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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 47, Number 1

January-February 2013

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.

January 8, 2013: Nature Deficit Disorder - Professor Stephen Bede Scharper. Nature Deficit Disorder is the idea that children and adults are more detached from their natural surroundings than ever before. This detachment is seen as contributing to current mental and physical disorders. Professor Scharper of the University of Toronto will present his views on this interesting topic. Professor Scharper is the author of a new book called *For Earth's Sake: Toward a Compassionate Ecology*. He will have copies of this book available for purchase at the meeting.

February 19, 2013: Caterpillars, Butterflies and Moths - Don Scallen.

Don Scallen is a teacher, writer and naturalist. Join him to learn about the fascinating caterpillars in our midst and the glorious moths and butterflies they become after metamorphosis.

March 12th, 2013: Hummingbird mechanics - Professor Kenneth Welch.

Hummingbirds are masters of flight. They can hover, turn on a dime and even fly backwards. Professor Welch of the University of Toronto has conducted research to better understand just how hummingbirds manage their aerial acrobatics. Join him to learn more about what makes these fascinating birds tick.

Outdoor: See individual outing details for meeting locations and times

March 09: Tundra Swans at Long Point. Flocks of Tundra Swans stop at Long Point during their spring migration to the northern breeding grounds. Many other species of waterfowl, early-returning songbirds, Bald Eagle and Short-eared Owl may also be seen on this long day trip. Be advised that lunch at the restaurant is usually around 1:00 p.m. and the outing usually ends in the late afternoon near Jarvis. Bring snacks, water, a lunch or money for the restaurant(s) and layers of warm clothing, etc. Call Ray Blower, (519)853-0171, by Thursday, March 07 for more details.

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year to members old and new!

Writing this on the first day of 2013, I hope we are all inspired as I am to make this year a good year for wildlife and wildlife-watching. It was a cool, crisp and wonderfully sunny winter's day today. Don Scallen and I went over to Burlington to enjoy the waterfowl and other birds that can be seen there throughout the winter, and today was no exception. I will report elsewhere in this newsletter on one of the birds we enjoyed on our outing.

On our way to La Salle we stopped at Scotch Block reservoir and saw a great diversity of winter birds, including three woodpecker species – Downy, Red-bellied, and Yellow-shafted Flicker. The brushy area alongside the reservoir is important habitat year-round for many songbirds. We all need to encourage landowners not to “clean up” every fallen tree, cut down shrubs or mow to the corners. Birds and other wildlife are dependent on a bit of “mess” for food, shelter and nest sites.

I hope you will all get out this winter to enjoy the great outdoors and also to attend our meetings each month. I look forward to seeing everyone.

Best wishes,
Fiona

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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 Sukhiani (647) 408-9515

Appointments

Membership: Valerie Dobson (905) 828-1729
Newsletter: Nicole Charlton (519) 993-6870
Ontario Nature Representative: Freyja Forsyth
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

Death of a tree

Two weeks ago one of my favourite trees was felled by a bulldozer. This tree, on Creditview Rd. in Brampton, was graced with the lovely arching form that only mature elms exhibit.

Before Dutch elm disease ravaged the land this beauty was common. The few remaining mature elms are rare treasures.

The lure of this elm was so powerful that I would include Creditview Road on my route to work simply to see it in the morning. The green and gold cropland surrounding it provided a lovely foil for its iconic form.

The cropland is no more. The soil that gave life to the wheat, the corn and the soybeans has been scraped bare by earth moving equipment. Denuded and sterilized, the land waits sullenly for the homes and strip malls that characterize the inexorable expansion of Brampton.

I knew the destruction of this landscape was imminent. New development announces itself with cheery signs and property stakes. But I harboured hope for the elm. Fencing had been placed around it. I thought – naively it turned out – that “my” elm would be saved.

The elm now lies ingloriously in the mud, its roots ripped from the desolate earth.

I realize that thousands of trees are felled every day in this province to feed various appetites. I realize as well that landowners have certain broad rights to do as they wish with the property they own.

But, perhaps it is time to try to enshrine some protection for trees of character – trees that rate highly for certain features including size, rarity, cultural importance and the admittedly subjective quality of beauty.

The elm will continue to influence the route I take to work. I’ll now avoid the place where it once stood.

Don Scallen



Trip report – La Salle Park, Burlington, November 17, 2012

A small group of club members joined me for an outing to La Salle Park back in November. We were fortunate to have very good weather – so often it is extremely cold on the lakeshore! We saw all the more common ducks and swans, and were happy to watch a large group of Ruddy Ducks and with them were some White-winged Scoters, a nice bird to see up close.



Yellow-rumped Warbler (Jim Hughes)

I spotted two Yellow-rumped Warblers, quite late to be around foraging for insects in the willows. After we all had a look at the warblers we went over to see the Trumpeter Swans up close on the beach. We almost missed a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron perched above our heads!

La Salle always seems to have something good to offer and this day was no exception.

Fiona Reid



Black-crowned Night Heron (Jim Hughes)

Long-tailed Ducks



Personally I prefer their old name, Oldsquaw, but sadly it has been replaced by a more prosaic one. Nonetheless, this bird has always been a favorite of mine, a winter visitor elegantly attired at all times, and as with all the winter ducks, apparently unfazed by cold water and icy winds.

Don Scallen and I had stopped off at the Travelodge Hotel in Burlington to see what the lakeshore had to offer and we enjoyed watching a large group of Long-tailed Ducks diving for food. They swam away from the rocky wall on our approach, but not for long. They returned close to shore to dive under large chunks of rubble and rocks, staying underwater for several minutes at a time. We thought they were probably gleaning mollusks, and in fact this is their main source of food in winter. In summer these ducks also eat aquatic insects, other aquatic invertebrates, and some plant material. They usually feed within 30 feet of the water surface, as they were today, but these ducks can dive more than 200 feet deep at times. Like most ducks they propel themselves with their feet when diving, but they also may swim with their wings partly open. They fly low, with stiff wing-beats, sometimes tilting from side to side. During migration and when flying over land they fly very high in large flocks.



These ducks establish pair bonds in winter or during migration. They nest near water, using a great deal of down that the female supplements as she lays her eggs. Females first breed at two years of age, laying 6 to 11 eggs and incubating for 24-29 days. The young swim and dive soon after hatching, but are tended by the female who may dislodge food items for them. They start to fly about a month later.



Article and photos by
Fiona Reid

Cackling Geese at Fairy Lake

On December 23, 2012, Bradley Bloemendal posted the sighting of at least three Cackling Geese at Fairy Lake in Acton was on the ONTBirds hotline. Next day, I went to check out the report. At that time, there was still a fairly large area of open water on the lake. I counted 330 Canada Geese, 32 Mallards, one American Black Duck, 6 Common Mergansers, and 8 Ring-billed Gulls. I could not distinguish any Cackling Geese among the birds there but they could easily have been present among the geese lined up on the ice off to the west side of the lake. Many had their heads tucked in and size differences were impossible to determine under those conditions. On December 26, I went back and found that much of the formerly-open water had frozen. The Canada Goose count was now down to 130 and those were present in the last open water close to the point in Prospect Park. Among them were four Cackling Geese. As can be seen in the accompanying photo, the Cackling Geese are much smaller than the regular Canada Geese and their bills are stubbier. Their presence was therefore confirmed for Count Week for the Halton Hills Christmas Bird Census that took place on December 27, 2012.

The taxonomy of birds that most people would recognize as Canada Geese has been in debate for many years. Splitting into various races was mentioned by Taverner over 90 years ago. Over the years, the number of recognized races or sub-species has stood at ten to twelve different forms. Distinction between these is blurred at best but size is one of the main features. There is much overlap and intergrading between the races as well as hybridization, not to mention size differences caused by diets and food supply, and thus distinction in the field is nearly impossible. It was no surprise though that American Ornithologist's Union's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature decided to split Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) into two species: Canada Goose (*B. canadensis*) and Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*). This became official in 2004 in the 45th supplement to the Check-list of North American Birds. Greater Canada Goose contains six subspecies, namely *canadensis* [Atlantic], *interior* [Interior], *maxima* [Giant], *moffitti* [Moffit's], *parvipes*, *fulva* [Vancouver], and *occidentalis* [Dusky]. The smaller Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) group includes the subspecies *hutchinsii* [Richardson's], [Bering], *leucopareia* [Aleutian], *taverneri* [Taverner's], and *minima*. The *asiatica* are already extinct.

The Cackling Goose was first recognized as a separate species when Sir John Richardson collected a specimen in 1822 north of Hudson's Bay. He named it *Branta hutchinsii* after a man by the name of Hutchins who was employed by the Hudson Bay Company. For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as Hutchins's Goose but now it is identified as the Richardson's subspecies of Cackling Goose. The geese at Fairy Lake appear to be of this subspecies as their breasts are light coloured, unlike the Cackling Cackling Goose (*minima*) which usually has a much darker breast.

Nomenclature of Canada and Cackling Geese is far from settled and we can expect further changes. There has even been a recent proposal that the group be divided into six species with 200 subspecies. This classification would be quite unworkable for field biologists even though DNA analysis might justifiably distinguish that many true species. It is simply not feasible to recognize that number of subspecies without access to DNA laboratory testing. We are only now just learning to separate out the Cackling Geese. Let's not go too far in the taxonomic splitting exercise. There is always a possibility that

while there may be genuinely different genetic groups, the differences may not be enough to separate the species and in the end, we might still be looking at one large but diverse species of Canada Goose.



W.D. McIlveen

Results of the 2012 Halton Hills Christmas Bird Count

The 22nd annual Christmas Bird Count took place on December 27, 2012. The fresh fall of snow overnight hindered or even prevented the participation of some count volunteers. Overall, there were 18 participants that took part in the field observations.

Generally, the Count produced close to average results based on comparisons with previous counts. The total number of species reported was 51 and the total number of birds was 10,082. The long-term averages for those are 49.9 and 9760 respectively. The results for the individual species are presented in the attached table. A new species for the Count was Cackling Goose seen in Count Week at Fairy Lake in Acton (See report in this issue of the newsletter). Also not previously reported was a Scaup sp. but this may not be entirely new as Lesser Scaup was recorded in 2011. New high counts were reported for Cooper's Hawk (6), Merlin (2), Hairy Woodpecker (29), Bohemian Waxwing (180), Dark-eyed Junco (693), and Northern Cardinal (101). Higher than average numbers of Canada Goose (3755), Mallard (682), Cedar Waxwing (159), American Tree Sparrow (591), and American Goldfinch (269) were recorded. Seventeen species had lower than average numbers and this offset the higher numbers mentioned above.

Thanks to the following participants: Ray Blower, Mark Cranford, Betty Ann Goldstein, Megan Kenzie, Lou Marsh, Meryl Marsh, Irene McIlveen, W.D. McIlveen, Fiona Reid, Dawn Renfrew, Teresa Rigg, Don Scallen, Dan Shuurman, Rick Stroud, David Sukhiani, Janice Sukhiani, Patrick Tuck, and Dave Williams.

Many thanks once more to Larry May for arranging access to the Maple Lodge Farms property and to the Halton Regional Police Service for use of the community boardroom for the wrap-up session.

W.D. McIlveen

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,

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

Meeting Location

St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams

