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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 pm 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 6.**

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

May 9: Conservation Halton's 50th Anniversary. A presentation on the new community outreach programs being launched for the 50th anniversary and a discussion of conservation work.

June 13: Moths of Ontario. Our presenters will be Don Scallen and Kerry Jarvis.

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 the location and 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 am. 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: Hawk Watch at Beamer Conservation Area, Grimsby. Meet 9:00 am. On the way to the Beamer hawk watch at the top of the escarpment stops are to be made at the Scotch Block reservoir, Islay Lake, and LaSalle Park. Even though the hawks may not blacken the sky during our trip we always see some. In addition, a good variety of songbirds and waterfowl are to 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's Woods 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's Woods 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 Lake Ontario which remains cool at this time of the season, so bring warm clothing, binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. These three places provide a 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

Apr. 15: Crozier Tract Adventure. This outing is from 1:00 to 3:00 pm. Meet at St Helena's Road off Highway 25 south of Speyside. Contact Andy and Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132.

May 13: Ravine hike in Georgetown. Meet at 1:00 pm. at 46 Regan Crescent. Contact Andy and Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132

President's Message

Now that spring is just around the corner (at least according to the calendar), it seems like a good time to mention some upcoming events and projects involving our club. River Fest in Norval is returning to its environmental roots this year, and the organizers are seeking involvement from our club. We hope to create a display for the festival, and we may hold another plant sale focusing on native species. This has been a reasonably good fund-raiser for us in the past, and volunteers are needed to make this a success!

On another front, Bill McIlveen has been working on our Summer Evening Walks schedule, but with a new focus for 2006. He has teamed up with municipal staff from Halton Hills, Milton, Oakville and Burlington to create and update hiking trail guides for the Halton area. Although in some cases these guides already exist, they may lack natural history information or be out of date. The idea is that together with the South Peel Naturalist Club, we will begin a multi-year project to systematically hike and record observations along walking trails within the region. The current plan is to tackle trails within the Sixteen Mile Creek watershed in 2006. This sounds like an exciting opportunity to lend some focus to our hikes and benefit the local community. I hope that members of our club will support this activity and participate in the evening walks this summer.

Our club executive, which is made up of a mixture of seasoned and new members this year, seems to be organizing nicely. However, we are still eagerly seeking a new Treasurer. Prior experience isn't necessary, just enthusiasm and some sense of how to keep track of the club's finances. I'm sure that some mentoring of a new volunteer can be offered as well! Furthermore, as anyone who has recently visited our website may have noticed, we are in need of some electronic updating. We would be thrilled if someone with a bit of web savvy might be able to help us out with routine updates on our website. We are also interested in photos, upcoming events and other information that could be posted on the site. If anyone could help us out in either of these areas, I or any other club executive members would love to hear from you! Thanks in advance!

Sincerely,
Kelly Bowen

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
Treasurer: David Williams (905) 877-1539

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

<http://haltonnorthpeelnaturalists.org>

Bird Report from Upper Canada College (UCC)

After a spell of warm weather, a total of 9 White-throated Sparrows showed up at the feeder area together on January 7. Almost weekly sightings this winter, 18 American Robins flew over the Stephen House on January 13. Surprise for January 22, was a Common Raven, calling while perched in a Scot's Pine beside our house, it stayed there for about five minutes and flew in a westerly direction.

A Song Sparrow has visited the feeder area off and on this winter.

A Rough-legged Hawk (dark phase) flew over the property on February 6.



Gerry Doekes

Other Events of Interest

Tuesday, March 21, 7:30 pm, Pond Gardens: The Natural Way.

MacEwan Field Station at Riverwood, 1475 Burnhamthorpe Road West. For more information and to register contact the Mississauga Garden Council at (905) 279-5878 or www.mississaugagardencouncil.org

Saturday, April 1, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday, April 2, 11:00 am to 4:00 pm, Halton Eco Festival.

