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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 44, Number 2

November-December 2009

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.
- Dec. 8: Pot Luck and Slides.** Please bring your own plate, mug, cutlery, and a pot luck dish of your choice. If you take nature slides or have other show-and-tell items, please bring some to share with the other members. Doors open at 6:00 pm; dinner 6:30.
- Jan. 12: Pollination and Pollinators, Victoria McPhail, Credit Valley Conservation.** Another timely talk. Recently, concern has been growing about declines in the diversity and abundance of pollinating insects. Well known are the difficulties that honeybees are experiencing. Lesser known is the ominous decline in our native bumblebees. Victoria MacPhail, a Natural Heritage Technician at Credit Valley Conservation, did her MSc on pollination. She is very much involved in both Pollination Canada and the new Pollinator Park being developed in Guelph.
- 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.
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- 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. 14: Late Flowering Plants Survey Hike.** Bill McIlveen will be leading this annual survey to find and identify any flowering plants that are still blooming at sites around Halton Hills. Meet at 1:00 pm.
- Dec 13: Ducks and other water birds in Burlington.** We will go to La Salle Park and the bay at the Travelodge in Burlington. We should see a good number of wintering ducks, loon and swans, and some winter songbirds. Please call Fiona Reid, (905)-693-9719, to arrange car pooling and meeting place and times.
- Dec. 27: Christmas Bird Count.** The annual Christmas Count for Halton Hills will take place in the standard survey area around Halton Hills. The area will be divided into smaller areas with participants assisting experienced leaders. This is a great way for beginners to learn their birds. A \$5 participation fee is requested to help cover the costs of management, organization and publication of the results. The fee does not apply to people counting only at their feeders – see page 3 for details. If you would like to join in any aspect of the count, please call Bill McIlveen at (519) 853-3948 or email wmcilveen@sympatico.ca.

President's Address

The bird life at my feeders this fall has been very active and diverse – my Red-bellied Woodpecker female is here again, alone as usual, along with a good number of woodland birds. Yesterday I noticed the leaves under the feeders were moving, not from the breeze, but from some action below. Looking closely, I saw a Short-tailed Shrew emerge and grab a sunflower seed. Even these insectivores will take what they can get! Squirrels are a conspicuous sight at any feeding station, but after our October presentation, I feel less well-disposed toward them, having seen the predatory activity of Red Squirrels captured so brilliantly on video, making their assault on Wood Thrush nests. By feeding squirrels as well as birds, are we doing more harm than good to bird populations? Thanks to our club, with its array of speakers, nature walks, and fellow naturalists, we all have a great opportunity to learn about and share our experiences of the natural world.

I would like to thank all the people who have kept our club alive and active over the past few years, in particular, our Past Presidents Andrew Kellman and Kelly Bowen for their long terms and dedication to the club and the Executive and Officers Marg Wilkes, Janice Sukhiani, and Christine Williams. Gerda Potzel has done an excellent job producing the newsletter and I thank her for her efforts. Don Scallen put together a great listing of speakers for this year (and we are looking forward to his raspberry pie!). Ray Blower has led numerous bird walks over the years. Ray and Don have agreed to act as joint Vice Presidents and I look forward to working with them. Last but not least, I'd like to thank Bill McIlveen for his many contributions to the newsletter over the years and for organising the Christmas bird count and other outings.

This year we hope to attract some new members to join our club. If you know of any former members who have stopped renewing their membership, why not invite them to drop in to one of our meetings in our new venue in Glen Williams? We have a great club, so let's all do what we can to help it grow. I look forward to my new term as President and seeing you all at our upcoming meetings.

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: Mary Wilke
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

Bird Studies Canada News- August 21

Acting on a report from the Committee on the Status of species at Risk in Ontario, The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources is adding 10 species, removing one species, and reclassifying eight species on the Species at Risk in Ontario list. The Chimney Swift and Whip-poor-will are being added to the list of Threatened species. Four additional bird species are being added as Special Concern: Common Nighthawk, Olive-sided Flycatcher Canada Warbler, and Horned Grebe. Two other birds are being reclassified to lower categories of risk, reflecting population increases in recent years. Southern Ontario's Bald Eagle population is being downgraded from Endangered to Special Concern. The Hooded Warbler is being reclassified from its previous status of Threatened to Special Concern.

from: The Naturalist, Durham Region Field Naturalists, September 2009, p.4, Rayfield Pye



Christmas Bird Count

Do you watch the birds at your feeder all winter?

The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club (HNPNC) invites you to help with the Halton Hills 19th Annual Bird Count.

The Christmas Bird Count is a North America-wide effort. Last year our club observed 6,763 birds from 49 different species. The most frequently observed birds were, European Starling, Canada Goose, Mourning Dove, and Black-capped Chickadees.

The Club would appreciate your assistance in collecting data by recording and reporting the number and species of birds you observe on **December 27th**.

Report **ONLY** birds observed on **December 27th**.

