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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 44, Number 4

March-April 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.

Apr. 13: Tasmania, 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.

May 11: Encounters with Weta and other Antipodean Wildlife, Darryl Gwynne, Professor of Biology at the University of Toronto. First two necessary definitions: "Antipodean" refers to Australia and New Zealand. "Weta" refers to a group of eye-popping insects that lurk in the forests of New Zealand. Relatives of ordinary crickets and grasshoppers, weta are the bruisers of the insect world. They can exceed 20 cm in length and some weigh more than small birds. The males, according to Dr. Gwynne, sport "elaborate weaponry." Like so many island animals, weta have suffered from the introduction of non-native predators. Sixteen of the seventy New Zealand weta are designated as threatened. Join Dr. Gwynne for a rare look into the lives of these fascinating insects.

June 8: Annual Evening Hike. This hike will either be along Silver Creek or the Credit River - contact Don Scallen at (905) 877-2876 for time and details closer to the event.

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.

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.

Outings continued on page 3...

President's Message

We seem to have had a very mild winter compared to our neighbours to the south, but there has been a light blanket of snow in the woods for the last two months. I've been seeing more animal tracks than usual in my woods, especially the narrow surface tunnels of shrews, tiny mouse footprints with tail marks, and one of my personal favourites, the swishy continuous pattern left by a porcupine as he travels from the safety of a rock crevice to a patch of cedars and hemlocks where he browses.

Spring is finally under way, though, and I saw a pair of Horned Larks in a stubble field south of Georgetown on Sunday. Other early arrivals should be appearing soon.

This month we will be sending you your newsletter electronically, to those who responded to my email. This will cut our club costs considerably. Thanks, everyone! If you are not on the e-list and would like to be, please contact me.

We have some great outings and talks scheduled in the coming months and I hope to see you all at one or more of these.

Happy rambles, 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 (647) 408-9515
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.

www.hnpnc.com

Conservation Halton BioBlitz

The Conservation Halton BioBlitz is a new event being launched in 2010 to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity. It will take place at Hilton Falls Conservation (from Highway 401, take Highway 25 north to 5 Side Road (Campbellville Road), go west on 5 Side Road for 5 km to park entrance) and features two days of activities.

The BioBlitz Fun Day offers activities for the whole family to enjoy and is an opportunity to learn about nature. The BioBlitz Naturalist Challenge will see teams of bird watchers, bug counters and plant afficianados compete to find the most of each species.

BioBlitz Fun Day - Saturday, June 19, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come out and enjoy themed guided hikes, guest speakers, birds of prey demonstrations, family activities, a BBQ lunch and much more. Contact: Liz Wren, 905-336-1158 ext. 284.

BioBlitz Naturalist Challenge - June 19-20. Put together a team or sign up individually and identify all that you can over the two days. Prizes for biggest species list, rarest bird and more. Specialized hikes and demonstrations on dragonflies/damselflies, bat mist netting and others will be available for participants to take part in. Contact: Nigel Finney, 905-336-1158 ext. 305.

Outings continued from page 1....

Mar 21: Leslie Street Spit. Meet at NEC lot at 8:30 a.m. or call Fiona (905) 693-9719 if you want to meet at the spit. This artificial promontory into Lake Ontario is good for birds at almost any time of year. We should see large numbers of waterfowl, wintering song birds, and more.

Early April: Salamander watching at Silver Creek. It is hard to put an exact date down for this event as it will be dependent on weather and ice cover, but usually during early April, and especially on a night with some light rain, the mole salamanders (Spotted and Jefferson's) make their way to ponds to breed. Silver Creek now has an excellent boardwalk for viewing the pond. If you would like to be contacted about the date for this walk, please call or email Fiona ((905)693-9719, Fiona.reid@xplornet.com). The event date will also be posted on the website.

Apr. 17: Beamer Conservation Area Hawk Watch, Grimsby. 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 a few. In addition, a good variety of songbirds and waterfowl are observed. Some things to bring: binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. Call Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171, to arrange car pooling and meeting spots and times.

Apr. 25: Early Woodland Wildflowers. Join Fiona on her Speyside property to search for bloodroot, hepatica, cohosh and more. We can also check the development of salamander eggs in the ponds. Call Fiona (905) 693-9719 for car pooling and/or directions. Start time 2:00 pm.

May 23: 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, Victoria Day weekend. This is 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, to arrange car pooling and meeting spots and times.

10th Annual Halton Eco Festival

Halton Eco Festival, Saturday April 17, 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday April 18, 11 am to 4 pm
Glen Abbey Recreation Centre, 1415 Third Line, Oakville,
Adults \$5.00/Students & Seniors \$2.00.

