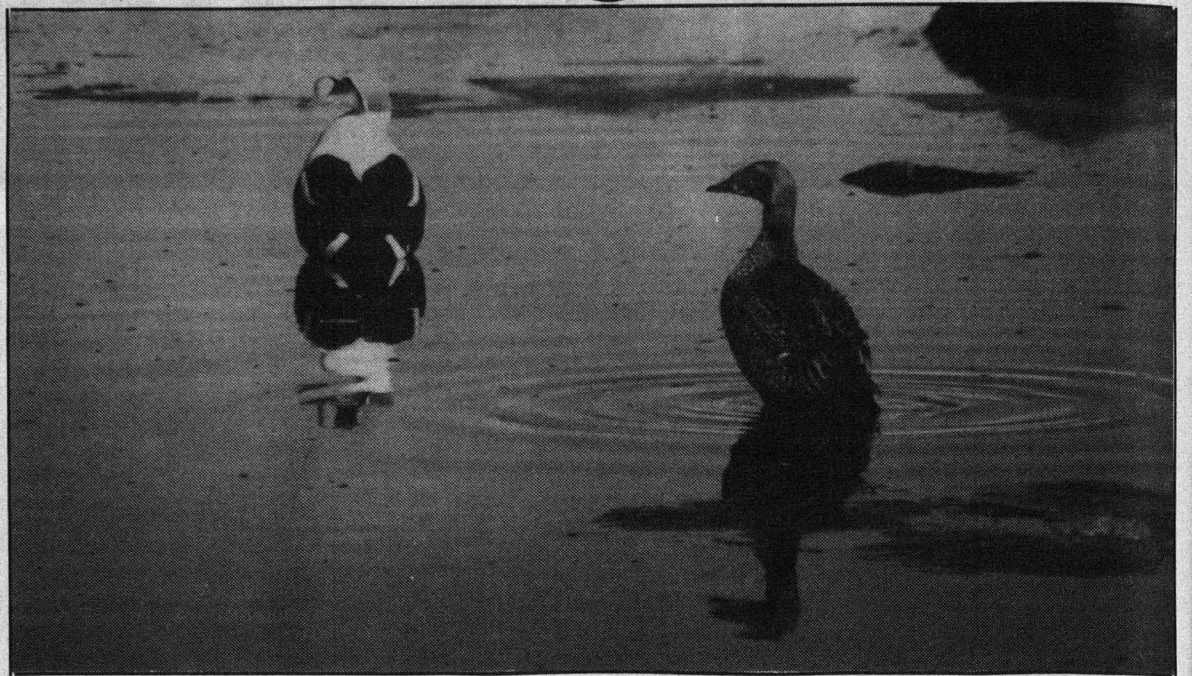
There is a team of seven leaving the U of A for Sapporo, Japan in October. They will be co-ordinating a joint research project between BINS and scientists from the Northern Regions Center at Hokkaido University. The researchers will look at such topics as mobility of individuals in cold climates. This translates into studentese as "How do I get from General Services to Tory in December without catching pneumonia?" This is just part of a relatively new field of research involving how we survive in and adapt to life in frosty climes. According to Dr. A.S.A. Mohsen, the Acting Director of the Boreal Institute, one of the first major

projects was completed in the mid-1970s in the Yukon. Hopefully within 10 years they'll know a cheaper cure for February than Honolulu!

Most of the researchers from the Institute are working even farther north than Edmonton, however. The bulk of the efforts are concentrated north of the 60th parallel, in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Current research activities of the Institute include wolf and coyote predation studies and a study to help reintroduce the swift fox to Canada, where it is now extinct. There are also studies under way on clothing, specifically explorer's wear, Scandinavian clothes and textile samples from the so-called "iceman". The "iceman" was a member of the Franklin Arctic expedition exhumed two years ago by a team from the U of A. There are researchers examining the status and employment of native women in the north and medical research on hepatitis and infant mortality as well.