Oakville Glen Abbey Recreation Centre, 1415 3rd Line, north of the QEW, just south of Upper Middle Road. Discover how to improve your environment, health, and community. 85 exhibitors and 16 free interactive workshops. Two-day admission is \$10.00. Free, age 12 and under. For more information – www.haltonecofest.ca

Saturday, April 22, 2006 10:00 am to 2:00 pm Earth Day Trees for Watershed Health

Milton Limestone Quarry. Please join Conservation Halton in their efforts to plant over 2000 trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants at this restoration site. Other activities include barbecue, wagon rides, educational displays, etc. Contact: Gary Hutton ghutton@hrca.on.ca (905)336-1158 ext. 233

Saturday, June 3, and Sunday, June 4, River Fest.

Willow Park Ecology Centre (WPEC), Norval. The theme is w-a-t-e-r, featuring Children's Water Festival events. There will also be exhibits, musicians, workshops, pancake breakfast, beer/wine tent, hikes, and an outdoor market hosting vendors and community groups offering new ideas, products and services related to water, environmentally friendly practices and sustainable living. More help is welcome and needed. Contact Tunde at the WPEC office (905) 702-9055, wpec@willowparkecology.com or www.willowparkecology.com.

Saturday, June 17, 10:00 am to Noon, 2nd Annual Nature Walk-a-Thon.

Gather pledges and raise money for your environmental group and the Halton Environmental Network (HEN). Your environmental group keeps 80% of all donations collected by you and HEN receives 20%. Location of route in North Halton – Willow Park Ecology Centre. To receive a pledge sheet call HEN at (905) 849-5501 or email info@the-hen.net or visit www.the-hen.net.

Book Review: *Winter World: the Ingenuity of Animal Survival*, by Bernd Heinrich

Published 2003 by HarperCollins Publishers Inc. New York, N.Y.
ISBN 0-06-095737-9 316 pages paperback

I was once taught that winter survival for animals was based on three simple strategies – migrate, hibernate or stay active. Thanks to Bernd Heinrich's book, I now know that there are as many ways of outlasting winter's harshness as there are of succumbing to the cold. Using one straight forward question, wondering how an animal as tiny as a kinglet keeps from freezing to death on a frigid winter night, the narrative launches a series of studies and observations that branch out to cover many familiar creatures. Heinrich and his students use his cabin in the woods as a living laboratory, performing simple experiments, observing animals in their natural habitats, and comparing their findings with those of other researchers. This is not a dry record of method and results, but a rich and complex tale of love for and curiosity about nature's ingenuity. The author's line drawings illustrate an eye for visual detail as keen as his insightful narrative. A good read the next time you are huddled up wondering how you'll survive until spring.

Teresa Rigg

Meeting and Outing Reports

Young Naturalist Meeting January 14

This was our first visit to the Young Naturalist 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 15 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 it must be protected.

Thanks to Teresa for leading this walk.

Bev Whatmough



Burlington Waterfowl, January 22

Ray Blower, Diane McCurdy, Andrew Kellman, and I met behind the Travel Lodge in Burlington to check out the waterfowl. The weather was beautiful – sunny, still, and about 25°C warmer than the duck outing we cancelled a year earlier. Despite a vast improvement in the weather from a human perspective, the lack of ice anywhere on the Great Lakes in early 2006 meant that the ducks could be anywhere. And they weren't hanging out in any great numbers at the western end of Lake Ontario or Hamilton Harbour. Nonetheless, it was a very pleasant day to wander the seawall, and we did see mallards, long-tailed ducks, and a few rafts of pinhead-sized ducks way out on the lake. Even Ray wasn't about to venture a positive identification. The glass-smooth thin layer of ice along the seawall tinkled and cracked, and was gone in a matter of minutes. Ephemeral beauty...



We continued to the Canada Centre for Inland Waters (CCIW) entrance, saw a few more species of ducks by the Bird Islands, and ventured over to the canal. Here we were treated to a large flock of probably a thousand long-tailed ducks. They were murmuring quietly among themselves and diving for the zebra mussels on the bottom.