An Earth Week environmental fair for sustainable living. 90 booths, green environmental products and services, educational forums about current issues and recent environmental developments, kid's eco fun area hosted by Trafalgar Ridge Montessori School of Oakville, action campaigns to learn from and join.

For more information: www.haltonecofest.ca

Floating Invasive Aquatic Plants

The name 'floaters' can be applied to many things. In our present context, the term is being applied to a group of non-native plants that have appeared in waters of Ontario and are either presently or could potentially be quite invasive. These plants float on the surface or are submerged by extending close to near the water surface.

We have many aquatic plant species that don't often attract attention because most of them they mostly live quite happily under the water surface out of view. But in some instances, they can grow profusely and reach the surface to become rather conspicuous. This would include the duckweeds (*Lemna* species), Water Meal (*Wolffia* sp.), and various algae species. The present article deals with non-native species that present certain management problems although a couple mentioned are not serious threats.

Common Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

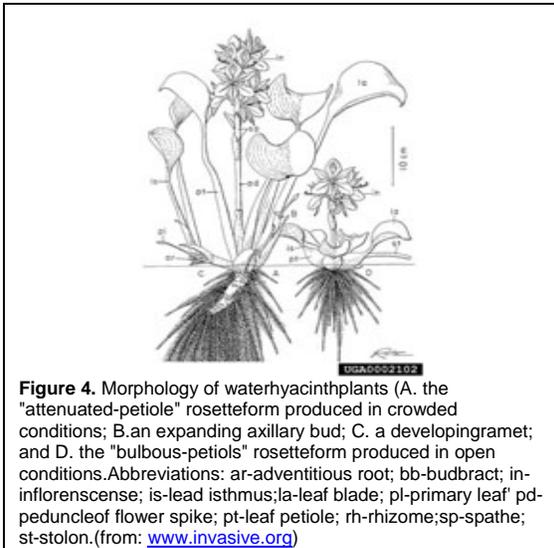


Figure 4. Morphology of waterhyacinth plants (A. the "attenuated-petiole" rosetteform produced in crowded conditions; B. an expanding axillary bud; C. a developing gramet; and D. the "bulbous-petiole" rosetteform produced in open conditions. Abbreviations: ar-adventitious root; bb-budbract; in-inflorescence; is-lead isthmus; la-leaf blade; pl-primary leaf; pd-peduncle of flower spike; pt-leaf petiole; rh-rhizome; sp-spathe; st-stolon. (from: www.invasive.org)

The Common Water Hyacinth is a very beautiful plant that has a bulbous petiole that helps to keep the plant afloat. It reproduces extremely quickly and colonies can soon block rivers, ponds and other waterways to impede movement of water craft and interfere with growth of other plants in the

water. Originating in the Amazon Basin, it is tropical in nature and it is not surprising that it is readily damaged by frost. This sensitivity to cold climates fairly well ensures that it will not become a nuisance species in Ontario. Despite that, I have seen it on the north shore of Burlington Bay and in the pond within Saddington Park at Port Credit. The plants were likely dumped into those waters from aquariums or water gardens

European Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*)

As its name suggests, the European Frogbit is native to Europe. It was introduced to Ontario as an aquatic ornamental species in the 1930s. It was first brought to the Central Experiment Station in Ottawa in 1932 but it escaped to the Rideau Canal where it was recorded only seven years later. It has continued to spread westward along the shore of Lake Ontario towards Toronto and more recently has been found at Long Point, Point Pelee and Rondeau.

The plant is quite attractive and the white flowers look much like a miniature water lily. The roots do not anchor the plant to a substrate, consequently, it can move about relatively easily and thus become distributed to new areas with little difficulty. The plants produce seed, runners or stolons, as well as many winter buds called turions.

The species soon forms very dense mats that screen out sunlight from lower submerged vegetation. The plants die in the fall and the decomposition process results in the rapid decline in dissolved oxygen required by fish and other aquatic organisms. The mats affect boating and swimming and other recreational use of water bodies.

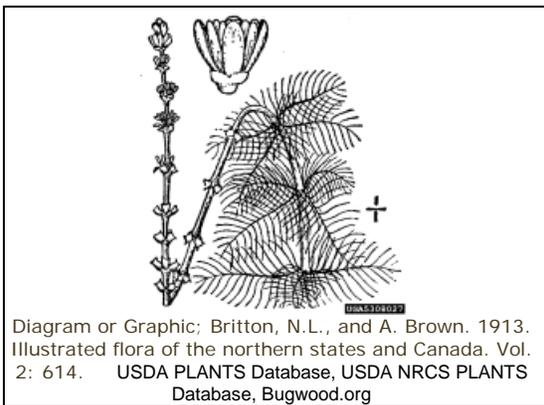
Fanwort (*Cabomba caroliniana*)

Fanwort has been distributed via the aquarium trade where it is used as an

'oxygenator' in outdoor ponds. It seems probable that such a use resulted in the escape of the species to the natural environment. It was first discovered in Kassabog Lake northeast of Peterborough in 1991. It has continued to spread through adjoining waterways in recent years.