Besides these major projects, the Institute administers two grants-in-aid programs, one federal and one provincial. Dr. Mohsen said these total about \$170,000 this year alone. He added that 90 per cent of all research sponsored by BINS is performed by graduate students for theses, although there is some faculty work. In addition, there are a few visiting researchers based at the U of A and affiliated with the Institute. Dr. Mohsen said that at any given time there are between 80 and 100 projects underway, covering all disciplines related to the north.

Because so much of the research is field work occurring in the territories, the largest on-campus element of the Institute is the library. Like everything else at BINS, the library is completely interdisciplinary. It is open to anyone from in or out of the university. The library is unique in that it is geo-



Two King Eider in the cold northern waters

photo courtesy The Boreal Institute for Northern Studies

graphically oriented, carrying all sorts of material about that part of the world north of 60. There are a lot of scientific works, but also periodicals, fiction and even films. Material is suitable for all ages as well, from young children to graduate study level, according to the head librarian, Mrs. G.A. Cooke. "We have every newspaper north of 60 and most native published papers from the rest of Canada," she said.

Due to its specialized nature, the library uses an unusual numbering system, developed by the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge University. Cooke said that every professor offering a course with northern content is contacted to arrange for students' orientation tours at the start of each year. The library is fully computerised, with a Keyword In Context index and a SPIRES database. There is also a staff of six to provide assistance. The library is located at CW401 Bio-

logical Sciences Building. As well as Cambridge, the library maintains contact with libraries in Alaska, the territories and at Arctic related institutions around the world.

The Institute is developing its international ties. They have a formal exchange agreement with the Northern Regions Center in Hokkaido. "We are also about to sign an agreement with the University of Umea in Sweden," said Dr. Mohsen. He went on to say that all the circumpolar nations have research centers and that most communicate with each other through regular conventions and seminars. The Soviet Union is the notable exception, with no contacts at the official level, although there is exchange with individual scientists. The Soviets are very active in northern research and there has been progress towards their participation at the official level according to Dr. Mohsen.

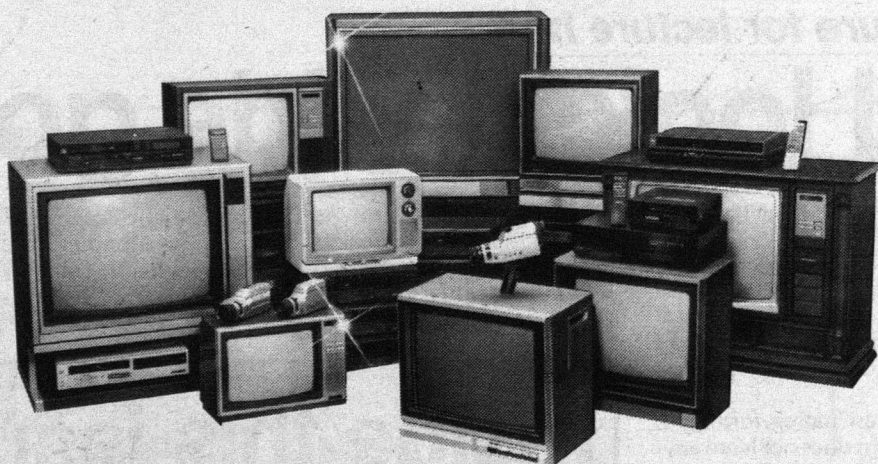
The Boreal Institute will be

hosting a major conference on November 20-22, 1986, marking their 25th anniversary. The conference will include workshops on northern ecology and the environment, education, history and modern and traditional medicine. There will be a display of northern art at the convention site (the Terrace Inn) and another on campus. A publication based on the topics covered at the conference will follow. The conference theme is *Knowing the North; Integrating Tradition, Technology and Science*.

In addition, there will be a special conference examining the Finnish folk epic, the *Kalevala*. It runs concurrent with the main conference and will incorporate lectures, concerts, workshops and films. Information on the conference is available from the BINS office, CW401 Biological Sciences.

Congratulations and wishes for a successful 25th anniversary to the Boreal Institute!

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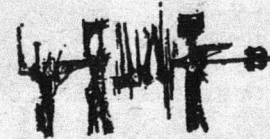
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