



the Esquesing

Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 42, Number 4

Club Activities

March-April 2008

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

Apr. 8: Photographing Insects: Tips and Techniques. Kerry Jarvis will share his expertise on taking insect photos. Kerry is a TEA member, educator, naturalist, author, and photographer. His images have won numerous awards.

May 13: Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*). Greg Bales, Stewardship Coordinator, Halton-Peel Woodlands and Wildlife Stewardship will speak on the status and threats to the butternut.

June 10: Walk the New Boardwalk at Silver Creek. Evening outing will be led by Scott Sampson, Senior Natural Heritage Ecologist, Credit Valley Conservation. Meet 7:00 pm at the Silver Creek School parking lot, 9th Line and Fallbrook Trail (27th Sideroad).

Outdoor: Trips begin at the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) parking lot at Mountainview Road and Guelph Street, 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. 15: 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 a lunch or money for lunch, binoculars, and scopes. Call Ray to join the outing at another location (519) 853-0171.

Apr. 12: A walk in the woods at 14118 - 8th Line (halfway between 27 Sideroad and Ballinafad Town Line). Meet Charles Hildebrandt at 10:00 am at the location. He has counted more than 40 species of native trees on the property, some of which are marked as part of an arboretum. Charles can be contacted at (905) 873-7282.

Apr. 19: Beamer Conservation Area Hawk Watch, Grimsby. Meet 9:00 am. 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. The number and variety of hawks has been quite variable over the years; but, we always see some. In addition, a good variety of songbirds and waterfowl are seen. Bring: binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. Call Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171 with any questions.

May 10: Halton Regional Forest. Join Gerry Doekes on this all day nature walk in the Curry, Robinson, and Turner Tracts. The length of time spent at each tract will depend on observations at each tract. Meet 8:00 am at the NEC, end time 5:00 pm. Bring lunch, water, and wear appropriate footwear and clothing. Gerry can be reached at (905) 873-0179.

May 18: 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. Complete details in the next issue.

President's Message

Hello everyone! I hope that people are faring well through this very snowy winter and are still able to get out and play on occasion (maybe wearing snowshoes). In the following address, I would like to draw your attention to a few local and national nature initiatives.

Credit River Watershed and Region of Peel Natural Areas Inventory Project – A draft of the project's terms of reference have been completed. This document provides information on the project's purpose, objectives, deliverables, organizational structure, partners, work plan and time frame. As one of the project partners, we have given our approval to finalize the draft. I can send an electronic or hard copy to anyone who is interested.

Town of Halton Hills Recreation and Parks Strategic Action Plan – In October 2007, the town endorsed this plan, which has the buzz line "How do you want to have fun in the future?" One of the items identified is a deficit in both local and non-local parkland, especially as the area's population grows. It gives the current supply of local and non-local parkland as 45.0 and 85.4 hectares, respectively, and the current demand as 66.0 and 137.5 hectares, respectively. It will be interesting to see if the town will be able to address this problem, and if so, what type of land is acquired. This shows how efforts such as the natural areas inventory projects may be instrumental in guiding the acquisition and development of new parkland. More information on the action plan is available at www.haltonhills.ca/recandparks or a copy can be picked up at the Halton Hills Civic Centre.

Environment Canada's Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Network: This national program includes *NatureWatch*. To borrow from their website (<http://www.eman-rese.ca/eman/naturewatch.html>) this is "a suite of community-based "citizen science" monitoring programs including [FrogWatch](#), [WormWatch](#), [IceWatch](#) and [PlantWatch](#). Through these programs, Environment Canada collects national information on indicators of ecosystem health. New "citizen science" programs will soon be available on lichens, tree health and benthic macro invertebrates". I encourage everyone to visit this site and take part in their monitoring efforts in whatever capacity you can!

Finally, we will order a number of copies of the larval amphibian guides from the Metro Toronto Zoo Adopt a Pond program. We meant to do this ages ago, but better late than never! When available, we will offer them for sale at our meetings. For a great on-line guide to reptiles and amphibians, visit the Adopt a Pond website at <http://www.torontozoo.com/AdoptAPond/SpeciesGuides.asp>.

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: Marg Wilkes (905) 878-6255

Appointments

Membership: Christine Williams (905) 877-1539
Newsletter: Gerda Potzel (905) 702-1681
Ontario Nature Representative: Teresa Rigg 873-0614
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
Charitable number: 869778761RR0001

North American Native Plant Society (NANPS) Wildflower Sale

May 10, 2008, 10 am - 3 pm, 101 Town Centre Boulevard, Hwy 7 at Warden, Markham.

Native plant species to buy includes flowers, shrubs, trees, ferns, vines, grasses and sedges. All plants come from ethical growers approved by NANPS. Also there will be books, free speakers and a green expo. Species list available to view at www.nanps.org, Members may order in advance. For more information, please call 416.631-4438 or e-mail nanps@nanps.

Burlington Outing 2008

On Sunday, February 3rd, Bill McIlveen, Larry Martyn, Marg and George Wilkes, Ray Blower and Dianne McCurdy joined Andrew, Sierra and I for our annual Burlington waterfowl outing. The day was relatively mild and bright, although the wind proved to be quite cool in exposed areas. This was a big improvement over our earlier attempt at this outing in December, when we cancelled due to a snowstorm.



We started the day at the Travel Lodge in downtown Burlington. There was very little ice on the lake, and a number of ducks were quite close. Farther out, Ray helped identify all three scoter species with the help of his scope. There were also mallards and Canada geese, some scaup, longtailed and goldeneye ducks. The waterfront trail in this area is a bit of a mess right now due to the construction of a new public pier. The hope is that when finished, this structure will help attract more people to the waterfront.

Our next brief stop was to check out waterfowl around the Bird Islands in the northeast corner of Hamilton Harbour. Although mostly iced in, there were a few birds around or on the islands, including gadwalls and mallards. Herring, ringbill and greater black-backed gulls circled overhead. We then drove over to the boat launch parking lot on the south side of the lift bridge. Sierra had a good nap in the warm car while the rest of us stood along the adjacent seawall and watched the long tailed ducks in the canal. We mostly forgot about our cold feet when Andrew

spotted what he first thought was a dove sitting on the top of the lift bridge. It turned out to be a peregrine falcon wiping bird-bits from its beak, suggesting it had recently eaten. Maybe that was why the pigeons roosting on the bridge seemed unconcerned with its presence. We had a good look at it through the scopes before it flew up to the north bridge tower and joined another falcon. They were roosting by the nesting platform high on the tower, so it seems they are preparing to nest here again this year.

We stopped for a fast-food lunch to warm up, and moved on to LaSalle Park. This location on the harbour's north shore was more protected and quite pleasant. Waterfowl are always abundant at this park, largely because people feed them (despite signs to the contrary). A few tiny bufflehead bobbed like bathtub toys among the larger mallards, black ducks, geese and swans. The stars of the show were the huge and very vocal trumpeter swans. They were in fine form, trumpeting back and forth, and rhythmically bobbing their heads in family



groups. As the days lengthen, courtship is already underway! One of the more spectacular incidents happened when someone threw some grain onto the parking lot near the water. Within seconds, the food was obscured by dozens of frantically scrabbling ducks and geese. Ray commented that they were just like feathered piranha on a feeding frenzy!

Kelly Bowen



4th Annual Halton Hills 20 Minute Makeover, Friday April 18th

Wanting to participate? Contact the Town of Halton Hills, Works Department at (905) 873-2601 x2610 to register and make arrangements for bags and gloves.

Halton Regional Forest Stewardship Advisory Committee Points of Interest from the January 22nd 2008 Meeting

Ron Reinholt of Halton Planning and Public Works gave all committee members an invaluable booklet about forest insects and diseases in our region. Bill Gaines, Conservation Halton gave us *Halton Hikes*, a booklet outlining the many trails available to all.

The committee voted to hire a group of Ontario Stewardship Rangers for a 2-week period. This program helps youth of age 17 years, to gain experience in forest management and maintenance, and aquatic habitat.

A forest monitoring program is in place to watch trends of the emerald ash borer, Asian long-horned beetle, and gypsy moth populations in all Region-owned properties. Ron mentioned a gypsy moth hotspot at the Biosolids Management Centre forest where defoliation has occurred for several years. Regional forest tracts, though, have had a low incidence of gypsy moth egg masses, and are generally safe for 2008. However, Conservation Halton properties have approximately 640 hectares that show 80-100% defoliation and they are considering a gypsy moth spray program for 2008.

Harvesting in the Currie Tract is completed. Numerous dead, standing softwood adjacent to

the access road has been cut and left on site. The Regional Forest Management Plan only allows harvesting in the softwood conifer plantations and none in upland hardwoods. Ron stated the Management Plan also stipulates the need of harvesting to ensure long term health of the forests. He mentioned that in 1950's and '60's, the Provincial Government planted these conifers in tight, organized rows. As the trees grow, they require more space and light, so trees are selectively harvested to allow healthier trees.

