



# The Esquesing

January – February 2015 Newsletter  
Volume 4, Number 3



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## UPCOMING SPEAKERS

*Meetings begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of each month, September to June. The meeting location is St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams.*

### January 13, 2015

#### David Lamble, Snow Buntings

David Lamble has handled more snow buntings than any other person on Earth – 30,000 and counting. Every winter David traps and bands snow buntings in the windswept fields of Wellington County. David will share some fascinating stories about these high Arctic breeders. David does not confine his banding to snow buntings, though. He bands a wide range of other birds in the spring and fall and will entertain us with some fascinating insights into their biology and natural history as well.

### February 10, 2015

#### Eric Davies, The Importance of Native Trees (*tentative*)

Eric Davies, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto, is a passionate native tree advocate. He decries the prevalence of non-native trees in our urban landscapes and promotes the use of natives to sustain insects and birds. Eric spoke eloquently about trees at September's Credit Valley Conservation Stewardship Forum, and he was interviewed recently by Matt Galloway on CBC's Metro Morning.



## OUTDOOR EVENTS

### **January, 2015 (TBA) Snow Buntings with David Lamble**

*Leader: Don Scallen*

We'll follow up on David Lamble's talk by visiting him on site to see him in action capturing and banding Snow Buntings. Further details will be posted soon on the club website and sent out via club email.

### **January, 2015 (TBA) Big trees of Halton Hills**

*Leader: Don Scallen*

Esquesing Forest contains some of the largest trees in Halton Hills, and we're going to find and measure some of the biggest ones we can find there. We should be able to measure sugar maple, white pine, eastern hemlock, black cherry and white oak and possibly a few other species. This could be the start of our very own "Halton Hills Big Tree Challenge". Details will be posted soon on the club website and sent out via club email.

### **February 28, 2015 (tentative) Tracks, signs and winter birds at the RBG**

*Leader: Fiona Reid*

We will be exploring the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington with David d'Entremont, looking for tracks in the snow, signs of mammal activity on tree trunks, and we can check open water for ducks and other winter birds. Please note, the date and time is tentative and will be confirmed depending on weather. Call or email Fiona ([fiona.reid7243@gmail.com](mailto:fiona.reid7243@gmail.com)) for details a few days prior to the trip.

**"TBA" means...**

***"To Be Announced, don't miss the fun!"***

We'll have one or more outings every month this winter, guided by the most experienced naturalists in our club. The outings will be fairly casual affairs, meaning... you won't have a lot of advance notice. We'll announce the details at each meeting, often along the lines of "hey I'm going out to do/see this next weekend, does anyone want to come?"

We'll follow-up with a club email, and post the details on the website, on Facebook, and on Twitter. Don't miss out on the fun! If you can't make a club meeting, make sure you go to the website and sign up for our newsletter to stay informed.



## (PAST) PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello and a very Happy New Year to all club members!

This winter has been so different from the last (so far at least), although the fallen branches from last winter's ice storm are still very conspicuous in leafless forests and roadsides. On the Christmas Bird count (reported in detail in this newsletter) we found the numbers of common birds to be very low, but the overall diversity was very high. In part this resulted from a very mild day for the count, but also we had a larger contingent of counters than usual. Many new members took part and their knowledge and enthusiasm no doubt helped us find more species than in previous years. Thanks to all who participated!

I will not be present at the next three meetings (I'm leading nature tours to much warmer destinations!), but I hope to see everyone in April and perhaps before at a winter outing. We do have a great line-up of speakers that I am sorry to miss.

*Best wishes,*

*Fiona*



### Report

## 2014 Halton Hills Christmas Bird Count

*by W. D. McIlveen*

In contrast to the weather experienced for the 2013 Christmas Bird Count in the aftermath of the ice storm that year, the weather for the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count on December 27, 2014 was quite delightful. Although there was a very brief light shower around noon, the lack of snow made for excellent survey conditions. The temperatures that got to approximately 10°C in the afternoon were probably the second highest in the 24 years that the survey has been undertaken. The survey had a new high total of 33 participants.

