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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 43, Number 4

March- April 2009

Club Activities

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. 14: Using Wasps to find the Emerald Ash Borer. Philip Careless, M.Sc. Candidate Insect Systematics Laboratory, Department of Environmental Biology, University of Guelph will be talking about the research and findings on using wasps to control the emerald ash borer.

May 12: Australia and New Zealand. Fiona Reed will be giving this presentation.

June 9: Round table discussion on the club's future direction. If time permits a walk will follow.

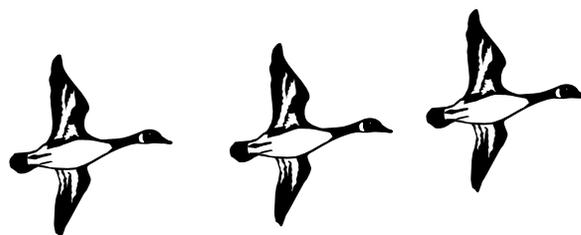
Outdoor: Trips begin at the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) parking lot at Guelphand Mountainview Road, Georgetown unless stated otherwise. If you would like to meet the group at the trip site, please speak to the trip leader for the location and directions to the starting point.

Mar.14: 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.

Apr. 18: 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. Some things to bring: binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. Call Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171 with any questions.

May 10: Leslie Street Spit. Meet Andrew Kellman, Kelly Bowen (and Sierra) at 9 am in the Leslie Street Spit Parking lot. Andrew can be reached at (905) 681-3701

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President's Message

Spring is just around the corner. We saw our first Turkey Vulture of the year while returning from the Royal Botanical Gardens Arboretum. It was a good day out for a hike in terms of seeing birds – brown creeper, flicker, red bellied woodpecker, white breasted nuthatch, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, chickadees, crows, Canada geese, red tailed hawks, bald eagles, mergansers, mallards, cardinal, song sparrow and red polls.

With spring everything changes, and along with the returning birds we will witness the greening earth after a long white and cold winter. We also nurture new life in the club.

Since the last newsletter there has been some discussion on how to move forward with the club. Talk of changing the place we hold meetings, less speakers, more social time and outings. All of this discussion is good but so far no one has expressed interest in becoming club president or vice president. Someone did suggest committees to run the club, but even committees need to report to someone. We also need people to co-ordinate and lead outings. To this end copies of the responsibilities for the executive are available to anyone who would like them.

There are a number of outings happening this spring, including new excursions to Leslie Street Spit in Toronto, looking for spring migrants and hiking along Grindstone Creek in Burlington. Another one will be canoeing/kayaking in Cootes Paradise late June.

There has been a lot of things happening in the Halton Hills, Milton and Brampton in terms of future development - highways, rail expansion and gravel pit operations to name a few. These require our input as members of the community. Hopefully, the more input received from people who care about nature, the more likely these projects will be built in an environmentally sound way or not at all.

With the downturn in the economy now more then ever is the time to stand up for what we believe in as governments are more likely to try and fast track things to help “jump start” the economy. Right now they are saying they are doing this because of the “NIMBY”s (Not In My BackYard) people. This is no excuse to fast track things.

As you know, our backyards can be sanctuaries for birds, insects, amphibians and mammals. And together we can help our backyards expand in flourish. Our backyards are places we go to teach, take photographs, pond dip, sketch, exercise, rejuvenate, and continually be amazed by what we can find by looking up in a tree or under that decaying log.

ANDREW KELLMAN

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

Executive

President: Andrew Kellman	(905) 681-3701
Past President Kelly Bowen	(905) 702-1132
Vice-President: Vacant	(905) 681-3701
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
Young Naturalists: Nancy Kovacs	(905) 702-1132
Webmaster	Andrew Kellman

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

Local Sightings

A memorable highlight on February 18th for the class visiting the Norval Outdoor School was an adult bald eagle flying over the arboretum. Possibly the same bird was perched in a tree overlooking the Credit River on the following Monday. This was observed and enjoyed by another class from inside the Stephen House while they were eating their evening meal.

On February 26th, an adult bald eagle flew over the Norval Outdoor School property again. The same day I observed two common ravens calling and flying in formation. I again observed a pair of common ravens flying together, and calling on March 6th.

