



the Esquesing

Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 44, Number 3

January-February 2010

Club Activities

Indoor: Meetings begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of the month, October to June at St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams, unless stated otherwise.

Feb. 9: Freshwater Mussels, Todd Morris, Species at Risk Research Biologist, Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Mussels?? Before you write this one off in favour of staying home and catching the latest installment of "Survivor" please think again! I drifted into Todd's presentation at an Ontario Nature meeting a few years ago with fairly low expectations. But holy wave rayed lamp mussel Batman! I left spellbound, brimming with wonder at the fascinating natural histories of our mussel species - some of which are among the most endangered invertebrates in Canada. If more people knew of their important ecosystem function and of their charismatic ways, more might be done to secure their future.

Mar. 9: The Galapagos, Kerry Jarvis, photographer, writer and educator. Yes it's "The Nature Guy" himself, our own Kerry Jarvis. Kerry and his wife Melitta Smole travelled to the Galapagos in May of 2009 to drink in the magic and mystery of this iconic destination. Expect wonderful photography and engaging commentary.

Apr. 13: Tasmania and Australia, Fiona Reid, author, artist, nature trip leader. The inimitable Fiona Reid will regale us with tales of her exploits in these lands down under. Fiona casts a wide net in her travels, capturing memories of diverse wildlife and natural phenomenon. She will share these memories with humour and insight. Expect a great presentation.

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.

Feb. 20:: Owl Prowl. Meet at 5 p.m. at Esquesing Tract, Dublin Line, or car pool at 4:30 p.m. For many years, Esquesing has been the one sure-fire region for both Screech and Great Horned Owls of the Christmas Bird Count. We will try to locate both species and we should hear them and will likely see one or both species as well. We may also visit Fiona's Speyside forest where a Great Horned was calling in December. Join Fiona Reid (905-693-9719) and Don Scallen for this walk. Please call a few days before so we can update you about any changes due to weather, snow depth, etc.

Mar.13: Returning Swans at Long Point. Flocks of Tundra Swans stop at Long Point to rest and feed on their way to their breeding grounds in the far north. Many other species of waterfowl, early returning songbirds, Bald Eagle and Short-eared Owl may also be seen on this long day trip. Bring lunch or money for the restaurant, binoculars, scopes and warm clothes. Call Ray Blower, (519)853-0171, to arrange car pooling and meeting spots and times

President's Address

I'd like to wish everyone a very happy New Year and new decade! Let's hope 2010 is a great year for wildlife, local and international conservation initiatives, and for the growth of our club. So far this season we have had great speakers and good attendance at evening meetings at our new venue in Glen Williams and I am sure that will continue, given the excellent line-up of speakers in the coming months (with the possible exception of April – that's me!).

With the increasingly cold weather and recent snowfall, it often seems as if the woods and fields are almost devoid of life, but there is always something interesting going on in nature, if one pauses to take a closer look. On our club outing to La Salle and area in December, we saw a great array of waterfowl and even a Carolina Wren, a visitor from the south (see the complete write-up on page 6). It always amazes me how ducks can sit out on icy water all day and night and appear completely unaffected by the cold, their feathers gleaming and immaculate.

The club's Christmas bird count, held on December 27th, was another great opportunity to see wildlife in winter. My day started with a mammal sighting – two deer crossing the road ahead of us – followed by a good diversity of birds small and large. I particularly enjoyed seeing a Ruffed Grouse sitting in the open in a corn field. Many of our bird sightings were made at feeders so keep putting out that seed, especially in these cold months.

We have some great walks coming up, including an owl prowl, so please join us. There is always something to discover, even in these cold winter months (though I have to admit I am off to Trinidad tomorrow!).

Fiona Reid

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

Executive

President: Fiona Reid (905) 693-9719
Past President Andrew Kellman (905) 681-3701
Co-Vice President: Don Scallen (905) 877-2876
Co-Vice President: Ray Blower (519) 853-0171
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: Vacant
Public Relations: Vacant
Webmaster: Andrew Kellman
Crozier Property Steward: Marg Wilkes
Hardy Property Steward: Ray Blower

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

www.hnpnc.com

Feel like a walk in the woods?

This summer Credit Valley Conservation is planning on mapping invasive plants at Terra Cotta Conservation Area with the end goal of establishing an invasive species management plan. We are looking for committed volunteers to assist with the data collection by walking the property with a GPS device that will assist with navigation through a network of established grids cells. Call it "Geo-caching for Invasives!"

We will be holding an information session this winter/early spring to provide more information. The project will begin with a workshop to provide training to ensure everyone is comfortable identifying the invasive species and using the GPS units. If you have any questions please contact Freyja Forsyth, either by phone at 905-670-1615 X 481 or at fforsyth@creditvalleyca.ca.

More details and a date for the workshop will be published in future newsletters.

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION

At the March 09, 2010 meeting of the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, the Executive committee will ask the membership to ratify a proposed change to the constitution that is intended to encourage new members to join our club.

The Executive would like to make changes to ARTICLE 3 – MEMBERSHIP FEES AND DUES, Clause 3. Payment of dues.

Step 1 would be the **removal of the existing section c)** which states “New memberships paid after May 01 will have membership privileges until Aug 31 the following year.”

Step 2 would be the **adoption of the new section c)** which states “*New memberships starting after the September meeting will be charged at a fraction of the full price as follows: ¾ at the December meeting; ½ at the March meeting; ¼ at the June meeting.*”

Questions can be directed to Co-Vice President Ray Blower (519) 853-0171.



Halton North/Peel Naturalist Club		
Statement of Income and Expenses		
for the period May 1, 2009 through October 31, 2009		
INCOME		
Donations	60.00	
Memberships paid	<u>530.00</u>	
Total income	.	\$590.00
EXPENSES		
Bank charges	24.75	
Speakers' fees	125.00	
Newsletter costs	201.06	
Insurance	307.50	
Rent	537.00*	
Total expenses		\$1,195.61
*Prepaid until January 2010		
GIC due Nov. 16/09 - \$6,976.06 - \$1,000.00 withheld for operating expenses and balance reinvested.		

Results of the 2009 Halton Hills Christmas Count

The annual Christmas Bird Count for Halton Hills took place on December 27, 2009. The 2009 Count represents the 19th version of the modern version of the Halton Hills Count. The weather was moderately mild, reaching 1.6°C during a mostly cloudy day. Fortunately, the dense fog that prevailed exactly one year earlier did not materialize.

The results for the 2009 Count are summarized in the attached table. For comparison, the average and high numbers recorded for the previous 18 years are included in the table.

The total number of species recorded for the day plus Count Week was 50 which is very close to the long-term count average. The total number of birds (9691) was reasonably close to the long-term average of 9742 and much higher than the low numbers encountered on the previous count (6763).

No new species were seen in 2009 so the cumulative number of species remains at 96. Two of the species are included on the list by virtue of their having been seen in Count Week, rather than on the Count Day proper.

New high numbers of Mallard (1256), Great Black-backed Gull (3) and Sharp-shinned Hawk (11) were observed. The numbers of birds of six species (Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, American Crow, Song Sparrow, and American Goldfinch) were present in numbers higher than the respective long-term average. By comparison, there were fourteen species that were present in numbers lower their corresponding long-term averages. These

included Common Merganser, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Mourning Dove, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, House Finch, and Common Redpoll. A single-year's count has limited importance in determining trends in populations. Continuing trends require several years worth of observation to be meaningful. As well, certain species are irruptive in occurrence. This was evident as very few 'winter finches' have moved into Southern Ontario for the winter of 2009.

It is worthy to note that a Varied Thrush was reported at an Acton feeder (in the week prior) according to the December 23, 2009 edition of the Acton *Tanner*. There was a good photo of the bird but there were no details on the location or whether it was still there within the Count period. If it was still there, it would be a new species for the Count circle.