Our attention was drawn to the sudden flight of pigeons roosting on the lift bridge. For a couple of minutes, a juvenile peregrine falcon darted among the girders of the bridge, chasing the frightened pigeons. Surprisingly, the pigeons proved to be agile, and the falcon flew away hungry. It was probably one of the young hatched on the bridge the season before. We worried that in the thick of the hunt, the falcon would inadvertently crash into a bridge girder or overhead wire. It didn't, although collisions with structures and cars are apparently the leading cause of death in young urban peregrines.

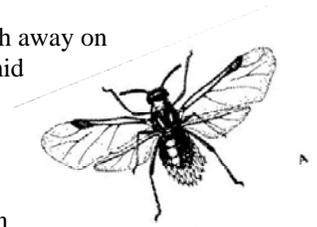
We finished the outing with an afternoon visit to LaSalle Park, a waterfowl oasis tucked on the north shore of Hamilton Harbour. This is trumpeter swan central during the winter, as volunteers from the swan restoration program routinely feed the swans here. We were told that the hundred or so swans consume 100 pounds of corn in a single day! And you thought your feeder bills were high! The resident mute swans and mallard ducks are also quick to steal corn.

One of the reasons the program feeds the trumpeters is to keep them in Canada during the winter, as the

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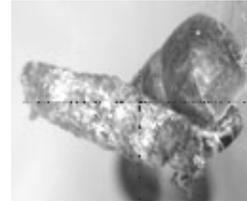
Carnivorous Caterpillars

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.



Hyposmocoma molluscivora
caterpillar

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





A Taste of Spring

March means just one thing to me... maple syrup season! Over the years I have made gallons of that sweet, sticky reminder of summer's warmth. You can try it too, if you follow some simple directions. This is a great family project during the holidays.

First of all, to make maple syrup, you need a maple tree. You can make syrup from yellow birch, although despite years of trying I have yet to discover when the sap actually flows. I have also used butternut sap to make syrup that was an unusual green colour, smelled like walnut wood yet had a very pleasant flavour. Apparently you can also use sycamore sap, if you can find a big enough tree to tap. Maple, however, works best if you want a lot of syrup. No other tree seems to produce enough sap flow.

Sugar maple is best, although you can use black maple, red maple and silver maple too. I made silver maple syrup for several years from backyard trees. It had the taste and consistency of corn syrup. Never, ever, try Norway maple sap. It turns into the nastiest, bitter, cloudy stuff, quite reminiscent of fabric glue and far from edible. Sugar maple gives the most sap with the most sugar and the traditional maple flavour.

You need a tree that is at least 25 centimetres (cm) in diameter to tap. For every extra 15 cm in diameter, you can put another tap hole in the tree, but don't put more than four on even the biggest trees. To tap, you need a 1.1 cm (7/16 inch) wood bit and brace or a cordless drill (unless your tree is near an electrical outlet!). When the temperature is above minus 4 degrees Celsius, drill a hole 7.5 cm into the tree at a slight upwards angle. On my index finger, that means I can just fit my entire finger into the tree through the tap hole.

Tap a spile gently into the tree. If you can't find a proper spile at a hardware or farmer's cooperative store, you could try using a short piece of steel or plastic plumbing pipe. Make sure everything is sterilized before you put it into the tree.

To collect the sap, hang a small bucket from the hook on the spile. If your bucket doesn't have a lid, make one out of cardboard or plastic. The sap will stay cleaner, and you won't have to remove drowned rodents from the bucket (an unfortunate and unpleasant fact, but squirrels and mice love maple sap). Plastic juice jugs with handles also work well.

Empty the sap buckets each day when the temperature warms up enough for the sap to flow. You may have to empty several times on a really warm day. Store it in the fridge or freezer until you are ready to boil it down. If it gets too warm, the sap will spoil, turning cloudy or a yellowy green colour. Don't use spoiled sap for syrup.



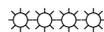
Before boiling, filter the sap through cheesecloth or a coffee filter. Do your boiling outdoors over a propane barbeque, camp stove or wood fire. Only boil sap into syrup indoors if you like your kitchen steamy and sugar coated at the end of the day! You need 30 to 40 litres of sap to make one litre of syrup, which means a lot of steam as you process.

