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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 40, Number 4

March-April 2006

Club Activities

Indoor: Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month from September to June at Georgetown and District High School, Drama Room, 70 Guelph Street (Highway 7/Guelph Street at Albert), unless stated otherwise. **See map page ?.**

Apr. 11: Mamals of Madacascar Fiona Reid will give a talk and slide presentation on bat conservation in Africa and Madacascar.

May 9: Moths of Ontario. Our presenters will be Don Scallen and Kerry Jarvis.

June 13: Evening walk at Crozier. Meet at 7:30 at the Helena Road entrance.

Outdoor: Trips begin at the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) parking lot at Guelph and Mountainview Road, Georgetown, unless stated otherwise. If you would like to meet the group at the trip site, please speak to the trip leader for confirmation of the location and the directions to the starting point.

Mar. 18: Annual trip to Long Point. Long Point is a resting and feeding stop for Tundra Swans on the way to their breeding grounds in the far north. Many other species of waterfowl, and some returning songbirds are usually seen too. Meet Ray Blower at 8:00 a.m. Bring lunch or money for lunch, binoculars, and scopes. Call Ray to join the outing at another location (519) 853-0171.

Apr. 9: Crozier Tract - Completion of tree inventory plot set up. Meet Bill McIlveen at the end of St Helena Road off Highway 25, south of Speyside at 1:00 pm.

Apr. 29: Beamer Conservation Area Hawk Watch, Grimsby. Meet 9:00 am at the NEC parking lot. On this trip we stop at the Scotch Block reservoir, Islay Lake, and La Salle Park on the way to the Beamer Hawk Watch at the top of the escarpment in Grimsby. Even though the hawks may not blacken the sky during our trip we will always see some. In addition, a good variety of songbirds and waterfowl will be seen. Some things to bring: binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. Call Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171 with any questions.

May 21: Thickson Wood Spring Birding, Whitby. Meeting times and locations to be arranged with trip leader, Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171 in Acton or (905) 444-9454 in Whitby. This trip is scheduled on the Sunday of the Victoria Day weekend to minimize the effect of traffic on participants coming from points west. Meeting times at Thickson Wood could be arranged for any time between 06:00 to 11:00 if the weather is reasonable. Lynde Shores Conservation Area and Cranberry Marsh are the other places visited. All locations are near that cool lake, Ontario, so bring warm clothing. Binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. These three places provide a lovely variety of habitats including mature forest, meadows, marshes, swamps, scrub land and Lake Ontario. Almost any song bird may be seen as well as a variety of the "late" ducks.

Young Naturalists

Jan. 14: Evergreens. Location of meeting Limehouse Memorial Hall, 1:00-3:00 p.m. Openings available for children; but parent participation required. Contact Andy and Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132.

Inside...

President's message.....p.2
2005 Bird Count Results.....p.3
Emily's Young Naturalist Report.....p.5
Evergreen ID.....p.5

Short-eared Owl Survey.....p.6
UCC Bird Report.....p.6
Species at Risk Survey.....p.7
Election Questions.....p.10
Duffins-Rouge Act.....p.10

President's Message

Sincerely,
Kelly Brown

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1

Executive

President: Kelly Bowen (905) 873-7338
Past-President Andy Kovacs (905)702-1132
Vice-President: Andrew Kellman (905) 873-7338
Secretary: Janice Sukhiani (905) 693-8227
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Appointments

Membership: Teresa Rigg (905) 873-0614
Newsletter: Gerda Potzel (905) 702-1681
Ontario Nature Representative: Teresa Rigg
Public Relations: Gerry Doekes (905) 873-0179
Young Naturalists: Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132

- Membership .for one year: \$20 Single; \$30 Family
- The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club is an affiliated member of Ontario Nature (Formerly Federation of Ontario Naturalists)



Deadline for the May/June 2006 newsletter: May 31, 2006

Email submissions/questions/concerns to: gpotzel@sympatico.ca

Meeting and Outing Reports

Young Naturalist January Meeting

This was our first visit to the Young Naturalists Club for my sister and I, we had lots of fun. We met in the Limehouse Community Centre. The first thing we did was put together a pine tree by counting all the whorls on each piece of cut up wood. Whorls are the rings on the inside of the tree. Then we identified pinecones and branches from the evergreen trees using a chart to help us. After that we bundled up in our outdoor clothes and went on a walk. It was very cold and the paths were like skating rinks. We saw lots of trees, ice, snow and a really cool kiln. We were told about kilns and the limestone by Teresa.