In total, 20 people participated in the count, either as observers or as feeder watchers. Thanks to the following participants. Ray Blower, Ross Evans, Megan Kenzie, Larry Martyn, Irene McIlveen, W.D. McIlveen, Lisa Petrie, Fiona Reid, Dawn Renfrew, Teresa Rigg, Valerie Rosenfield, Don Scallen, Dan Shuurman, Rick Stroud, David Sukiani, Janice Sukhiani, Jake Veerman, George Wilkes, Marg Wilkes, and Dave Williams. Appreciation is extended to Larry May for arranging access to the Maple Lodge Farms property and to Halton Regional Police for use of the community boardroom for the wrap-up session.

W.D. McIlveen



Ruffed Grouse, submitted by Fiona Reid

Results of the 2009 Christmas Bird Count at Halton Hills

Species	Total	Avg	Low	High
Great Blue Heron	1	2	0	4
Trumpeter Swan	1	1	1	1
Mute Swan	1	7	2	15
Canada Goose	3092	1715	229	3534
Wood Duck	1	1	1	1
American Black Duck	31	16	2	34
Mallard	1256	437	135	889
Common Goldeneye	7	2	1	3
Common Merganser	4	20	2	66
Northern Harrier	3	4	0	11
Sharp-shinned Hawk	11	4	1	7
Cooper's Hawk	4	2	0	4
Red-tailed Hawk	100	64	40	117
Rough-legged Hawk	5	8	1	45
American Kestrel	9	12	0	16
Merlin	CW	1	0	1
Ruffed Grouse	5	5	1	8
Wild Turkey	8	16	0	49
Great Black-backed Gull	3	1	1	1
Ring-billed Gull	39	239	4	2010
Herring Gull	3	50	1	222
Rock Pigeon	652	666	210	1455
Mourning Dove	529	696	191	1174
Great Horned Owl	3	2	0	5
Belted Kingfisher	2	3	1	7
Red-bellied Woodpecker	5	1	0	2

Species	Total	Avg	Low	High
Downy Woodpecker	52	51	21	83
Hairy Woodpecker	19	15	2	26
Pileated Woodpecker	2	4	0	12
Blue Jay	108	162	60	333
American Crow	438	339	55	692
Common Raven	3	2	0	3
Black-capped Chickadee	490	692	244	1211
Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	9	1	22
White-breasted Nuthatch	41	45	19	76
Brown Creeper	2	3	1	8
American Robin	11	36	1	206
Northern Mockingbird	1	1	0	2
Cedar Waxwing	24	69	7	240
Northern Shrike	6	4	1	19
European Starling	1341	2187	485	3490
Northern Cardinal	59	55	29	95
American Tree Sparrow	164	319	95	837
Song Sparrow	11	5	1	22
Slate-colored Junco	124	244	91	496
Brown-headed Cowbird	CW	5	1	10
House Finch	57	270	37	456
Common Redpoll	30	330	3	1670
American Goldfinch	178	155	37	470
House Sparrow	749	739	196	1316

Number of Birds	9691	9742	3131	15507
Number of Species	50	49	41	57



Local Sighting

One of my most unusual wildlife encounters happened as I was driving to Georgetown on December 15th. I spotted two little prongs on the roadside. Thinking these might be owl ear tufts, I stopped and walked back, and there was a Screech Owl huddled on the ground. It was alive but in bad shape. I picked it up and put it in my jacket. I hoped, like songbirds that sometimes hit our picture window, it would recover when warmed up. So I went on into town, dropped my car off for repairs. I then walked to a copy shop and did

my errands. Once I returned home the owl was still resting in my coat. At my house I examined the owl and gave it some water, but it wasn't opening its eyes. In search of more expert help, I drove over to a friend's on Highway 25 who breeds flamingos, ducks, and macaws. They told me they didn't know anything about owls, but dispatched me to another house across the road. Here I discovered, much to my surprise, a large office where a very efficient woman immediately recorded all the details about my owl. Then the owl was taken away, tubed to receive water, and housed. I had no idea that within less than 2 km of my home there was a place that rehabilitates hawks and owls, and also uses hawks for controlling pest birds at airports. To find out more, visit www.hawkeye.ca. I am happy to report that my owl is now accepting food and has had a wing injury treated successfully, but has not yet been released.