Our committee voted 6-3 to permit wild turkey hunting in the same tracts where other hunting is allowed. However, this was subsequently quashed by a Halton Regional Council motion.

Kathy Pounder, Niagara Escarpment Commission made a motion to prohibit snowmobiles in all forest tracts, and this was passed. Councillor Allan Elgar made a motion to exclude the harvesting of non-traditional forest products from all tracts, and this passed unanimously. Non traditional products are stones, mushrooms, flowers, fiddleheads, etc. This motion was presented as a result of some people using the products in retail outlets.

Marg Wilkes

Ontario
Breeding
Bird Atlas



Breeding Bird Atlas is now for sale!

We know the Breeding Bird Atlas is respected by birdwatchers across the province and it is the *go to guide* for bird lovers who want to learn about birds in their region as it focuses on mapping the distribution of all breeding bird species in Ontario.

The Breeding Bird Atlas is one of the most important and monumental avian research and conservation projects conducted anywhere. The atlas, a joint project of several groups including Ontario Nature and the Ontario Field Ornithologists, and helped out by 3,400 volunteer bird watchers, surveyed bird populations across the province between the years 2001-05. The comprehensive; 728-page atlas, includes over 900 coloured maps and 400 photographs of Ontario's 286 breeding bird species.

Copies of the book can be purchased by calling 416-444-8419 or 1-800-440-2366 (\$92.50 plus GST, price includes shipping), for online sales follow the links from https://id408.van.ca.siteprotect.com/ontarionature/shop/BBA_order_form.html.

The atlas is published by a partnership of five organizations: Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ministry of Natural Resources, and Ontario Nature.

A New Boardwalk for Silver Creek

Most local naturalists are already aware of the ecological importance of the pond located just east of Silver Creek Outdoor Education Centre on Fallbrook Road north of Georgetown. Each spring, large numbers of several species including, salamanders and frogs use the pool for breeding. Notably the endangered Jefferson's Salamander.

One problem is that the edge of the pond receives heavy foot traffic from hikers, and students from the Education Center, not to mention naturalists themselves. There was therefore an obvious need to do something to protect the site which had been proposed by the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club in the past. This included placing tree branches in the water as egg-laying sites for the salamanders. The club assisted in placing basking logs for turtles. The latter was done during the winter when ice made access easy; however, the success of that project is open to question.



In 2007, Credit Valley Conservation pursued and received financial aid from the Environment Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk and from the Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Stewardship Fund. This financial support was enough to create a sturdy boardwalk that extended almost the full length of the western side of the pond that receives the heaviest traffic.

On November 9, 2007, about 40 students from John F. Ross High School in Guelph started off the construction process by carrying lumber to the site and laying out some of the first stages of the boardwalk. On November 10, about 50-60 volunteers showed up to continue the construction process.

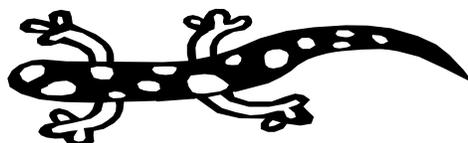
The participating groups in alphabetic order included Bruce Trail Association, Credit Valley Conservation, Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, Halton/Peel Woodlands & Wildlife Stewardship, Korean Hiking Club, Ontario Vernal Pools Association and the Toronto Outdoors Club. Members of other groups might also have been present and the absence of any mention of their names here is not intended as a slight – I just don't have the names of all groups that were present.

The activity on the day included the removal of several old docks that extended into the edge of the pond. These were no longer of much value as they were sinking. On the construction side of the equation, a main boardwalk was constructed along the west side of the pond. Two shorter side sections were built out to the positions of the two former docks.

Eventually, the side sections will be extended out into the pond and they will form a loop. Details are not available on how this will be accomplished but possibly the ice can be taken advantage of this winter for installing the footings that have to contend with the deep mud in the bottom of the pond. Construction cannot take place in the spring because it is the breeding season for the amphibians.

Whatever the outcome of the last stage, the construction day was immensely successful with about 115 meters of boardwalk being built. Congratulations and thank you to all that participated and supported this very worthwhile project.

W.D. McIlveen



A Snake in a Snowstorm?