By Gerry Doekes

Dealing With Invasive Plants – Some Prospects for Control

On October 18, 2008, I attended a very interesting workshop in Ottawa. The title was “Biology and Biological Control of Established Invasive Plants in Canada”. The workshop focused on four plant species rather than the wide range of species that are problems and had been arranged to look at only species that are already well-established, widely distributed, and causing significant problems. The four species were Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), Dog-strangling Vine or Pale Swallowwort (*Cynanchium rossicum*), Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia* (formerly *Polygonum*) *cuspidatum*), and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*).

It is not possible to summarize all of the presentations here. Instead, some interesting points that came out of the presentations are reported below. A large part of the workshop dealt with progress in looking for mainly insect agents that are responsible for keeping the species in check in their native ranges, mainly in Europe. The hope is that certain of the insects might one day be brought to North America to feed on the problem plant species. Before that can happen, rigorous testing is required and it must be demonstrated that any introduced insect must be effective in controlling the unwanted vegetation but not cause problems for more desirable species (i.e. native plants and agronomic crops).

The scale of invasive weeds is enormous. The estimated costs for controlling 16 selected weed species (all rather nasty ones) in North America ranges from \$13 to 34 billion dollars per year.

On average, about ten new weed species arrive every year. I am not sure whether that applied to Canada or to North America.

All vegetation in Ontario is not native; having arrived after the ice from the last glacial period retreated. Since 1952, about 70 species of arthropod have been introduced to control 20 invasive plants in Canada. Some of these have been quite effective.

Garlic Mustard

Garlic mustard negatively affects the mycorrhizal association in roots of other plants, placing the other plants at a competitive disadvantage. Mustards typically do not have mycorrhizae and are well adapted to live without this symbiotic condition.



Plants can apply two basic strategies to ensure their continued existence. They can either utilize their energy resources to grow large and produce high numbers of seeds or they can use some of that energy to form chemicals that protect them against insect pests. A protected plant can be assured of producing seed but can do so only in lesser amounts.

When the plant species become established in North America where there are no insects to attack them, there is no advantage to the species to retain the strategy of chemical protection. The

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Plant and Vegetation Community Highlights of the 2008 Natural Areas Inventory

A huge body of data was collected by field crews in 2008 for the Natural Areas Inventory throughout the Credit River watershed and the Region of Peel. We're gradually working through the data, analysing it and organizing it in our database. And of course, we're also making preparations for our upcoming field season this summer.

Over 1000 acres over 10 natural areas were inventoried in detail for plant species and another 2000 acres were covered less comprehensively. The provincially endangered Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) was found in many areas but the really exciting news is that some of the butternuts trees observed appeared to be quite healthy, without obvious signs of canker disease that is causing the species so much trouble. Many species (too many to list here) of regionally and locally uncommon species of plants were also seen.

Four plant species, Round-leaved Pyrola (*Pyrola americana*), 2 sedge species (*Carex schweinitzii*, *Carex oligospermum*) and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) have not been previously reported for the Credit watershed or the Region of Peel. For the botanists out there, several more plant species previously known from only a single location in the Credit watershed or Peel Region were found at new locations. These are: 2 sedge species (*Carex antherodes* and *C. castanea*), Sweet Flag (*Acorus americanus*), Bearded Short-husk (*Brachyelytrum erectum*), Rattlesnake Manna-grass (*Glyceria canadensis*), Wild Raisin (*Viburnum cassinoides*) and Bog Aster (*Aster borealis*). The Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) previously known from few locations was found at two new spots. Another sedge (*Carex chordorrhiza*) that hadn't been seen in the area since 1908 was found too.

A lot of high quality areas were visited by the crews that did inventory of vegetation

communities. Most notably, several large fens and bogs were found on private properties and all in pristine condition.

One of the bog/fens was dominated by mounds of Leatherleaf (*Chaemaedaphne calyculata*) and Sphagnum moss, with scattered stunted Black Spruce (*Picea mariana*) and ringed by Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) and Wild Raisin (*Viburnum cassinoides*).

Another lovely bog, dominated by grass and sedge species was liberally sprinkled with cotton grass (*Eriophorum virginicum*), stunted tamarack trees (*Larix laricina*) and a closer look at the ground revealed a wealth of uncommon plants such as Labrador Tea (*Ledum groenlandica*), Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*), Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Large Cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpum*), Bog Buckbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Bog Laurel (*Kalmia polifolia*) and the lovely Wild Calla (*Calla palustris*).

