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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 46, Number 1

September-October 2011

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.

Tuesday, September 13: A tour of the national parks of Zimbabwe. Dave Welfare of Georgetown will entertain us with photos and stories of the rich natural history of Zimbabwe.

Tuesday, October 13: Early birdwatchers in Ontario. Judith Pudden, a Royal Ontario Museum archivist, will offer an insiders view of the observations of early birdwatchers in Ontario. Judith manages the journals of over 50 ornithologists who engaged their passion for birds from the 1880's to the 1960's. She will present selections from these journals and provide insight into the lives of the writers. Come and learn about the genesis of birding in Ontario.

Tuesday, November 8: The Halton/North Peel Naturalists encourages members and non-members alike to share their love of nature on this evening by bringing objects of interest to the meeting. This adult show and tell could include art work, wood carvings, photographs, writing or anything else that celebrates nature. Items collected on trips both domestic and exotic would be welcome. This will be an opportunity for folks to mingle and tell tall tales.

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.

Sunday, September 25: Burns Conservation Area. Join Fiona Reid on an afternoon trip to this small but interesting conservation area west of Georgetown. We should see some ducks and fall migrants. On our way back we will check out Scotch Block reservoir for waterfowl. Please call Fiona (905-693-9719) for carpooling information and directions.

Saturday, October 15: Mt. Nemo. Join Fiona Reid to enjoy a fall walk on the edge of the escarpment, where hawks and other migrants use thermals and soar at eye level. Optional climb down to see 500-year old cedars. Please call Fiona (905-693-9719) for carpooling information and directions.

President's Message

Even with the late start to summer, things did finally heat up and I found the warm months to be productive. For me this was a time to get to know the smaller realms of animal life – dragons and damsels, moths and caterpillars. It is very exciting to take on a new group of animals and see new species on almost every outing!

We have a great line-up of speakers and events for fall and winter this year, and I look forward to welcoming old members and new at our first meeting in September, as well as throughout the season. Don't forget to fill out the attached membership form and drop it off with your payment – thanks!

Best wishes to all,

Fiona Reid

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1
Charity registration number 869778761RR0001

Executive

President: Fiona Reid (905) 693-9719
Past President Andrew Kellman (905) 681-3701
Vice President: Don Scallen (905) 877-2876
Secretary: Anne Fraser (905)-877-1844
Treasurer: Janice Sukhani (647) 408-9515

Appointments

Membership: Valerie Dobson (905) 828-1729
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: \$30 Single; \$40 Family
The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club is an affiliated member of Ontario Nature.

www.hnpnc.com

Volunteer needed!

Are you interested in the position of Newsletter Editor?

Email Gerda at gerdapotzel@gmail.com



Conservation Halton Event

Mount Nemo Hardwood Tour - Saturday September 24

Time: 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Location: Mountain Nemo Conservation Authority, Burlington

Contact: To register please e-mail - web@hrca.on.ca

For more information: 905-336-1158 ext 233

Conservation Halton Forestry staff will lead a guided tour of the hardwood plantations at Mount Nemo. This event is from 9 a.m. to noon at Mount Nemo Conservation Area

Giant Swallowtails and Climate Change

Recently, one of the items covered by the news media was the change in distribution of various species owing to climate change. There are other causes for expansions of populations other than climate shifts but this discussion is limited to the global warming phenomenon. The media accounts included the recent appearance of fish species in the ocean much further north than where they normally occur. One species that was mentioned that has relevance to our own area was the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly.



Figure 1: Giant Swallowtail Butterfly adult, Prince Edward Point, May 30, 2009

While it is a good thing that the media covered this important story, they unfortunately got it wrong. To listen to what they were saying one was left with the impression the species involved were fleeing from excessive heat in their traditional areas and seeking respite in cooler areas. This is not the case. The geographic range expansion is possible only because the new areas are now offering conditions (slightly warmer) where the cooler conditions had prevented them from surviving before. Giant Swallowtails (*Papilio cresphontes*) are the largest butterfly in much of North America. Their wingspan

ranges from 10 to 14 cm across! (Figure 1). They tend to stay in woodland areas or, in the southern US, in citrus groves. The adults sip flower nectar for food. The larvae of this butterfly are known as the 'Orange Dog', not for their colour but for their host in citrus groves. The caterpillars look a lot like bird droppings and can get as big as 4.5 cm long! (Figure 2)

They generally adopt a disguise by looking like bird droppings, an appearance that they retain until they pupate. Another deterrent to would-be predators is the osmeterium. This is a reddish, forked gland located behind the head that is extended when the caterpillar disturbed. The osmeterium exudes a fluid that is considered to smell terrible and deters any attacker.

In years past, Giant Swallowtails were essentially restricted to the far southern parts of the province. They would occasionally wander farther and one vagrant had been reported at Ottawa. Now they are much more frequent in parts of the province where they were seen only occasionally. How much of this recent range expansion is due to climate change is still unclear. Milder winters could certainly assist in the



Figure 2. Giant Swallowtail Butterfly larva on Common Hop-tree seedling, Windsor, September 6, 2011

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survival of the species over the coldest part of the year. A key limitation in their distribution is the availability of their host plants.

Hosts of the Giant Swallowtail all belong to the citrus plant family Rutaceae. We do not have many groves of oranges or lemons in Ontario to sustain the butterflies but we do have a few other members of the plant family. The list includes Gas Plant (*Dictamnus albus*), Cork Tree (*Phellodendron amurense*), Common Rue (*Ruta graveolens*), Common Hop-tree (*Ptelea trifoliata*) and American Prickly-ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*). The first three mentioned are all introduced or non-native species. They are rarely grown and are thus hardly capable of sustaining populations of the butterflies in Ontario. The Hop-tree is rather

uncommon in Ontario and restricted to the Carolinian zone. The main job of supporting the larvae of the Giant Swallowtails then falls to the Prickly-ash that has a much wider distribution than the others though it also tends to grow in more southern parts of the province. Prickly-ash is a relatively inconspicuous species that goes unnoticed unless one needs to cross through a patch of it. Then the thorns on its stems are more than adequate to grab the traveler's attention. Other than vagrant butterflies that might be carried by the wind, the anticipated range of the butterflies is going to strongly mirror the distribution of Prickly-ash. Perhaps the changing climate will allow that plant to extend its range and thus allow the butterflies to follow further a field. It will be interesting to follow shifts in distribution patterns for these species as well as others that exhibit similar types of range restrictions.

by W.D. McIlveen



Credit Valley Conservation Event

Giving Back to the Glen: Tree Planting Festival - Saturday, October 1

Time: 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Location: Glen Williams Park, 509 Main Street, Glen Williams

Cost: Free

Contact: Lindsey Jennings 905-670-1615 ext. 445 ljenning@creditvalleyca.ca

Join us for a Community Tree Planting Event in partnership with the Town of Halton Hills, P.O.W.E.R and CVC. Come out for a fun morning of tree planting at Glen Williams Park and some family-friendly activities. No experience necessary, and all trees and equipment will be provided. If you have your own shovel, please bring it! Come on out, give back and get involved!

Strange Small World

This summer I tried to learn more about dragonflies. It was very exciting to encounter new species and I found these beautiful predators quite entrancing. Later, our attention turned to moths and caterpillars. In the search for new and wonderful caterpillars, we ventured out day and night, walking very slowly and turning over each damaged leaf. Caterpillars were not the only things that turned up on our search. Much as I enjoyed the caterpillars, the “surprises” were even more fascinating. All photos below were taken by George Smiley.

We found two Derbid planthoppers – exquisite little insects with corn-cub antennae. These small creatures feed on the sap of woody fungi.



Another very small insect we found was a flatid planthopper, apparently our most common species, but given its small size, easily overlooked.



One night walk we spotted this Scorpion fly on a leaf, quite motionless.



It is a harmless beast despite its menacing tail – this is in fact the male’s reproductive part! The scorpion fly feeds on dead insects, sometimes stealing from spider’s webs. The male offers a cache of food to a prospective mate, but if he has nothing to offer he will spit up a wad of saliva on a leaf, which the female feeds on during their prolonged copulation.

by Fiona Reid

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

Renewal or New Member(s) Date _____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership fee for the period
from September through to August Single (\$30.00) Family (\$40.00)
from December through to August Single (\$22.50) Family (\$30.00)
from March through to August Single (\$15.00) Family (\$20.00)
from June through to August Single (\$ 7.50) Family (\$10.00)

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: _____

Meetings are at St Alban's Church in Glen Williams (see over) starting at 7:30 p.m.

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

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club
Meeting Location
St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams

