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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 41, Number 1

November-December 2006

Club Activities

Indoor: Meetings begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of the month from October to June at St. Andrew's United Church, 89 Mountainview Road South in Georgetown (Mountainview & Sinclair) unless stated otherwise.

Dec. 12: Annual Potluck and Members' Night at Limehouse Hall or St. Andrews

Jan. 9: Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Mike Cadman is the coordinator for the second edition (he was also the coordinator of the first atlas). He will be giving an overview of the work involved in such a large project, outline changes, and give an update on the progress of the second atlas.

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.

Nov. 19: Late Flowering Survey Hike. Bill McIlveen will be leading this outing to find and identify any wild plants that are still blooming. Meet at 1:00 pm.

Dec. 27: Christmas Bird Count.

Jan. 21: Burlington Waterfowl. Meet 8:00 am. In case of inclement weather, check ahead with the trip leaders, Kelly Bowen and Andrew Kellman (905) 873-7338.

Young Naturalists

Note: Meetings and outings begin at 1:00 pm the last Saturday of the month.

Nov 25: For details call Nancy and Andy Kovacs (905) 702-1132.

President's Message

Hello everyone! Although I was only able to catch a small part of our October meeting, I hear that Jean Iron gave a wonderful, well-photographed talk on her travels through the Arctic. I'm very sorry I missed most of it. October was also our AGM, and the new club executive was announced. Calling the event an election would be a bit of a stretch, as there was no competition due to the lack of candidates. **Again, we are still looking for a treasurer and/or secretary, membership coordinator, publicity coordinator and webmaster.** Our executive members for the next year are listed below. Please feel free to contact any of us if you have any questions, comments, or can assist the club in any way!

A new initiative for our club is the Credit River Watershed/Region of Peel Natural Areas Inventory (NAI). This project is a joint effort between Credit Valley Conservation, South Peel Naturalists and our club. Its goal is to inventory significant natural areas within the Credit River Watershed and the Region of Peel from 2007 to 2010, and produce a comprehensive report, computerised database, and website accessible to the general public. It will provide information on the area's biodiversity, help guide Official Plans and sub-watershed studies, and assist government agencies charged with managing species at risk. Scott Samson of CVC is currently managing the NAI. A grant proposal has just been submitted to the Ontario Trillium Foundation to support this work. Other granting agencies will be contacted in the near future as part of ongoing fundraising efforts. Bill McIlveen is currently representing our club's interests in this NAI. If you have any questions about this work, please ask Scott or Bill.

On a final note, I would like to remind everyone of the upcoming Christmas potluck party at Limehouse. Please bring along an appetizer, entrée or dessert. As always, interested members will be showing slides of their recent travels, adventures or nature sightings. As this night sometimes runs a little late, we want to know roughly how many people are interested in presenting. That way we can set a time limit per person. If you are unable to tell us at the November meeting, please phone or email Andrew or I at (905) 873-7338 or andrew.kellman@sympatico.ca.

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: Vacant
Treasurer: Janice Sukhiani (905) 693-8227

Appointments

Membership: Vacant
Newsletter: Gerda Potzel (905) 702-1681
Ontario Nature Representative: Teresa Rigg
Public Relations: Vacant
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

Email submissions/questions/concerns to: gpotzel@sympatico.ca
<http://haltonnorthpeelnaturalists.org>

Other Events of Interest

Friday, October 27 to Sunday, October 29, "W" is for Water; Ontario Environment Network (OEN) Fall Conference 2006. Pearce Williams United Church Christian Centre, South of Iona (Hwy. 3), west of Fingal, 8009 Iona Road, R. R. #1, Fingal, ON N0L 1K0. The focus of the conference will be on water. The centre piece of the weekend will be the *Ontario Clean Water Act*, but we will also discuss the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*, hydro power, sewage sludge, road salt contamination, bottled water, etc. If you have any suggestions for speakers or anything related to the fall conference contact Phillip Penna,, 705-840-2888, oen@oen.ca, or visit www.oen.ca.

Friday, September 22. Car Free Day in Canada. International Car Free Day is an annual event celebrated by 100 million people on every continent and supported by the European Union, the United Nations, the Government of Canada and the leaders of 1500 cities around the world. Car Free Day street events and forums highlight the many problems caused by our dependence on the private automobile. It emphasizes the rights of pedestrians and cyclists, the need for more and better public transit. For more information visit www.carfreeday.ca.

A Brief and Hopefully Accurate Recollection of the March 18 2006 Swan Outing

The day was cold and windy, but Lake Erie was almost completely free of ice. Our meeting place at Turkey Point was surprisingly short of Song Sparrows and Red-winged Blackbirds despite the sun and open water. We did see a few of the common gull and duck species.

Our second stop provided a pleasant treat as it often does. There we basked in the sun, protected from the cold, westerly wind by the fishing shed near the shoreline. From here we saw a multitude of ducks fairly close to shore. They were mostly Redheads- perhaps 3000! We spent some time scoping the huge mass of birds to find the minorities- Wigeons, Gadwalls, Canvasbacks Ringed-necked Ducks, etc. Here we also heard faint calls coming with the wind from the west. When we looked up the shore through our scopes, we saw, through the heat distortion, blurry figures of numerous Tundra Swans loafing on the distant shoreline.

Later, when we passed to the west of Highway 59, we saw swans flying in from the south in small, scattered flocks. As usual, some were calling as they flew over, maneuvering to land in the fields. As usual, we were impressed by the lovely sight and sound of those majestic birds. It never fails.

Next we made a quick stop at Lee Browns' pond. It was pretty quiet, but, after most of us had already boarded our cars to leave, an adult Bald Eagle was spotted flying away in the distance.

Then we went to the causeway and scoped the many waterfowl spread across the expanse of the bay. I recall a good number of Coots were seen floating in rafts and an elusive pair of Hooded Mergansers was eventually spotted by everyone. During our duck scanning an immature eagle winged in from stage-

right, just out from the shoreline. As it disappeared behind the causeway willows, a second one followed up, tracing the same course as the first. What a treat that was!

About this time, Ross suggested we go north on Hwy 59 to some flooded bottomland where a Eurasian Wigeon had recently been spotted. Off we went, and, when we arrived at the spot, saw hundreds of ducks at the flooded edge of a young forest. Half of the flock was made up of over a hundred Pintails- the most I've ever seen. Unfortunately, the other half was comprised of about a hundred Wigeons, which made it very difficult to pick out the similar Eurasian Wigeon that may have been in their midst.

As the day wound down, we arrived in the Nanticoke area. Twice, on previous trips, we had seen a large mixed flock / herd of Wild Turkeys / deer in this area. It was a fascinating sight, reminiscent of the African plains. This year we saw neither, but, I believe we added another adult Bald Eagle here. I'm not sure. These trips do blur together over the years, especially when you don't keep a list or notes.

The last stop was the Fisherville Raptor Preserve. For several years, we have enjoyed spectacular displays by Short-eared Owls at this location. This year we were not that fortunate. However, we did enjoy several Northern Harriers coursing across the shrubby fields. In the failing light, there was one buffy-coloured bird that excited many times our hopes for a Short-eared owl. After lengthy observation, we agreed it was a small, very attractive female Northern Harrier. Despite our watering eyes, we could not make her into an owl. Oh well, maybe next year.

Ray Blower

Ratray Marsh Outing

The forecast called for 90 km/h gusts of wind on Sunday, October 29. Why does it usually seem that there is SOMETHING wrong with the weather on club outing days? Despite the high winds (and occasional bouts of ice pellets), the day was sunny and not too cold in the shelter of the trees at Ratray Marsh. Ratray is a conservation area located along the lakeshore in Mississauga, near Erin Mills Parkway. It contains a mix of marsh (more like a cattail-edged mudflat with a meandering creek when we visited), hardwood forest, regenerating areas and a number of pathways. The stream flowing from the wetland cuts across a narrow limestone shingled beach before it flows into Lake Ontario.

Bill McIlveen and Gerry Doekes joined Andrew and

me at the gate. Before we had even left the cars, Gerry spotted a soaring Red-shouldered Hawk. We started down the path, where we were welcomed by small flocks of Ruby and Yellow-crowned Kinglets and chickadees flitting out of the pines. Since the strong northwesterly winds were blowing out over the lake, conditions at the beach were calm. However, we could see the building whitecaps on the horizon, and I was glad to be on dry land that day. The waterfowl obviously had other ideas and we spotted dozens of Red-necked Grebes bobbing around. A few tiny Bufflehead flew by, and even two remaining cormorants. There were also a number of other waterfowl specks far out on the lake, but even Gerry wouldn't commit to their identity. The mudflats at the marsh were quiet, as most

shorebirds have wisely already left for warmer climes. We spotted a lone lesser yellowlegs just beyond the remains of a fallen willow, its beak sewing up and down searching for invertebrates. Farther out was a wading Greater Yellowlegs, and a resting Killdeer. ...



*Gerry Doekes and Kelly Bowen
at Rattray Marsh*

From our viewpoint at the hardwood knoll, a flock of green-winged teal exploded out of the cattails, only to quickly disappear again. Song sparrows flitted among the cattail stems, and a winter wren chattered. We also spotted a great blue heron flying in, its huge wings struggling for control in the gale-force winds. So they're not always an image of grace

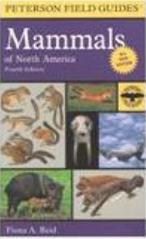
Young Naturalists Club

The Young Naturalists Club met in September at Willow Park Ecology Centre. The children began by collecting as many leaves as they could find. At the pavilion, Teresa Rigg showed them several ways to preserve autumn leaves. An enthusiastic group and pleasantly cool, dry weather made for a pleasant outing. The second meeting is to take place on October 28th (after time of writing but before publication of the newsletter). Beginning at the home of Andy and Nancy Kovacs, the plan is to check the ravine woods for any remaining fungi and to take casts of animal tracks. A cold rainy day is forecast, so we'll see... Check with Andy and Nancy (905-702-1132) for details of the November 25th meeting. There will be no December meeting. Meetings will resume in January, and will be held on the last Saturday of each month from 1:00 to 3:00 pm.

Back along the wooded path, we watched more kinglets and pondered the call of a Mockingbird. A Mourningcloak butterfly floated by, and we saw a couple of "confusing fall warblers". I nervously glanced up at the large creaking willow boughs overhead. Crack willow, huh? I wonder how it got THAT name? Bill also pointed out a lone sassafras tree by the trail, and bittersweet vines overhead. Gerry prowled into a grove of pines in the off chance he might find a roosting owl. No luck. In one area backing onto a residential street, we found a number of burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*) marching into the woodlot. Despite their visual appeal (flaming red fall foliage and interesting corky, winged stems), it seems that even this garden favourite could become invasive if given the opportunity. Based on my experience, the rabbits and mice will at least enjoy dining on the twigs over the winter. We also found Amur Maple, another exotic. Clumps of buckthorn also grew along the trail. Not surprising, given that this botanical scourge is notoriously hard to control. The perils of an urban woodlot, I guess. On a more interesting note, we found a few blue beech or American hornbeam trees that had already lost their leaves, but still retained the irregular, leaf-like "wings" to which the tiny nutlets were attached. These seeds, combined with the muscle-like grey bark, give the tree an interesting fall appearance. We completed the loop trail, and were driven back to our cars by a sudden flurry of ice pellets. What a weird day! While maybe not the most productive birding location in late October, our trip to Rattray was enjoyable and interesting. Certainly worth a return visit, especially in the early morning before the park becomes too busy!

Kelly Bowen

COME TO A BOOK LAUNCH FOR THE NEW
Peterson Field Guide to Mammals of North America
 Written and illustrated by Fiona A. Reid








When: December 2, 2 to 4 p.m.
Where: 7243 15 Side Road, Speyside
 8 km north of 401 on Hwy 25
 (Milton exit), and 1 km west on 15 Side Road
For more information: fionar@globalserve.net
Meet the author/artist, see original artwork
 Books and prints on sale (cash/cheque only)

*Please come to
 the book launch*

UCC Property and other local Bird Sightings

Many American Robins continue to migrate through this area. They have been feeding on earthworms, but also European Buckthorn berries. This is a great food supply for them on migration, but unfortunately it leads to the spreading of more Buckthorn trees growing in the process.

Late in the evening, on October 10, an Eastern Screech Owl was calling behind our house.

An Orange-crowned Warbler spent most of the day, foraging near our house, on October 17.

A Northern Goshawk was hunting in the conifer plantation close to the workshop, on November 1. I caught a glimpse of it, as I could hear it calling.

With the fall migration well under way, Water Pipits are flying over daily, as well as Horned Larks.

While driving home after the Club's outing to Rattray Marsh on Sunday October 29, I saw a Peregrine Falcon in pursuit of some Mourning Doves.



Gerry Doekes

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

Membership for September 2006 to September 2007

_____ Renewal or _____ New Member(s)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

_____ 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 bring it in to next indoor meeting. or mail with payment to:

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