Finally a tiny patch of very unusual marl fen was found late in the fall, so we need to revisit it to better evaluate the community. (Marl is wet, limey "soil".) So different from the other places we had seen, this special spot was dominated by small rushes and variegated scouring rush (*Equisetum variegatum*) as a backdrop against a few gem-like specimens of Kalm's Lobelia (*Lobelia kalmii*) and an unidentified orchid (the reason we need to re-visit).

It's a good feeling to know that such special places are out there and that their owners are taking such wonderful care of them. And who knows what the next field season will bring!

By Dawn Renfrew, Coordinator,
Natural Areas Inventory Project
Credit Valley Conservation

Species at Risk Workshop and Environmental Heroes

Spring is in the air! Well...almost! We are very excited for the many workshops, events, and workdays coming up this spring. Be sure to keep checking the CVC website for volunteer workday opportunities, along with the newly created online registration! Details will be coming soon! www.creditvalleyca.ca

For more information please contact: Greg Bales, 905 713-7410 or Michael Guindon at 905 713-6010,

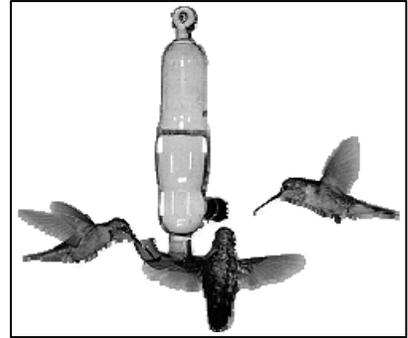
The Ontario Hummingbird Project

Despite the high frequency with which we see Hummingbirds during the summer, relatively little is known about the species in Ontario. In fact, a number of beliefs and 'facts' often repeated by well-known biologists in our area are turning out to be incorrect. Attempts to obtain simple bits of information about the biology and behavior of the species have determined there are huge gaps in our knowledge about the species. To correct this, the Ontario Hummingbird Project was launched in 2005.

You can obtain more information from the project website at www.ontariohummingbirds.ca. For your convenience, I have summarized the main objectives for the project and the ways in which you can participate.

The goals of The Ontario Hummingbird Project include:

- Identifying migration routes and peak migration dates
- Documenting spring arrival and fall departure dates
- Defining the northern limits of the breeding range
- Locating concentration points
- Collecting information on nesting locations, population estimates, reproduction rates and birds returning to the same locality each year



www.hummingbird.net

You are encouraged to participate in the Ontario Hummingbird Project by:

- Becoming a member of the Ontario Hummingbird Project
- Keeping track of the first date that you see hummingbirds at your feeders in the spring (April - May)
- Keeping track of the last date that you see hummingbirds at your feeders in the fall (September - October)
- Counting the highest numbers of hummingbirds seen at one time at your feeder each day during migration and the time of day
- Reporting nesting activity and numbers of hummingbirds visiting your feeders during the breeding season (June - August)

Information collected can be submitted to hummingbirds@bmts.com. As well as knowing that membership fees (\$20/year) go towards a worthwhile project, the benefits to members include three newsletters per year and a chance to participate in special events.

By W.D. McIlveen



Earth Hour™

On **Saturday, March 28, 2009 between 8:30pm and 9:30pm**, Earth Hour will be celebrated around the world. The objective of Earth Hour is to increase public awareness of the need to decrease energy use and take action against climate change. This can simply be done by turning off unnecessary lights, without compromising safety and security. Earth Hour participation is voluntary, fun and educational.

The participation of Town residents, businesses and community organizations is important to making Earth Hour a success. Below are some simple suggestions for how residents can participate:

- Register for Earth Hour at www.EarthHourCanada.org. Share your ideas about how you will be participating by e-mailing the Office of Sustainability at damians@haltonhills.ca.
- Attend the fun and free Star Gazing event being held by the Town on March 28th at the Cedarvale Community Centre. Space is limited so please RSVP by contacting the Town of Halton Hills, Office of Sustainability at 905.873.2601 ext. 2290.

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population thus becomes dominated by plants that have opted for the 'growing big' strategy

This may leave the population in its most defenceless position (with few genes to generate defence chemicals) should an old insect foe be introduced to control the plant or possibly a native insect species may adapt to a new host.

In fact, this may have happened in garlic mustard as shown by the discovery of occasional attacks by a native stem-mining weevil *Ceutorhynchus erysimi* in Ontario. By coincidence, four species from the same weevil genus have been under recent evaluation from collections made in Europe. One or two of these have been recommended as the species to test first. One of these *Ceutorhynchus scrobicollis* has had a 2008 petition made for a future field release.

Pale Swallowwort

The pale swallowwort is an unusual plant in that it can produce several plants from a single seed because the seeds can contain up to at least five separate embryos. As well, it is described as a self-facilitator species. That means that the more plants there are within a given area, the more seeds an individual plant will produce. This runs contrary to the expectation that through crowding, the plants should logically compete with each other for space and resources and individual plants will be less productive.

In its native range, a number of different insects have been found to attack swallowworts. The taxonomy of swallowworts is complex with likely 18 species found in Europe and the Eastern Ukraine and it is difficult to sort out the species. This is an important consideration for it would be prudent to select parasites of only the most relevant plant genotype that matches the species found in North America. Our species apparently matches the genotype of plants from the Ukraine indicating that is their place of origin.

Japanese Knotweed

The invasive Japanese knotweed is an exceedingly severe problem in Great Britain. It is extremely hard to control when it becomes established. Taxonomic revisions have caused the species to be classified as *Fallopia japonica*

though many field guides list it as *Polygonum cuspidata* or *Reynoutria cuspidata*. While our species is likely to be *F. japonica*, it must be recognized that there is a similar and related species, the giant knotweed (*Fallopia sachalensis*). The two can hybridize to form the Bohemian Knotweed (*F. x bohemica*).

All share similar undesirable characteristics. Climatic modelling suggests that the species distribution through Southern Ontario is not going to be limited by temperature or rainfall and its range can extend as far north as Sudbury.

Some insects have been found that attack the plants within their native range. The psyllid *Aphalaris itadori* may offer some potential as a controlling agent but the evidence provided to support that was rather weak. *Aphalaris* may be the very first insect ever to be purposely introduced into Europe (Great Britain) to control any weed species if approval is granted. Due to stringent legislation; however, it is not even possible to legally test certain related plant species in Britain because of their rarity status. This poses a significant obstacle to the testing program that has never been attempted before. This particular delay may cause the studies conducted for Britain to effectively support the release of the insect into North America rather than in Britain itself.

Giant Reed

The last species under investigation was giant reed. This is complicated by the fact that there is a native subspecies of the circumglobal plant. It is the non-native form that grows so vigorously and is spreading rapidly in wetlands, roadsides, and similar sites. The native species is considered to be rare. So we have an unusual situation where the same species is a rare native but an invasive alien. It has been generally accepted that most of the spread of giant reed is by vegetative means. More recent DNA testing has challenged that supposition and it is believed that, in certain places at least, the plant is spreading well by seeds.

The scale of this problem plant in Quebec is illustrated by the fact that the "Phragmites Group" that is a consortium of four universities and 70 individuals has a budget of nearly \$1.5 million to study the problem, not to control it. In Europe, some insects will feed on the species and

work is being done to find the best species that might one day be released to control this large grass in North America.

Whether the various insects under investigation will ever be released as biological control agents remains to be seen; however, some seem

promising enough and a few may eventually be selected and given the chance to prove their worth. If they do work, some rather significant weed problems might be erased from our natural areas.

By W.D. McIlveen

Coalition of Concerned Citizens of Caledon Good News!!

In the last two weeks, Credit Valley Conservation, the Town of Erin and the Town of Caledon have all had unanimous votes to oppose the Rockfort Quarry application! This is very good news as we continue to raise concerns with the various levels of government about the potential risk of this project.

For those of you that came out to the Town of Caledon Council vote on March 3rd - Thank You! For those of you who couldn't attend but are interested in supporting in other ways - thank you, too. We'll be in touch with ways you can help.

Your support and participation is critical and has allowed CCC to forge ahead. It is one step at a time as we continue to make headway and set precedents but there is still much work ahead.

We commend Credit Valley Conservation, the Town of Erin and the Town of Caledon for voting in the best interest of all residents - because the financial burden for roads, water, lost property taxes around the site, etc. could impact all taxpayers in the Region of Peel, Town of Erin and Halton Hills if this quarry proceeds.

A vote at the Region of Peel will be held April 2nd. Please plan to attend if you can. In the meantime, please write letters to Regional Councilors about your concerns regarding the Rockfort Quarry. The Region could be liable for costs if the proposal should all go terribly wrong. Region of Peel contact information is available on the Coalition website or click here for quick access:

<http://www.coalitioncaledon.com/images/clientupload/Contact%20List%20Politicians&CVC%20Board,%20Nov08.doc>.



Really cool birding website - a virtual field guide, complete with calls! There's a bit of advertizing for bird related stuff, but there's loads of information here!

<http://www.whatbird.com/>

The Whatbird engine presents a visual interface made up of icons for the field marks. There are icons for colours, shape, family and much more. Each visual selection step narrows the search results to help locate the bird you saw. Try search engine - http://identify.whatbird.com/mwg/_/0/attrs.aspx---it currently has over 800 birds in the database.

9th annual Halton Eco Festival - Saturday, April 18 from 9 am to 5 pm

FREE-TO-ATTEND

Earth Day Environmental Fair for Sustainability at the Glen Abbey Recreation Centre, 1415 Third Line, Oakville. For more information – www.haltonecofest.ca.



Outings ... continued from page 1

- May 17: Spring Birding at Thickson Wood, Lynde Shores Conservation Area, and Cranberry Marsh.** This cluster of very good birding locations provides a wide variety of habitats including mature forests, meadows, marshes, swamps, scrub land, and Lake Ontario and its shoreline. As a result, a diverse collection of birds can be seen in this area, especially during spring migration. This outing is scheduled for the Sunday of the Victoria Day weekend to minimize the effect of traffic on the drive to and from this Whitby birding "Mecca." Bring warm layers of clothing, binoculars, scopes, water, lunch, hat, and sunscreen. Call Ray Blower (519) 853-0171 up to 10:00 pm Friday, May 15th to arrange meeting times and carpooling.
- May 30: Heronry Outing.** Meet 9 am at Laurie Reed's 11331 15 Sideroad. This is an exceptional opportunity to observe a heronry and wetland from a viewing platform. Directions: from Trafalgar Road in Stewarttown (at the Stewarttown school) take 15 Side Road west to Speyside, cross the traffic lights and continue about 6 km west on 15 Side Road passing Town Line, 6th, and 5th Lines. At 4th Line go right (north) to # 11331 on the east side. There is a stone house and a barn set back from the road, and dead trees of the swamp are visible. For more information call Mike Davis, (905) 877-9665.
- Jun 14: Grindstone Creek:** Meet 1:00 pm at Hidden Valley Park. Walk along Grindstone Creek towards the ponds at the Royal Botanical Gardens. Kelly and Andrew will be leading.
- July 5: Paddle in Cootes Paradise Marsh, Hamilton.** Meet at Princess Point at 9 am as we look for turtles, water birds and recovering water vegetation. Kelly Bowen and Andrew Kellman will be leading this outing.

Burlington Bird Outing – January 25, 2009

It snowed a good amount the night before so I was up early to shovel the car out. While I was shoveling in the cold morning air, a rough legged hawk soared overhead. It must have been a good sign. I was initially not sure I would make the outing as Sierra had stomach flu the night before. Not an easy night for Kelly tending to Sierra all night.

We met up at the Travelodge in downtown Burlington not sure what we would see as the ice had formed close to shore, but there were still enough open areas to see a number of duck species. On our way to the lift bridge we stopped at the Discovery Centre and the beach strip. At the lift bridge we were hoping to find the peregrine falcons. We were told we just missed the snowy owl that headed out towards the lake from Hamilton harbour. As the canal was mostly full of ice the viewing was limited to some ring bill, greater black backed, and herring gulls and American coot. We walked along the canal wall towards Hamilton Harbour and spotted something out on the ice jumping around. We had found two bald eagles, then four, and then two more appeared, for a total of six mature and immature birds.

It was then time to warm up over lunch at our house and we said our good-byes to Marg and George Wilkes. After lunch we headed over to La Salle Park. Kelly and Sierra came along for some fresh air. In fact, it wasn't entirely fresh, as the smell along the waterfront was reminiscent of a barnyard. The bay was almost entirely frozen over, and hundreds of birds had congregated on the ice adjacent to the parking lot, waiting to be fed. Heavy use by mallards, geese and swans had taken its toll on the cleanliness of the ice in the area! It really illustrated the potential water quality impacts of large numbers of waterfowl attracted by people feeding them. The diversity of species was disappointing relative to previous years, and we didn't stay too long given the chilly weather.

Birds seen that day included: Canada geese, trumpeter swans, mute swans, long-tailed ducks, bufflehead, common goldeneye, American black ducks, mallards, gadwalls, black scoters, white-winged scoters, red-breasted mergansers, red tailed hawks, bald eagles, American crows, black capped chickadees, northern cardinals, mourning doves and winter wren

By Andrew Kellman