When we got back inside we had hot chocolate and apple slices. To get to know and remember every one's name we played a game. I think everyone had fun with the game.

We are excitedly awaiting the next meeting,

Rachel and Victoria Wilkes

January Outing at Terra Cotta

On January 15, a small group met at Terra Cotta Conservation area for a walk. For one of the rare days this winter, the sun shone in a clear blue sky and the air was clear and very cold. We were able to stroll at a leisurely pace with comfort, protected from the wind by the trees. Although icy in places, with care we managed to avoid slipping on the path. The woods retain more snow than the open areas enabling us a chance to spot tracks of rabbits, squirrels, and raccoons. The birds must have all been huddled up with companions for warmth – they were not to be seen or heard. Newly felled trees puzzled us, but were probably a result of safety concerns. There was evidence of uprooted trees having been felled by high winds. These probably damaged others as they fell, and resulted in the other trees needing to be removed. Many people use this wonderful conservation area year round, and must be protected.

Thanks to Theresa for leading this walk.

Bev Whatmough.

Carnivorous Caterpillars

It is generally considered that moths and butterflies are a placid bunch of vegetarians that munch away on their preferred host plants, although at times, their numbers can reach outbreak proportions. Amid this perception, it is sometimes reported that the Harvester butterfly (*Feniseca tarquinius*) is the only carnivorous butterfly in North America. That may be true in the strict sense but it leaves the reader with the impression that this is the only lepidopteran species that has such an unusual characteristic. This is not quite correct. The Harvester larva does feed on several species of Woolly Aphid but the most commonly encountered host insect is the one found, often conspicuously, on alder.

The Harvester is a member of the Lycaenidae (Blues). When one examines this group of butterflies, it is noted that about half of the 1500 species world-wide have evolved a mutualistic relationship with ants. Ants tend the larvae in return for sugary secretions. The larvae in turn are protected by the ants against parasitoids that would use the butterfly larvae as hosts for their young. In a number of cases, the ants take the larvae into their nests. In some cases, the larvae become very bad guests that start to feed on the ant larvae. For example, the caterpillars of the species *Cigaritis acamas* spend almost their entire larval life inside the host ant (*Crematogaster*) colony. The caterpillars are fed by the ants at the same time that the caterpillars are busy feeding on the ant brood. For some reason, the ants do not realize what is happening and continue to groom their caterpillar while it is feeding on their young. They make no attempt to protect the brood. In a similar fashion, the moth butterfly, *Liphyra brassolis major* of the same Lycaenidae family, flies at dawn and dusk. The larvae have a thick leathery surface that protects them within the nests of the green tree ant *Oecophylla smaragdina* where they feed on the juices of the ant larvae.

A carnivorous habit is not exclusive to the Lycaenidae. The European Dun-bar Moth, (*Cosmia trapezina*) a member of the Noctuidae (Cutworm moths) is often carnivorous. The related American Dun-bar (*Cosmia calami*) is also reported to be carnivorous, feeding on other caterpillars; however, it can complete its life cycle feeding on plant material alone.

On Hawaii, at least sixteen species of the genus *Eupithecia* (Geometridae or inchworms) are reported to be carnivorous. Six species of these small caterpillars have adapted a special ability to catch small flying insects such as fruit flies or termites. They remain motionless until the prey flies too close and the caterpillar snatches it out of the air. The caterpillar grasps the prey tightly with its six legs and proceeds to devour it. There are about thirty-four *Eupithecia* species in Ontario but there are no reports of equivalent carnivorous behaviour among these.

In 2005, it was discovered that certain tiny caterpillars in Hawaii had acquired a taste for escargot, albeit on a small scale (the caterpillars are only about 8 mm long). The larvae of the case-bearing moth, *Hyposmocoma molluscivora* (Family Cosmopterigidae) live in a loose 'shell' of silk that may also incorporate debris as camouflage for additional protection. When a suitable snail is located, the caterpillar traps the snail in a silk net and wedges its own case against the snail shell. Then it crawls out of its case and pursues the snail as it withdraws into its shell and consumes it at leisure.