The results of the tally for Count Day and Count Week are summarized in the attached table. The number of species reported was 60 plus one hybrid, which exceeds the previous high of 57 species seen in 2003. Despite the large increase in numbers of Canada Geese (over half of the total), the total birds was 8413. The total of counted birds was lower than the long term average by more than 1300. Six species (Ruffed Grouse, Snowy

Owl, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, White-throated Sparrow, and Pine Siskin) made the final list but were not tallied on Count Day.

Eight species were present in new high numbers. These included Trumpeter Swan (2), Northern Shoveler (7), Bufflehead (2), Common Goldeneye (22), Cooper's Hawk (7), Eastern Screech Owl (6), Red-bellied Woodpecker (18), and Common Raven (4). Twenty-six species were present in numbers below average. The single Common Redpoll was the lowest count recorded to date when the species is actually present; however, this is a highly-eruptive species with numbers as high as 1670 in 1997 and present only about every other year.

The unusually warm conditions and lack of snow in combination with extra observers likely affected the overall results. The lack of snow would cause fewer birds to require food

from feeders though most feeders observed were not filled. Despite the annual variability in numbers observed over the duration of the Halton Hills Count, we can conclude that numbers of Canada Geese, Common Raven and Red-bellied Woodpecker are increasing while the numbers of American Kestrel have declined.

Thanks to the following participants: Ray Blower, Alexis Buset, Mark Cranford, Melissa Creassey, Emily Dobson, Kim Dobson, Ramona Dobson, Pam Forsythe, Ann Fraser, Sandy Gillians, Ian Jarvie, Aaron

Keating, Dan MacNeal, Lou Marsh, Merle Marsh, Katie McDonnell, Bill McIlveen, Irene McIlveen, Matt Mills, Dan Pearson, Johanna Perz, Fiona Reid, Dawn Renfrew, Don Scallen, Adhara Collins Scholten, Yves Scholten, Dan Schuurman, Rick Stroud, Janice Sukhiana, Patrick Tuck, George Wilkes, Marge Wilkes, Dave Willams.

Many thanks once more to Larry May for arranging access to the Maple Lodge Farms property and to Fiona Reid for hosting the wrap-up session.

Results of the 2014 Christmas Bird Count at Halton Hills									
Species	Total	Avg	Low	High	Species	Total	Avg	Low	High
Canada Goose	4281	1879	229	4577	Pileated Woodpecker	5	3.5	0	12
Cackling Goose	1				Northern Shrike	2	4.2	1	19
Mute Swan	3	5.7	1	15	Blue Jay	85	158.3	60	333
Trumpeter Swan	2	1.0	1	1	American Crow	379	344.7	55	692
Gadwall	1	1.0	1	1	Common Raven	4	1.7	0	3
American Black Duck	50	18.7	2	67	Black-capped Chickadee	339	683.1	244	1211
Mallard	488	558	135	1636	Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	9.2	1	22
Northern Shoveler	7				White-breasted Nuthatch	31	44.9	19	82
Bufflehead	2	1.0	1	1	Brown Creeper	4	3.2	1	8
Common Goldeneye	22	2.6	1	7	Winter Wren	1	0.7	0	1
Common Merganser	11	14.5	1	66	Golden-crowned Kinglet	CW	7.6	1	30
Ruffed Grouse	CW	4.2	0	8	American Robin	CW	30.8	1	206
Wild Turkey	15	21.9	0	55	Northern Mockingbird	2	1.9	0	5
Great Blue Heron	2	1.4	0	4	European Starling	503	2114	485	3490
Bald Eagle	2	1.3	0	3	Cedar Waxwing	83	73.4	7	240
Northern Harrier	1	3.5	0	11	American Tree Sparrow	131	299.7	95	837
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	4.5	1	11	Song Sparrow	12	5.0	1	22
Cooper's Hawk	7	2.5	0	5	White-throated Sparrow	CW	2.6	1	10
Red-tailed Hawk	50	64.7	39	117	Slate-colored Junco	155	257.2	91	565
Rough-legged Hawk	3	7.5	1	45	Snow Bunting	35	267.5	1	1118
American Kestrel	2	10.4	0	16	Northern Cardinal	45	58.9	29	95
Ring-billed Gull	126	182.5	3	2010	Red-winged Blackbird	1	4.7	1	12
Herring Gull	22	42.2	1	222	Purple Finch	3	12.6	1	52
Rock Pigeon	518	617.2	210	1455	House Finch	73	235.1	23	456
Mourning Dove	241	708.8	191	1385	Common Redpoll	1	264.2	3	1670
Eastern Screech Owl	6	1.7	0	4	Pine Siskin	CW	13.3	1	50
Snowy Owl	CW	0.5	0	1	American Goldfinch	212	185.9	37	470
Belted Kingfisher	3	2.8	1	7	House Sparrow	347	668.7	196	1316
Red-bellied Woodpecker	18	1.9	0	6	Hybrid Mallard X American Black Duck	1			
Downy Woodpecker	44	52.1	21	91					
Hairy Woodpecker	19	16.6	2	32	<b>Total Birds</b>	<b>8413</b>	<b>9760</b>	<b>3131</b>	<b>15507</b>
Northern Flicker	1	1.1	0	2	<b>No. Species</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>57</b>

(CW = Count Week)



*Northern Mockingbird observed by Dan McNeil, Don Scallen, David Williams during the 2014 Halton Hills Christmas Bird Count*



## **Bird Feeders at Georgetown Hospital**

*By Don Scallen*



I've spent a lot of time recently at the Georgetown Hospital, visiting my mother who suffered a broken pelvis on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Looking out the windows of the various rooms she's occupied, it occurred to me that a strategically placed bird feeder or two could be a pleasant diversion for bed-bound patients.

The hospital management heartily endorsed my proposal to install the feeders. I purchased two feeders along with poles and squirrel baffles from **Wild Birds Unlimited** in Guelph. Manager Richard Tofflemire generously offered a large discount on the total cost after I explained the project. He also provided two 20kg bags of seed and a carton of suet cakes at no cost.

Sandy Gillians and I erected the feeders just prior to Christmas. They now await discovery by the neighbourhood birds.

I'll maintain the feeders throughout the winter and then likely remove them as the voracious Grackles return in early spring. I'll re-install them next fall. Both feeders are currently placed fairly close together in the hospital's courtyard. One may eventually be relocated to another area of the hospital grounds.

Our club executive has agreed to help pay for these feeders, with money from membership fees. They are ours to celebrate.



## Welcome New Members!

Aaron Keating

Eugene Jankowski



*"I was driving back from the airport Dec. 5 when my daughter spotted a snowy owl. I'm attaching a photo she took with her cell phone. I thought the owl on the aviation sign was a cute juxtaposition!"*

*Bette-Ann Goldstein*



## New Year's Resolutions for Naturalists

*by Fiona Reid & Don Scallen*

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
<p><b>For Feathered Friends!</b>  <i>Food:</i> Consider adding peanuts or suet for extra fat at this time of year.  <i>Water:</i> A heated bird bath can be very important in midwinter.</p>	<p><b>Turn down the Heat!</b>            Save money and reduce consumption of non-renewable energy supplies by turning down heat at night or when out.    <b>Prowl for an Owl!</b>            Owls nest really early so now is a good time to go out at dusk and listen for them, or imitate them and see if you get a response.</p>	<p><b>Homes for Birds, Bats, and Bees</b>            Order a new birdhouse or bat house. Check out new domiciles for bumble bees:  <a href="http://bumbleboosters.unl.edu/?q=node/8">http://bumbleboosters.unl.edu/?q=node/8</a>    <b>If you build it they will come!</b>            Make your own house if you are handy. Bees and wasps like soft wood: drill holes of varying thicknesses in a 6 x 6 or larger log and hang this on an outer wall or barn.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>APRIL</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Salamander Season!</b></p> <p>Join HNPNC on a salamander walk at Silver Creek to learn about these amazing animals. Hunt for frogs in local ponds.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Snakes</b></p> <p>Head to Willow Park in Norval on a sunny day later in the month to look for emerging snakes around the rocks of the hibernacula or beside their small pond.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Look for Woodcocks</b></p> <p>Woodcocks may be back and on territory so go for a woodcock prowl at dusk.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MAY</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Help our Pollinators Go Native!</b></p> <p>Join HNPNC in converting a stretch of the riverbank by St. Alban's church into a home for pollinators and a bank for nesting turtles.</p> <p>Help remove non-natives and plant natives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lose the Lawn</b></p> <p>If you have a large lawn, why not convert a section into a native plant garden?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JUNE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dig it, Dig it Good!</b></p> <p>Put in a pond in your back yard – nature will come to you (more info coming in March newsletter).</p> <p>No space? A dripping hose can attract birds, or a small fountain will lure in dragonflies.</p> <p>Turtles love ponds, and this month they will also be out looking for nest sites. Report your turtle sightings to the Toronto Zoo's Turtle Tally Program. <i><a href="http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtleletally.asp">http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtleletally.asp</a></i></p> <p>Do some pond-dipping to see the huge array of small creatures that live in a healthy pond.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JULY</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Out with the Invaders!</b></p> <p>Now is the time to pull out dog-strangling vine and other invasive species before they set seed and spread further.</p> <p>Start a local initiative to remove Norway Maples and plant native trees.</p> <p>Talk to a neighbour about planting native trees and shrubs to provide food for declining birds (caterpillars prefer native plants and they in turn are food for the birds).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>AUGUST</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Have a Wild Night out!</b></p> <p>Join HNPNC on a moth night, or paint sticky goop (beer, banana and sugar) on trees near your own home to see what moths you can attract.</p> <p>Come on a Monday evening walk.</p> <p>Watch bats forage over water near the cottage.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SEPTEMBER</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Help Migrants Journey in Safety</b></p> <p>Put up weighted threads outside large windows to reduce reflection and bird collisions (check out <a href="http://www.flap.org/">www.flap.org/</a> for more information).</p> <p>Keep cats inside when thrushes and warblers are passing through backyard habitats.</p> <p>Plant asters and other late-blooming natives for travelling Monarchs.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OCTOBER</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fall into Nature!</b></p> <p>Take a trip with our club to see migrating hawks.</p> <p>Look for fall warblers and sparrows.</p> <p>Take a child for a walk in nature; it is a great time of year to see animals of all sizes on the move.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOVEMBER</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Get on Track Buy a new Field Guide!</b></p> <p>It's slowing down out in the forest, so why not get some new nature books to study for next year and check off what you have seen to date.</p> <p>Get out after the first snowfall to look for animal tracks, and bring a book to identify them.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DECEMBER</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Have an Eco-friendly Holiday!</b></p> <p>Use recyclable wrapping (bags, newspaper, scraps of cloth). Decorate the tree with popcorn and cranberries to put out for birds later. Minimize use of colored lights.</p> <p>Give nature-inspired gifts; for the friends who have everything, consider buying an acre of rainforest.</p> <p>Take part in the Christmas Bird Count and tell your friends all about it.</p>
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## Beech trees

*By Don Scallen*

The smooth gray bark of beech trees evokes elephant skin, making beech strikingly unique among the large trees of the forest. This smooth bark sometimes offers signs of mammals that have passed by - claw marks left by climbing bears, or declarations of love etched by romantic humans.

Beechnuts nourish wildlife. This bounty, properly referred to as “mast,” once fed legions of passenger pigeons. Where beech trees and black bears co-exist, the bears cling to the trunks and pull branches towards them to feast on the nuts, inadvertently tangling the branches to form structures fancifully referred to as “bear nests”.

Beech trees offer not only food, but also housing to wild creatures. Pileated woodpeckers chisel nesting holes into them. Other tenants, including flying squirrels, move in when the woodpeckers move out.

Woodlands in parts of southern Ontario were once referred to as maple-beech forests. Beech, like sugar maple - but unlike oak and pine - can grow in very shady conditions, enabling them to dominate mature deciduous woodlands.

No more. Beech are being destroyed at heart-breaking speed by an introduced pathogen called beech bark disease.

The demise of beech goes largely unnoticed by people who don't hike in the woods; this is because beech trees seldom grow in the open. They require the shade, moisture and shelter of the forest's embrace.

Beech trees also likely depend on soil-borne forest fungi. Many trees as well as other woodland plants have a mutualistic, “you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours”, relationship with fungi. The fungi take carbohydrates

from tree roots and, in return, help the roots absorb water and minerals.



Regardless, the forest disposition of beech trees means you won't see their bleached bones on the open landscape as you do elm trees. The glorious beech trees with the elephant-skin bark die largely unmourned as they tilt towards the fate of the passenger pigeons they once fed.



## Nature News

### The Nature of Things

#### Documentary: SongbirdSOS

A documentary will air this spring on the Nature of Things that you won't want to miss.

In spring 2010, ornithologist, author, and York University Professor Dr. Bridget Stutchbury placed a tiny geolocator tag on the backs of five male Hooded Warblers. One year later, two of the five warblers returned to their territory in northwestern Pennsylvania with the geolocators intact. The documentary crew was on hand as Dr. Stutchbury downloaded and analyzed the spectacular data.

Songbird SOS is a documentary inspired by and featuring the work of Dr. Stutchbury (*Silence of the Songbirds*). It follows migratory songbirds from north to south, and from tropical rain forests to urban centres. The film addresses the environmental and industrial dangers that the birds encounter on their migration, and unravels the mystery of disappearing songbirds by taking the journey along with them.

Watch for it!

<http://songbirdsos.com>

<http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/blog/tracking-songbirds-with-geolocators>

### Huron Fringe Bird Festival

May 22 to 25 & May 28 to 31, 2015



The "Huron Fringe", located along the Lake Huron coastline, offers birders, naturalists and photographers unique opportunities to discover nature in the early spring. Programs are available January 15th and registration begins February 1st. For more information:

Call: 519-389-6231

Email: [birdfest@rogers.com](mailto:birdfest@rogers.com)

Website: <http://friendsofmacgregor.org/page/huron-fringe-birding-festival>

### Follow HNPNC Online



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Twitter

[@hnpnc](https://twitter.com/hnpnc)



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

<u>Executive</u>		<u>Appointments</u>	
President:	<i>Vacant</i>	Membership:	Valerie Dobson (905) 828-1729
Past President:	Fiona Reid (905) 693-9719	Publicity:	Johanna Perz
Vice-President:	Don Scallen (905) 877-2876	Ontario Nature Representative:	Katie McDonnell
Secretary:	Emily Dobson (647) 996-6512	Newsletter & Webmaster:	Sandy Gillians sandyg@gmail.com
Treasurer:	Janice Sukhiani (647) 408-9515		
		<u>Stewards:</u>	
Roving:	William McIlveen, Kevin Kerr, Nikki Pineau, Anne Fraser	Crozier Property:	Marg Wilkes
		Hardy Property:	Ray Blower

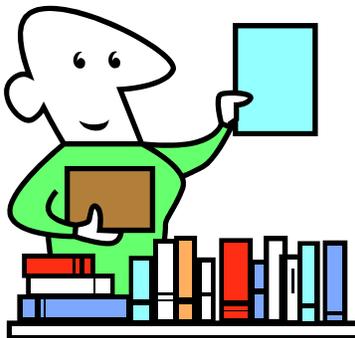
Membership for one year: \$30 Single; \$40 Family  
 The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club is an affiliated member of Ontario Nature.

www.hnpnc.com | [info@hnpnc.com](mailto:info@hnpnc.com)



## Newsletter Submissions & Classified Ads

The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club newsletter is published five times a year – every two months except July and August. Contributions from members are welcome, including nature-themed personal “want” ads and “for sale” ads that would of interest to fellow HNPNC members. Please send all contributions for the next newsletter to Sandy Gillians ([info@hnpnc.com](mailto:info@hnpnc.com)) by March 1st.





# Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Meeting Location

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