The small white flowers of Fanwort resemble those of White Water Crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*), a native species. It only occasionally forms floating leaves. The majority of submerged leaves occur in pairs of highly-dissected, fan-shaped leaves along the main stem. The plants prefer slow moving waters of streams, lakes and ponds that are nutrient-rich. The species is subtropical but is quite cold tolerant. Once it becomes established, it can rapidly form dense stands. These can displace native vegetation, clog drainage systems, and interfere with recreational use of waterways. Its long-term impact in the natural environment has yet to be determined.

Eurasian Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)



Eurasian Milfoil as it is commonly called has been around as a problem species for probably longer than the other species discussed below. Although it is a flowering plant, its flower is a short spike with rather inconspicuous flowers. Most of the plant consists of highly-dissected leaves, a condition that is quite common in aquatic plants. It looks much like its closely-related North American cousins. It has been known

to be in Ontario for about 50 years and has dispersed to many places across the province. It displaces native species, interferes with fish habitat, and can interfere with human use of water bodies (i.e. tangling boat motors, fishing lines), and it has been reported to increase populations of disease-carrying mosquitoes. Growth is quite rapid and it can regenerate very quickly from stem fragments left from attempts at underwater mowing of the plants.

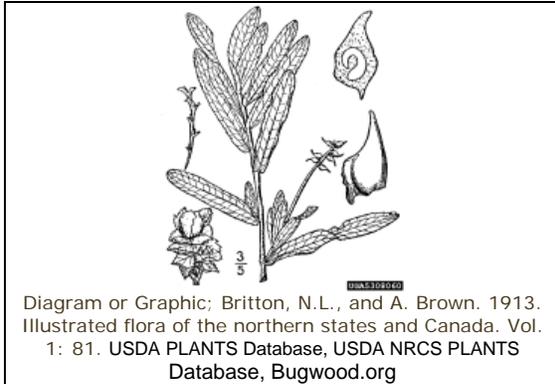
Yellow Floating Heart (*Nymphoides peltata*)

Yellow Floating Heart is a species native to Europe and Asia. It is popular as an ornamental species in water gardens owing to the small yellow flowers that somewhat resemble small yellow pond lilies. They also look like small Marsh Marigolds with their shiny, heart-shaped leaves although the leaves tend to float on the water rather than stand erect above it. Inevitably, the species escapes to the wild from cultivation. It has become established as a nuisance across a number of states in the U.S. It has been found growing wild in Quebec and Ontario. The Ontario fact sheet on the species prepared in 2006 lists only one location for the species in the province. That was in the City of Ottawa at Brown's Inlet connected to the Rideau Canal. In 2009, the species was discovered closer to home in the storm water management pond in the Dominion Seedhouse Park in Georgetown. Plans were made to eradicate the species by draining the pond.

Floating Yellow Heart prefers slow moving rivers, lakes, reservoirs, ponds and swamps 0.5 to 4 meters deep. It can also grow on damp mud. It reproduces both by seeds and vegetatively by broken stems. In other locations where it has become invasive, it forms dense mats that shade native plants growing lower in the water column. Upon dying, the decomposition of the dead plant tissue decreases the dissolved oxygen

concentrations and thus negatively affects fish and other aquatic organisms.

Curly Pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*)



Curly Pondweed from Eurasia is a member of a wide-spread aquatic genus with many native species in our area. Most of the plant is submersed but some of the leaves may emerge above the water surface. Its leaves are distinctively serrated and appear ruffled. The flowers are not conspicuous. It spreads primarily by the hard and prickly burr-like winter buds ('turions'). One plant may produce hundreds of turions that can germinate the following year. Other reproduction is by vegetative plant fragments as well as seeds and rhizomes.