Fiona Reid

Report from Halton Forest Stewardship Committee

Leaves underfoot crackled like fresh soda biscuits as we followed the winding forestry road into the bush of Esquesing Forest. Our walk was led by Bill Gaines, from the Halton Region Conservation Authority and Ron Reinholt of Halton Forest Stewardship Committee.

We were there to examine a soft wood thinning, and the old growth that occurs herein.

Amongst us were an entomologist, two owners of bush lots within Halton, three foresters, two bird watchers, one cyclist, one baker/computer expert, and several interested persons.

Esquesing Forest covers 40 hectares. It was purchased in 1958 for \$6,000. This is its third thinning/cutting. The plantation consists of about 1/5 white plus red and white pine. The remainder consists of hardwoods, with old growth throughout. Bill Gaines, the forester, counted 120 rings in an old fallen hemlock. Ron spotted a tree that had bark that looked like a red oak, but without the usual habit of a red oak. When we looked closer, we saw that it was an enormous cherry, about 125 feet tall with a circumference of six feet. The plates of the bark had thickened and were about 3/4" thick, making the bark greatly furrowed, and unlike the cherry bark we are accustomed to seeing.

Two yellow birch grew by the roadway. They were not growing straight, and had huge gashes along a side. Ron stated that they would be left to grow as they added diversity to the woodlot. This was a greater dividend to the woodlot than lumber value.

There was a stand of beech on a slope that held their orange leaves. Bill mentioned that the reason beech all grow together is because they grow from underground rhizomes. I was surprised by this, as I always assumed that they grew from beech nuts.

Within the plantation, some trees have been flagged to avoid cutting. These usually contain the stick nests of raptors or the leaf nests of squirrels. Tree growing close by with crowns touching will be left also. Otherwise, the machine goes in and cuts down one row, as marked by the forester. From this vantage point, the machine can reach into the next two rows to remove trees with crooked trunks or those with abnormal growths within them. Trunks that are not straight usually are a result of bacteria or insects attacking the terminal bud of the young sapling

Marg Wilkes

Outing to La Salle Park, December 13th

Although the weather did not cooperate, with overcast weather giving way to freezing rain, we had a very good time birding at La Salle. Ray Blower, Anne Fraser and I were the only brave souls participating, and we were rewarded with numerous ducks including large numbers of Common Goldeneye, all three merganser species, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, one Gadwall, a few coot, and a smattering of Redheads. We saw more Canvasbacks than usual, and one was actually resting on the shore, an unusual sight. It had its head curled back as if sleeping. With binoculars, its red eye was clearly open and it was alert to our presence. It is always nice to be able to compare Canvasbacks and Redheads at the same time, distinguishable by their different shaped foreheads and the darker gray back of the Redhead. Many Trumpeter Swans were still present in La Salle, along with Mute Swans and Canada Geese. As we made our way along the wooded section of the boardwalk, we heard a loud repeated call and we were gratified to see a Carolina Wren at close range. Another may have been present but was not spotted by us. We also enjoyed views of Cardinal and Song Sparrow and extremely fat Gray Squirrels collecting seeds set out for Chickadees.

We moved on to the Travelodge, where the parking lot was unusually empty, a fact explained by the new parking fees – a flat rate of \$5 per day on Sundays! We did not find enough birds in the bay to justify the cost of parking, but did enjoy a very nice Thai lunch at Saigon Dish. After lunch we drove over to the Burlington Lift Bridge and the nearby Burlington Skyway in hopes of finding Peregrine Falcons that were present in the summer. We didn't find the falcons, but saw a few ducks in the ship channel and some Black-backed Gulls before we headed back home.

Fiona Reid