- Report the location where you made the observation (Location could be “backyard on Princess Anne Drive” or “Cedarvale Park”).
- If observations were recorded in more than one location, please keep multiple lists (For example, report 3 Blue Jays in Cedarvale, 10 Gold Finches in backyard).
- If you are not certain which bird you have seen don’t guess, do your best to describe it or do not include it.

You may report your observations by **December 31st**, in one of two ways:

- E-mail your observations to wmcilveen@sympatico.ca (If you are interested in learning the results for our area, please indicate so in your e-mail).
- Or if you do not have email, phone Bill at (519) 853-3948

REMINDER – MEMBERSHIPS ARE DUE! MEMBERSHIP FORM ON PAGE 8

Local Sightings

Late last spring, an American Robin was very busy pecking at it’s reflection on the outside mirror’s of two vehicles in the parking lot, at our place. I had noticed behaviour like this by a Robin, a couple of years ago as well. What set this apart, from the other times, this particular bird was very territorial, to the point of attacking a chipmunk that was scurrying across the ground towards its hole.

The Robin almost landed on the back of the chipmunk, and attempted to scare the animal away with its feet trying to grab hold of it, all the while still in partial flight. It happened very quickly, and it stayed with the animal, until it escaped into its hole.

Recent observations –

October 14 - Red-bellied Woodpecker
November 2 & 3 - Eastern Bluebirds.
November .3 - Northern Goshawk

Submitted by Gerry Doekes

Butterfly Late Date Records

In 2009, starting on August 26, I commenced some monitoring of butterflies and other forms of wildlife at nine parks in southern Mississauga. Up until the present time, a total of seventeen species of butterfly was observed. Some of these were the expected later-flying species but some were less common ones that were flying later than anticipated. To determine if these were correct impressions, the late dates for 2009 were compared with the dates provided by Harrison [2007]. His records are based on observations of

butterflies seen within 50 km of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto from 1867 to 2007.

The attached table shows the extreme late dates shown by Harrison compared with the late dates of observation for the species found within the study sites in Mississauga in 2009. Most of the observation dates are well within the normal flight periods for the respective species; however, new late dates were determined for two species. These were Dun Skipper and Northern Broken Dash.

Common Name	Late Date*	2009 Date
Wild Indigo Duskywing	Oct. 21	Sep. 24
Least Skipper	Oct. 2	Sep. 17
Peck's Skipper	Oct. 21	Sep. 17
Northern Broken-Dash	Aug. 30	Oct. 8
Dun Skipper	Sep. 5	Sep. 24
Black Swallowtail	Oct. 3	Sep. 25
Cabbage White	Nov. 24	Oct. 14
Clouded Sulphur	Dec. 4	Oct. 13
Orange Sulphur	Nov 29	Sep. 17
Summer Azure	Oct. 3	Sep. 24
Eastern Comma	Nov 22	Sep. 25
Mourning Cloak	Nov. 20	Oct. 1
American Lady	Nov. 10	Sep. 25
Red Admiral	Nov. 14	Oct. 10
Northern Crescent	Oct. 14	Sep. 17
Common Ringlet	Oct. 8	Sep. 17
Monarch	Dec. 4	Oct. 13

*Dates provided by Harrison, 2007

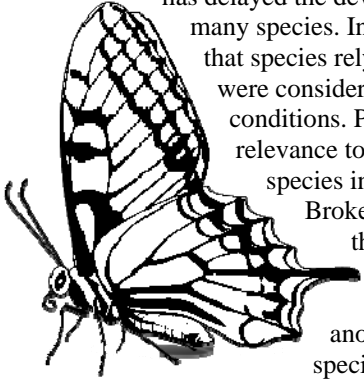
The Ontario Butterfly Atlas [Holmes, 1991] indicates that Northern Broken Dash has but one generation per year with a flight period ending after mid-August. Butterflies of Canada [Layberry, 1998] confirms that there is only a single generation per year in Canada though further south in the United States; it can have a second generation. It cautions however that distinguishing females from those of the Dun can be difficult. Although worn from age, the individual seen at Fusion Park clearly best

matched the illustration of the Broken Dash. The Ontario Butterfly Atlas also suggests that Dun Skippers may have a partial second generation with adults present into September. Butterflies of Canada notes that Dun Skippers may have a rare second brood at Point Pelee. The fresh specimen seen at Lakeside Park (not far distant from Fusion Park) is clear evidence that the species had developed a later generation in our area.

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It should be noted that the relatively cool, wet weather during the spring and summer of 2009 has delayed the development and appearance of many species. In part, it should be expected that species relying on specific 'degree days' were considerably affected by such weather conditions. Perhaps this has some relevance to the late appearance of the species in question. Why a Northern Broken Dash was present so late in the season is still difficult to explain. It must be mentioned that I observed another individual of this same species at Niagara-on-the-Lake on September 23. Such a coincidence surely



suggests that the species was not behaving in a traditional manner though no definite conclusions can be drawn from such limited data. It must remain a mystery until additional information becomes available.

Harrison, B. 2007. The butterflies of the Toronto Region: 140 years of history. Checklist and flight seasons. Toronto Entomologists. 8 pp.