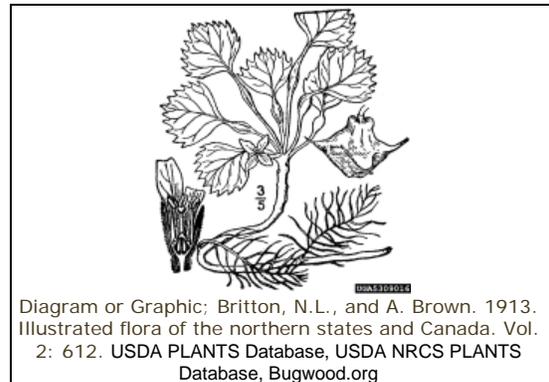
This Pondweed is found in freshwater lakes, ponds, rivers and streams as well as in slightly brackish waters. It tolerates low light, low water temperatures, and survives in many lower quality water conditions. Its ability to grow in such a diverse range of conditions allows it to aggressively out-compete many native species. Dense surface mats of this plant may interfere with water-based recreational activities.

Information on the establishment of the species in North America is not definitive but one source suggests that it was inadvertently brought by boat in the mid-1800s. It is present in nearly every state and province suggesting that it has been on the continent for a considerable period. Several states have classed the species as invasive.

Water-clover (*Marsilea quadrifolia*)

Water-clover is an unusual member of the group of floating plants in that it is a species of fern. It resembles a 4-leaf clover rather than the more typical woodland species with which we are all familiar. Because it is a fern, it does not produce any flowers. It originated in southern Europe but has been present in North America for over 100 years. In some places in the United States, it does become a nuisance but its distribution in Canada is very restricted. A small colony exists in the mouth of the Nanticoke Creek near Lake Erie and it was reported from Marie Curtis Park in Etobicoke. That later colony appears to have died out. In any case, the species does not present any invasive threat at present.

Water Chestnut (*Trapa natans*)



One of the newest plants to Ontario is the Water Chestnut from Eurasia. It is known only in one bay on the Ottawa River north of Voyageur Provincial Park in Prescott and Russell County. Plants were first introduced to North America in about 1874, possibly escaping from the botanical garden of Asa Gray at Harvard University. A few years later (1879), plants were found in the nearby Charles River in Massachusetts.

In 1998, it was first reported in Canada in southwestern Quebec, along a tributary of the Richelieu River. The species is also known from Sodus Bay, NY, on the south shore of Lake Ontario but not along the north shore of the lake. It was first detected

in Voyageur Provincial Park in 2007. Attempts are being made to manually eradicate the species before it can spread to other locations.

The flowers are inconspicuous with four white petals about 8 mm long. They are borne singly on erect stalks located in the central area of floating leafy rosette. Submerged leaves are highly dissected. The fruit, a four-horned, barbed, nut-like structure about 3 cm in diameter, develops under water.

Its growth can quickly produce dense, clonal mats that impede navigation. It has low food value for wildlife and likely reduces aquatic plant growth of other species beneath the shade of its floating canopy. Decomposition of the dead plant material at the end of the growing season contributes toward lower oxygen levels in shallow waters. This, in turn, impacts other aquatic organisms. The

sharp spiny fruits can also be hazardous to bathers.

General Comments

The release of plants and animals into natural waterways, directly or indirectly, is illegal as well as ecologically unsound. People who wish to maintain water gardens should restrict their species selection to native species and maintain their gardens such that the species cannot accidentally escape. Unwanted plants should be destroyed by thorough drying and discarding them in garbage, not by composting. Boaters should ensure that boats and motors are thoroughly clean of adhering plant parts and other forms of life before they are allowed to enter a new body of water. Similar sanitation practices should apply to bait containers, water-wells, and boat trailers.

W.D. McIlveen

Owls and Owling

On February 20th, we headed out with a group of 18 people into the Esquesing Forest to look for owls. Don Scallen and I were confident we would see Great Horned Owls as we had been out scouting just one week earlier and listened to a pair call almost directly above our heads. Sadly, on this occasion, these same owls were far off on the slopes of the escarpment. They called a few times in response to our tape, but they did not approach. The highlight for some was a good view of a very large and colourful meteor. There is always something to see when you get outside!

This past Sunday, February 28th, I headed over to Heart Lake CA to join Bette-Ann Goldstein and Ross Evans (I think everyone else was glued to their TVs for the big game) and look for Long-eared Owls. Bette-Ann had seen three birds a few days earlier. We were able to find two of these magnificent owls resting in a dead pine tree. They were very tolerant and allowed me to



walk right under them to take their picture. For me at least, this was well worth missing the hockey!

Last but not least on the “owl-news,” I’d like to update you on the Screech Owl I found injured before Christmas. I went

to see him last week and what a fine sight to see! The huddled, sick bird with feathers all askew is now sleek and handsome, sitting bolt upright with not a feather out of place. His wing injury has healed perfectly and he is feeding very well. As soon as temperatures are above freezing at night, he will be released. Thanks to Hawkeye for taking such good care of him.

Fiona Reid