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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 48, Number 2

November-December 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.

November 12,

Fiona Reid and life in the night garden; Our president Fiona Reid is perhaps best known as a mammal expert and the author of the Peterson's Field Guide to the Mammals. Lately however, Fiona has become obsessed by nocturnal visitors to her garden, especially Lepidoptera. Eschewing sleep she prowls her flowerbeds after dusk, finding and photographing a multitude of moths, spiders, ambush bugs and more.

December 10, 2013 * note: special time 6:30 pm

Our annual pot luck dinner.

Bring your sumptuous offerings to St. Alban's at **6:30 pm**. Please **bring your own** plate, bowl, knife, fork, spoon and cup. As usual, after the feast members will be invited to share their nature images. Bring a memory stick or disk with no more than ten pics please. We are planning a bucket raffle and ask members to bring an item to contribute – nature or Christmas related, value \$5 and up. Thanks!

January 14, 2014

Rod Krick and the Grassland Birds Recovery Program.

Rod is involved in a new Credit Valley Conservation project to assist the recovery of Bobolinks and Meadowlarks in the Credit Valley Watershed and throughout southern Ontario. One of the initiatives of this Grasslands Birds Recovery Program is the promotion of late-season hay cutting to increase nesting survival rates and providing farmers with resources to market this hay as "Bird Friendly". Other initiatives include the restoration of 10ha of abandoned agricultural land in Caledon to native tall grass prairie, and a breeding bird survey of field areas throughout the watershed - a venture that interested club members can become involved with.

February 11, 2014

Paloma Plant Program Coordinator

Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP)

For years FLAP, headquartered in Toronto, has been battling the carnage that results when migratory birds strike office windows. In 2012 FLAP found 3734 birds of over 90 species felled by collisions with buildings in Toronto. Most were dead but a significant minority was found alive and later released. These totals, of course, represent the tip of the iceberg. Many millions of migrants die each year in cities across North America.

FLAP does more than simply recover downed birds. It has also been involved in court cases involving businesses that fail to take measures to protect migratory birds. Ms. Plant will give us an overview of the actions FLAP engages in to rescue birds and of the initiatives FLAP is involved in to mitigate the terrible toll of window collisions.

March 11

Sheila Colla, Bumblebee identification and conservation; Sheila Colla

Ph.D. is a project coordinator for Wildlife Preservation Canada. Her Ph.D. research at York University focused on the conservation and ecology of bumblebees in Eastern North America. Her research has been featured on Quirks and Quarks, the Discovery Channel and the Nature of Things. Sheila will help us identify native bumblebees and, more critically, inspire us to get involved in their conservation.

Outdoor Events

Nov. 10: Late Flowering Plants Survey Hike. Bill McIlveen will be leading this twelfth annual survey to find and identify any flowering plants that are still blooming late in the season at sites around Halton Hills. Meet at 1:00 pm. at NEC on Sunday, Nov. 10.

November 16: Outing to Colonel Samuel Smith Park for ducks and other water birds. This park is off Kipling Ave, south of the Gardiner Expwy. In addition to water birds, we may see other species of interest: a Short-eared Owl was seen here Oct 25. Call or email Fiona for meeting time and car-pooling info ([905-6939719](tel:905-6939719), fiona.reid7243@gmail.com).

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. If you would like to join in any aspect of the count, please call Bill McIlveen at (519) 853-3948 (cell) or email wmcilveen@sympatico.ca.

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 23rd Annual Bird Count. The Club would appreciate your assistance in collecting data by recording and reporting the number and species of birds you observe on Friday, 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.

President's Message

Hello all,

Today is the first day of wet snow falling, a sure sign of winter on the way! Well, some good things do happen even in the dead of winter in Canada. One of those is the Christmas Bird Count. If you have not taken part in this full-day event, I encourage you to do so. It is great fun. You do NOT need to know the winter birds! We split into teams and each team will have one or two people who know the winter birds. Other team members are vital for recording information, noticing a distant perched hawk, hearing a twitter that another person might miss. We DO need you!!

For those who prefer to stay at home, you can do a feeder count. Fill all your bird feeders several days before count day so the birds get used to visiting. Then on count day take a look at your feeder at different times. Only note down the maximum number of any one species at any one time, as the same bird may be returning multiple times. Your results can be called in at the end of the day.

We also have some great outings and indoor speakers coming up, and one of the tastiest activities, our potluck dinner in December! I hope to see you all there.

*Best wishes,
Fiona*

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 Sukhiani (647) 408-9515

Appointments

Membership: Valerie Dobson (905) 828-1729
Newsletter: Jeff Normandeau
Ontario Nature Representative: Freyja Whitten
Public Relations: Vacant
Webmaster: Sarah Lalonde
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



It is 10 p.m. Do you know where your cats are?

Fiona A. Reid



On my way home from our last meeting, with coyotes in mind, I was on the lookout for mammals and eyeshine in my car headlights. In the ten-minute drive, I spotted six domestic cats in fields and along the roadsides. These were the only mammals I saw that night.

So, what impact do our cats have on wildlife if they are allowed to roam free? A recent study in the USA (based on a systematic review and quantitative mortality

estimates) found that free-ranging domestic cats kill **1.4 to 3.7 billion birds and 6.9 to 20.7 billion mammals annually** (Loss et al., 2013).

This means that free-ranging cats are the single greatest source of human-caused mortality for wild birds and mammals. The authors found that feral (including barn) cats caused more damage than owned pets, but many dearly-loved felines spend time in the great outdoors happily hunting. Native species make up the majority of birds and mammals killed by cats, only a few non-native birds are impacted. Free-ranging cats on islands have caused or contributed to 33 recent extinctions, as recorded by the IUCN.



Of course, the cats that do *not* impact wild populations of songbirds and small mammals are the ones that are kept indoors! Indoor cats are safe from predators such as coyotes and owls. They are less likely to get fleas or other parasites, and they can live a long and happy life without decimating our fragile fauna. Or, take them out on a leash! The photo below by club member Jeff Normandeau shows how content cats can be on a leash.



Cats are funny, smart, loveable, affectionate, and they are cold-blooded killers. They are not native to North America. Unlike most carnivores, they hunt by day or by night. If roving gangs of children were killing thousands of songbirds, would we not hold their parents accountable? Why then do we not hold pet owners accountable for the actions of their pets?

Please, keep your cats indoors and get them spayed. They will live longer and so will your neighborhood birds and small mammals.

Red-backed Salamander

Don Scallen

They weigh about as much as a paper clip. Dew worms dwarf them. They are, by weight, the smallest vertebrates in Ontario. But what they lack in size they more than make up in numbers. Red-backed salamanders are abundant, outnumbering all of the reptiles, rodents and birds that share their forest habitat. Densities of red-backed salamanders have been estimated as 500 to 9000 per hectare of woodland!



See more of Don's red-backed salamander photos at <http://www.inthehills.ca/2013/10/blogs/red-backed-salamander/>

For several years I took part in a salamander monitoring project at Forks of the Credit Provincial Park. Boards were placed on the forest floor to provide cover for salamanders. Particularly bountiful monthly counts would yield upwards of 70 red-backed salamanders hiding under the boards.

Almost all amphibians need to lay eggs in water. Not so the red-backs. They have escaped the surly bonds of aquatic existence. Females lay small grape-like clusters of eggs, under stones or suspended in the cavities of rotting logs.

Freed from the necessity to remain close to ponds, red-backs can disperse to occupy the entirety of the available habitat in woodlands. Laying eggs sans aqua also allows their larvae to avoid becoming lunch for ravenous pond-dwelling predators like dragonfly nymphs and diving beetles.

Of interest as well is that red-backs are lungless, drawing oxygen through the skin. For this to work the skin must be moist, so during the day the salamanders stay out of sight

under forest debris. In especially dry weather, and during the winter, they retreat underground.

Many populations of red-backed salamanders are now completely separated from each other. Creatures with legs smaller than carpet tacks cannot readily cross roads and farm fields. Isolation drives the creation of new species. In a few millennia or so, future herpetologists - reptile and amphibian biologists- may have their hands full, cataloguing a diversity of red-backed salamander descendants.

The Crozier in September

Marg Wilkes, Crozier Steward

Kinglets and Chickadees tweet overhead as I stumble over unseen ruts in the high grass. Within the boundary fences, the meadow is crowned in gold from an impenetrable of plumes and elm-branched goldenrod.

More goldenrod higher than my shoulders, line the trail along the fence, the colours accentuated with purple New England asters and punctuated here and there with Deptford pinks.

The air is sweetened by this wild bouquet. Several dragonflies, a few mosquitoes, and many bees hover and hum throughout.

Twenty-foot-high thorn apple trees hold an abundance of tiny apples. Dogwood trees in the understory offer-up their flattened leaves to the sunshine. Ferns are rusting and the meadow rue is yellowed, and a few wild carrot till grace the mix.

A blue jay tattles to everyone that I am intruding. Seven geese woosh-woosh-woosh overhead in their synchronic flight westward, thirty feet above me.

A small pool retains water in the bottom, and I hear frogs' small plops, into its safety.

A Bruce Trail avows **No Vehicles** and another begs "Give Nature A Chance"



Club members visited
Crozier tract in
October.
Photo 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 renewal fee

from September through to August _____ Single (\$30.00) _____ Family (\$40.00)

New members' fees from sign-up date:

December through to August _____ Single (\$22.50) _____ Family (\$30.00)

March through to August _____ Single (\$15.00) _____ Family (\$20.00)

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**