Holmes, A.M., Q.F. Hess, R.R. Tasker, and A.J. Hanks. 1991. The Ontario Butterfly Atlas. Toronto Entomologists Association, Toronto, Canada. 167 pp.

Layberry, R.A., P.W. Hall, and J.D. Lafontaine. 1998. The Butterflies of Canada. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Canada. 280 pp.

W.D. McIlveen

The Butterfly Whisperer by Brenda and Ben Kulon

Lambton Wildlife Inc. is planning to publish this new book on butterflies and butterfly gardening. It includes many examples of Brenda and Ben's gorgeous photography as well as many tips on how to garden to attract butterflies to your garden. The book is being marketed through local field naturalist clubs.

However, a limited number of hard cover copies are available as a special "protector edition." These special copies cost \$100 and include: a hard cover copy of the book, each personally dedicated and signed by the author, a tax receipt for \$65.00.

To order a protector edition of the Butterfly Whisperer contact Gord Catterson at (519) 337-1246, gpcatt@xcelco.on.ca, or 502 Roosevelt Drive, Sarnia, ON N7V 2P2.



Summer of the wrens

Wrens are among my favourite summer birds. They would never finish first in a contest of ornithological beauty, but what they lack in looks they more than make up in strength of character. The males sing a rollicking song from dawn to dusk. Brief interludes are spent stuffing nest boxes with sticks – so many that it is difficult to fathom how any space could be left for eggs and young. Males and females interact noisily and scold interlopers such as cats and red squirrels with discordant chatter.

In early May of 2009 a male house wren arrived in my backyard and I kept my fingers crossed that a mate would appear. I've had nest boxes in my yard for over 20 years. Though I have often had exuberant male wrens calling in the spring, on only two occasions did females arrive to consummate a relationship. I was hoping that 2009 would see this happen a third time. And then in early June, after three weeks of incessant singing by the male, a female did arrive. I was elated, but I suspect, not nearly as elated as the male!

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During June the wren pair raised their initial brood. The male continued singing, most often from the top of a small dead birch at the rear of my yard. His preference for this calling perch became clear when a neighbour with a yard abutting mine, excitedly told me that wrens were nesting in his yard as well. It became clear that the male had attracted not one but *two* females. The perch on the birch just happened to be about equidistant from each nest – the perfect place for the bigamous male to survey his domain.

In early July the first brood from the nest box in my yard fledged. They made themselves inconspicuous amongst the cover found in the yard – hedging, shrubbery and dense herbaceous growth. It soon became apparent that the female was brooding another set of eggs. This would be a first for my yard. My two previous “wren years” had yielded only a single brood.



During the rearing of this second brood I had more time to watch the parents deliver food to the nestlings. Some of this food was the pabulum of the songbird world – small green caterpillars. Soft and nutritious, they form an important part of the diet of many small birds. I am amazed at the ability of birds to find green caterpillars amongst green foliage. In recent years I’ve made concerted efforts to look for caterpillars, usually without much success. I was particularly envious when one of the wren parents brought a large caterpillar to the nest. It looked like it might have been a sphinx moth larvae, one that I would have liked to rear, had I been able to find it first.

Caterpillars were, by no means, the only, or even the dominant food fed to the wren nestlings. The

offerings were diverse. Spiders were frequently on the menu, along with harvestmen and moths. Other prey included a ladybug, a green true bug - likely a variety of treehopper- and a centipede. The inclusion of a centipede and harvestmen in the diet of the young suggests that the parents spend time foraging on the ground.

In early August a fascinating thing happened. The wren parents were still busily feeding their second brood in the nest box when I began to hear calls in my yard that I wasn’t at all familiar with. Knowing that house wrens have a large vocal repertoire, I first thought that these new calls were attributable to them.

The reality was quite different and quite delightful. A Carolina wren was the vocal artist responsible for these new calls. This Carolinian species had appeared in my yard for the first time. And for reasons, unclear to me, it was showing an inordinate interest in the resident house wrens. Whenever the male house wren vocalized the Carolina wren would materialize from the undergrowth and perch nearby. This would infuriate the male house wren, who would then vigorously pursue the Carolina wren.

Occasionally the Carolina wren would even perch on the house wren’s nest box, until driven off by one or both of the house wren parents, distracting them from the important business of feeding their second brood. It was still present in my yard when this brood fledged on August 11th. It disappeared shortly after this. I hope I will have the opportunity of hosting one again.

On August 14th one of the house wrens entered another nest box repeatedly. I thought “Is it possible they’ll nest a third time?” Alas this was not to be. The family of wrens did however remain in the vicinity of my yard until at least August 27th. I was heartened by the fact that even after the young of the second brood had fledged, that the family had decided to remain in the yard instead of retreating to a wilder, more fecund habitat. For wrens, at least, a well vegetated suburban yard seems to provide the sustenance needed for survival. I had been graced with the presence of these engaging waifs for almost four months and look forward to a repeat performance next year.

Don Scallen

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

Membership for September 2009 to September 2010

_____ 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