One Friday in late January, during one of our many snowstorms this winter, Gerda Potzel knocked on my door. As part of her Humane Society duties, she had rescued a snake from the Hartsink family home north of Ballinafad. Although Lisa Hartsink was less than thrilled with the snake's presence, I was quite intrigued by the capture. Gerda brought the snake to my place, contained within a small aquarium. We identified it as a milk snake and estimated it to be about two feet long. I offered to foster it for a while and Gerda in turn provided me a large aquarium with a mesh top to house it. Needless to say, Andrew was a little surprised about our new houseguest when he phoned that afternoon from work!

After some internet research, I added some straps around the tank to securely fasten the lid down. Apparently milk snakes, which are commonly kept as pets are escape artists and I didn't want it free ranging in our cluttered basement!



My next dilemma was what to feed our little snake. Since we had successfully exterminated the mice from our shed, a local supply no longer seemed to be an option. Milk snakes apparently will eat only vertebrate prey, so crickets would

Editor's note:

The following is taken direct from the Species at risk Act (SARA) registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca): "The Milksnake also occurs in at least five national parks, thereby benefiting from the protection of the *Canada National Parks Act*. The Milksnake is listed as a "specially protected" species in Ontario in the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*. Under this Act, it is forbidden to hunt, trap, kill, trade, or hold in captivity any specially protected species without a permit. In Quebec, the Milksnake is protected under the *Act respecting the conservation and development of wildlife*. This Act protects animals from captivity or trade, and makes it illegal to disturb, destroy, or damage the eggs, nest, or den of an animal.

To date six milksnakes have been taken to the Toronto Wildlife Centre (www.torontowildlifecentre.com). The Centre is an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources licensed wildlife custodian.

be frowned upon. The woman in the pet store went into the back and returned with a furry grey mouse scurrying around in a plastic container its beady black eyes stared up at me. With some relief, I decided that it looked a little big for our slender snake. It was returned to the back room to live a few more days, and she returned with a little zip lock bag containing four frozen "pinkies". These, I learned, were hairless baby mice. They looked a lot like the tiny plastic piglets that were part of a childhood farm set. Frozen animals are no problem with me since I have sent countless invertebrates to their icy doom in liquid nitrogen at work.

Later at home, I reluctantly thawed a mouse in warm water and let it reach roughly body temperature. I didn't have much faith that "snakey" would think much of frozen entrées. I dropped it into the aquarium almost on top of the snake and wiggled it with a stick. The intrigued snake's tongue darted out to investigate. Within moments, it seized the little mouse and began swallowing. It is amazing watching a snake swallow its prey! Within minutes, the mouse was gone and the snake retreated to a hiding place to digest. I was thrilled that I was able to fool the snake into eating dead prey!

About a week later, Gerda took the snake down to the Toronto Wildlife Centre because apparently there are rules on who can take care of wild snakes prior to their release in the spring. Gerda assured me that it would be taken back to the property where it was found when the weather warmed up. The loss of "snakey" was probably for the best, as Sierra is enough of a handful these days. Now how do I convince her to eat her chicken puree?

Kelly Bowen

Local Sightings

A memorable highlight for a class of grade four students at the Norval Outdoor School during the first week of February was that of an adult male northern goshawk on the roof of one of the feeders just outside the dining area when the students were in for lunch. It is not very often that you can get a close-up look at one of those birds without the use of binoculars.

Several American goldfinch and approximately 60 common redpolls continue to feed on the nyger feeders.

Pine grosbeaks are still being seen in the area. A small flock of six birds was last seen on March 3.

You would think it would be more likely to observe pileated woodpeckers foraging for food in the forest. For the last couple of weeks I noticed one foraging and feeding on ants on two sugar maples. The surprising part of this for me is the location of the maples. They are about two metres from the paved edge of Winston Churchill Boulevard within close proximity of the constant noise of traffic, including big trucks. It did not appear to be phased by this as I watched it continue to feed and not fly away.

Gerry Doekes

On February 24, on the east side of Whitby Harbour, Diane and I saw a patrolling turkey vulture.

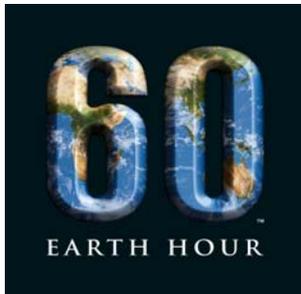
A screech owl was spotted sitting on a telephone wire March 1 at 6:30 pm., on the Fourth Line Halton Hills just north of Highway 7

March 5 between 12:00 and 1:00 pm a wild turkey was lurching under the bird feeders in my back yard (Fourth Line Halton Hills, 2.7 km. north of Highway 7). The bird then sunned itself for the next half hour in a sheltered corner of the yard before trudging away through the deep snow.

On March 8 around 10:00 am a screech owl roosted on my living room windowsill. I managed to take a few photographs before it shook the snow off and flew away.

Ray Blower

Earth Hour™, March 29th, 8:00 – 9:00 pm



Earth Hour™ is an event that was pioneered in Sydney (Australia) last year when over 2.2 million people and 2,100 businesses turned off their lights for just an hour - Earth Hour - in order to demonstrate that it is possible to take action against climate change.

This year, **Earth Hour™** is a global event that will take place on Saturday, March 29, 2008 between 8pm and 9pm. All individuals, businesses and organizations are being asked to voluntarily participate by turning off all non-essential and/or unnecessary lights for just an hour at 8pm on March 29.

Register your participation at www.wwf.ca/EarthHour and also let the Town of Halton Hills now you are participating by emailing damiens@haltonhills.ca.

8th Annual Halton Eco Festival, Saturday, April 19, 10:00 am -6:00 pm

Glen Abbey Community Centre, 1415 Third Line, Oakville. Admission – FREE.

Organized by the Oakville Community Centre for Peace, Ecology and Human Rights, P.O. Box 52007, Oakville, ON L6J 7N5, Phone: (905) 849-5501, www.haltonecofest.ca, volunteer@oakvillepeacecentre.org

Credit River Watershed & Region of Peel Natural Areas Inventory Update

Throughout the fall and winter, the Natural Areas Inventory (NAI) has been identifying natural areas and assessing existing inventory data to prepare for the upcoming field season. All natural areas in the study area (the Credit River watershed and Region of Peel) were identified using Credit Valley Conservation's land use mapping. "Natural areas" have been defined as areas in a natural state, not having resulted from or being maintained by human activities. In most cases, this turns out to be forests and wetlands. Some large areas of successional field will also be included because they provide habitat for meadow flora and fauna.

In another CVC study that did a landscape-scale analysis of ecosystem function, the functionality for each natural area was determined. The highest-functioning areas, along with areas recognized as regionally significant (e.g. Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest – ANSIs and Environmentally Sensitive Areas – ESAs) and some of CVC's properties were grouped as high priority areas and will be the focus of NAI fieldwork over the next two seasons. Other areas were designated medium or low priority and will be inventoried after the highest priority areas are completed.

An analysis of existing inventory information for the areas was carried out. Areas with recent (less than 20 years old), authoritative, taxonomically

complete observations covering the natural area were considered to be data-complete. To be considered taxonomically complete, the natural area had to have been assessed in terms of vegetation communities and plant, bird and amphibian species. The resulting maps clearly show where fieldwork is needed.

Next we will be seeking permission from landowners to access any privately held properties that have high priority natural areas, for study. NAI field crews will then be spending a busy season collecting inventory data that will give us a better understanding of the biodiversity and resources of these natural areas. If any of you have good quality natural areas on your own properties and would be willing to grant access to an NAI field crew and/or consultant for inventories, please contact Dawn Renfrew at Credit Valley Conservation.

The project will also be organizing events that allow the public to participate in the NAI. A very successful Winter Tree Identification workshop was just held and an Amphibian and Turtle Monitoring workshop is planned. Check the NAI WebPages at www.creditvalleycons.com/NAI for information on registration, additional events, new articles and to try the small mammal's quiz.

Dawn Renfrew



Amphibian & Turtle Monitoring Workshop March 26, 2008, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Location: Riverwood's MacEwan Field Station, 1447 Burnhamthorpe Road West, Mississauga.

Ian McIntosh from the Toronto Zoo will be speaking about amphibians, turtles and how to become involved in monitoring these fascinating animals in your neighbourhood. This workshop is presented by the Credit River Watershed and Region of Peel Natural Areas Inventory Project, in collaboration with the Mississauga Garden Council. Registration is required for this FREE workshop due to limited space.

To register, call (905) 670-1615 ext. 223 or e-mail drenfrew@creditvalleycons.com.

Earth Day Concert, Tuesday April 22, 2008, 7:00 pm

St. John's United Church, 11 Guelph Street, Georgetown

Gaudeamus Choirs of Halton Hills and P.O.W.E.R have partnered to host Halton Hill's first Earth Day choir event, "Sing of the Land – an Earth Day Concert.:

Tickets \$15 for adults, \$10 for students, children under five free.

For more information contact the Gaudeamus Choirs (416) 895-2697, e-mail gaudeamus@cogeco.ca or P.O.W.E.R. (905) 873-8362, or www.powerhalton.ca