The carnivorous habit is very rare among butterflies and moths with only about 200 out of the 150,000 species (0.13%) showing this predatory characteristic. The snail-feeding caterpillar mentioned above has another four or five relatives that share the same behaviour but they have yet to be studied. As scientific research continues, undoubtedly other species of moths and butterflies will be found that are carnivorous but, based on past experience, the numbers of species can be expected to remain rather low. It is likely that large numbers of mites and small insects living on leaf surfaces and the larvae of leaf-mining insects get consumed by caterpillars feeding on plant foliage. I am not aware of any specific studies that have examined this but undoubtedly, this is a form of inadvertent carnivorous behaviour that goes on constantly.

W.D. McIlveen

The Armchair Naturalist
“March of the Penguins” Movie Review

For those who have not yet seen it, or want to see it again, “March of the Penguins” has recently been released on DVD. This beautifully photographed documentary presents the fascinating breeding cycle of Antarctica’s emperor penguins. It begins at the start of the Antarctic winter when the penguins rocket out of the icy ocean and undertake a 70 mile trek across the frozen sea to their breeding grounds. Following courtship and mating, the male incubates their single egg in unimaginable cold, while the exhausted female returns to the ocean to feed. Finally, just as it seems that the penguins cannot endure another blizzard, the eggs hatch into adorable downy chicks. At this point, the new fathers have not eaten in nearly four months, and have lost almost half their initial body weight. The newly hatched chicks, which shelter in their fathers’ belly feathers, are also desperate for their first meal. Miraculously, it is at this point that the mothers return from the ocean after a two month feeding frenzy and take over parenting duties. The starving males trek back to the sea to feed for several weeks. As spring arrives (such as it is), the penguins take turns rearing their chicks. By summer, the sea ice has melted back to within a few hundred meters of the nesting grounds, and the chicks are finally left to their own devices. The movie closes with the newly-molted juveniles plunging into the water to begin their five-year sojourn at sea.

The stunning photography is the highlight of this amazing documentary, which is not surprising given its National Geographic roots. It presents about 90 minutes of up-close-and-personal-footage of these beautiful penguins, interspersed with dramatic imagery of blue glaciers, sea ice, rock formations and sky. Some of the most memorable scenes are the tender courtship displays between pairs. It also includes remarkable underwater footage of the graceful feeding penguins.

Furthermore, the storyline is interesting enough to grip even the non-birders among the audience. There were many comic moments in which the audience laughed aloud, and I dare say that a few tears were shed during the inevitable “survival of the fittest” scenes. It is not easy watching a chick, which has had much care lavished upon it with considerable sacrifice to its parents, die of exposure in the Antarctic cold. This raises the point that the movie is sometimes guilty of anthropomorphism – assigning human characteristics to animals or objects. In other words, a bit of “Disney-fication”... For example, you are left with the gnawing feeling that the marauding albatross is intrinsically “bad”. My only other criticism is that it gives only the bare bones of narrative. This is probably done not to overwhelm the general public with facts. The biologist in me wanted more information – how do the parents continue to feed their chicks some form of regurgitated fish when they haven’t eaten themselves in weeks? What is the mortality rate of chicks? What are their future prospects with climate change? Despite these few shortcomings, we thoroughly enjoyed “March of the Penguins”. My final advice is to see on a big screen if at all possible, as the cinematography is worth the money you’ll pay!

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club
Membership for September 2005 to September 2006

_____ Renewal or _____ New Member(s)

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

_____ Single (\$20.00) _____ Family (\$30.00)

Do you have any suggestions for programs or field trips?

WAIVER OF LIABILITY (must be signed by anyone planning to attend field trips or other outdoor activities)

In making this application, I affirm that I am in good health, capable of performing the exercise required to participate, and that I accept as my personal risk the hazards of such participation and will not hold the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club or its representatives responsible.

In consideration of the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club accepting my application, I hereby and forever release and discharge the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club and its officers, directors, servants, and agents from any liability whatsoever arising as a result of my participation in these trips and declare that this is binding upon me, my heirs, executors, administrators, and assigned.

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

Please fill out this form and mail with payment to:
Or bring it in to the next indoor meeting.

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