Boil the sap in a flat roasting pan or large canner. Skim off and dispose of any foam. Boil until the temperature reaches 4 degrees Celsius above the boiling point of water. Filter the hot syrup before putting it into clean jars. Store it in the fridge or freezer.

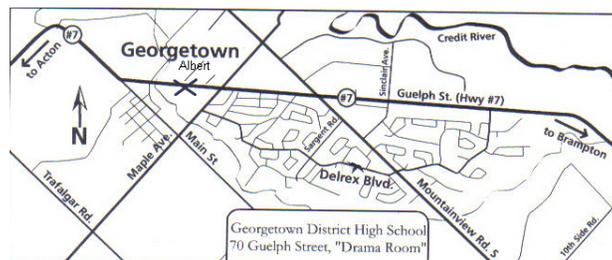
When the season is over, remove and thoroughly wash all the equipment you used. Store it away until next season. Sit back and enjoy the sweet savour of spring poured over pancakes, waffles or ice cream. This is truly the best renewable resource nature ever invented.



Teresa Rigg



Map showing Georgetown and District High School - the new location for monthly meetings



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 won best documentary feature at the 78th Annual Academy Awards. 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!

Kelly Bowen



Threats to Woodland Caribou

I was recently at a meeting in Sudbury where one of the invited speakers, Dr. Stan Boutin, Biological Sciences, University of Alberta, talked about his research on the Woodland Caribou in Alberta. I thought that the Naturalist Club members might be interested to learn a bit about the subject so I have summarized his presentation and expanded it with information from elsewhere.

As in most of southern Canada, Woodland Caribou in Alberta have been declining for decades. The numbers have been dwindling and the geographic range has been shrinking northward across North America. The Woodland Caribou is a subspecies of Barrenland Caribou. The latter occurs in extensive herds that migrate while the former occurs in much smaller groups that tend to remain in one area. As well, the former has two ecotypes in Alberta. One lives in mountainous areas while the other is confined to wet, peatlands in Alberta.

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Keep Motors out of Ontario's Wilderness Parks
Draft Parks and Conservation Reserves Act for Ontario opens wilderness parks to motorized uses

February 27, 2006

Ontario's Bill 11 2005, *An Act to enact the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* is opening the door to motorized uses in Ontario's wilderness parks! The draft Act received its first reading in the Legislature in the fall of 2005, with a second review expected later this spring.

Although there are important changes being made to improve the protection of Ontario's provincial parks from industrial activities, some amendments do not bode well for the future of wilderness in the province.

With a change to the definition of wilderness parks objectives, the new legislation will permit motorized uses (e.g. snowmobiles, ATVs, float planes motorboats and personal watercraft) in Ontario's last, undeveloped wilderness areas.

If you have ever enjoyed the solitude of Ontario's beloved wilderness parks like Quetico, Wabikimi, Woodland Caribou, Temagami and others - now is the time to take action. You can make a difference!

LET MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES DAVID RAMSAY KNOW THAT MOTORIZED ACCESS SHOULD BE PROHIBITED IN ONTARIO'S WILDERNESS PARKS.

Please write or email the Minister today – you can use the sample letter provided below
The Honourable David Ramsay, Minister of Natural Resources
6th Floor, Room 6630,
Whitney Block
99 Wellesley Street West,
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3
Fax: (416) 314-2216 Email: minister@mnr.gov.on.ca

Please make sure to send a copy to your MPP and to Ontario Nature at info@ontarionature.org!
You can locate your MPP at: www.electionsontario.on.ca/en/home_en.shtml

Proposed Changes to Wilderness Provincial Park Objectives

Original Definition:

(Source: *Ontario Provincial Parks – Planning and Management Policies, 1992 Update*)
Wilderness parks are substantial areas where the forces of nature are permitted to function freely and where **visitors travel by non-mechanized means** and experience expansive solitude, challenge and personal integration with nature.

New Definition:

(Source: *First Reading, Bill 11 2005*)
The objective of wilderness class parks is to protect large areas where the forces of nature can exist freely and **visitors travel primarily by non-motorized means** while engaging in low-impact recreation to experience solitude, challenge and integration with nature.

For sample letter or more information go to the Ontario Nature website –
http://www.ontarionature.org/news/template.php3?n_code=318

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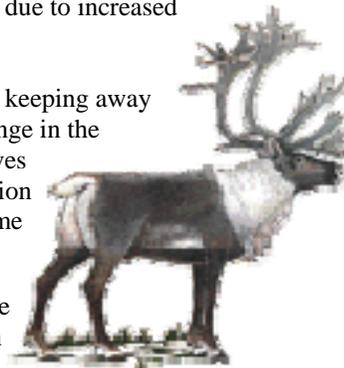
a chance of the swans being killed by hunters is greater south of the border. Ingestion of now-illegal lead shot remains another major cause of mortality. Whether the birds are being fed corn by the volunteers, or bread, donuts or other “junk food” by park visitors, the result is a squawking, heaving feathery mass of waterfowl all jostling for their share of food. This display of avian vitality, along with the many species of less bold “wild” ducks farther out on the harbour, are well worth a visit to LaSalle Park during the winter months

Kelly Bowen

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Woodland Caribou herds in Alberta, though never numerous, have decreased by 30 to 40 over the past ten years. Using radio collars on female Caribou, it was determined that the survival rates of the adults are only a little bit lower than the average across the country. Females are producing young at a good rate but the young are suffering a mortality rate that prevents the herd size from being maintained. The high mortality is likely due to increased predation. The cause of the change in predation appears to be related to human activities.

Normally, the Caribou herd has developed a strategy over time to avoid predation by simply keeping away from their major predators - wolves and bears. In Alberta, they do that by restricting their range in the large, peatland, muskeg complex in northeastern Alberta. These habitats are places that wolves and moose, the primary prey of wolves, don't utilize to any great degree. The spatial separation of these two players allows the Caribou to survive fairly well. When the two occur in the same area, it is the Caribou.



from rayweb.net

The peatland areas have not been subject to much human activity until recent times. They are currently of great interest for oil and gas development (oil sands). Some well sites have been developed but overall, the area affected is relatively small. Even the cutting of forests has been limited until now. The habitat disturbance caused by these two things is not able to explain the degree of decline observed in the Caribou herd. Instead of direct effects of human activity, the likely cause is an indirect effect involving altered predation patterns. As it turns out, there is a huge amount of mineral exploration in the peatlands. This includes seismic surveys during which an extensive network of linear lines is cut through the forests. The linear features probably have enhanced the ability of the wolves to travel into peatland areas and thus may have improved their hunting efficiency. The wolves generally restrict themselves to places close to the seismic lines and the Caribou avoid going near the lines. They seldom go within 100 metres of the lines with the overall effect that the available habitat is reduced by about a half because the seismic survey line network is so dense.

At the same time, moose and white-tailed deer populations have increased in the peatlands. In one study area, for example, the moose population increased from 35 to 179 and the deer population went from zero to 65 in 10 years. This is a major shift in large ungulate numbers. The deer likely responded to increased grassy habitat associated with the cutting of trees as well as milder winters. At the same time, the wolves that prey on the deer as well as a new predator, the coyote, have moved into the area. The extra pressures of the increased predator population are bad news for the caribou.

Industry has responded by reducing the widths of the survey lines and implementing restoration of the lines when possible. They are making wellpads smaller and fewer, and limiting the numbers of roads. The road density is expected to more than double though as resource extraction extends into the Caribou's habitat.

Because of the impact that human activity has had on the different herds, some have been affected to a very high degree. Such extensive effects suggest that the small populations would be extremely hard to restore and, in the long run, it may not prove to be successful. It has been proposed that the best use of available resources be spent on protecting the larger herds that have a greater potential for being saved. Protection might mean increasing predator control programs and completing major ungulate harvests (moose and deer) to reduce the numbers of predators required to keep their populations in check. This action may meet with resistance from some parts of the public but it might be the only way to protect the Caribou from disappearing.

W.D. McIlveen



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.

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club
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Georgetown, Ontario
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