



The Esquesing

May – June 2018 Newsletter
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Table of Contents

(Click on the article to go directly to the page. Click on the 'Home' key to come back here.)

President's Message	2
Talks and Walks.....	3
Naturalist Club Evening Walks – Summer 2018	5
Gifts of the Crow: How Perception, Emotion, and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans.....	6
Flickers	8
Morning at Great Pond	10
May – June Quiz.....	11
Fake News: Nature Stories in the Media - the Need for Critical Thinking.	12
How Can “We” Manage the Plastic Crisis?	18
Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club	21
Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form.....	22
Answers to Spring Quiz on page 11.....	23

President's Message

I'm writing this a week after the freakish April storm that coated the ground with ice pellets which then hardened to the consistency of concrete. Temperatures hovered around the freezing mark for days. Frog voices were muted, salamander breeding was suspended, and robins were placed on strict no-earthworm diets.

But today? What a difference a week makes! It's April 22 and I've just returned from the club's bird box installation trip to Forks of the Credit pictured below, where shorts and t-shirts were de rigueur for visitors. A sun-drenched day that summoned painted turtles from cold, muddy, pond bottoms to bask in luxurious warmth.

At the Forks nine club members added another dozen bird boxes to the existing complement of ten that we put up last year. Those ten boxes enjoyed a 100% occupancy rate, proof that an avian housing shortage exists at the park. A dozen spanking new bird houses will further meet the need. Kudos again to Kim Dobson who built the houses and acquired the necessary poles and baffles. As was the case last year, the installation was carried off quickly and efficiently. Bill McIlveen took care of the record keeping, ably assisted by new club member Mimi Chan on GPS.

With the warmth finally here, nature is offering an embarrassment of riches - birds, butterflies, wildflowers, amphibians - that will pull club members in different directions. Deciding what to see and do is a pleasant springtime dilemma.

Though the club's indoor schedule is about to enter summer dormancy, there will be opportunities to choose to enjoy this richness with others. There will be birding events, nest box surveys, a wildflower walk, and a dragonfly hunt, led by odonata expert David d'Entremont in early summer. And of course, Bill McIlveen's traditional Monday evening offerings. Some outings are listed in this newsletter. Notices for others will arrive in your inbox.

Regardless of whether our paths cross before the fall, I hope you enjoy a spring and summer of nature discovery and delight.

Don Scallen



Talks and Walks

Indoor Events: Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month, September to June at St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams, unless stated otherwise.

Tuesday, May 8, 2018

Laurence Packer: An Inordinate Fondness for Bees

Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies at York University, Laurence Packer is one of the foremost experts on the ecology of wild bees in Canada. This talk will not be about honeybees. Here is a quote from Packer's website: "When people find out that I study bees, invariably the next thing they say concerns the honeybee. I will then point out that asking me a question about *Apis mellifera* is like asking an ornithologist a question about chickens." So instead of honeybees, expect a talk about the thousands of fascinating wild species found throughout our landscape.

Important Note: There will be a special gear sale at this meeting to raise funds to support club initiatives. Here's how it will work: You are invited to bring any nature related items to the meeting for possible sale to other members. These could include cameras, binoculars, outdoor gear, nature/guide books, bird feeders, native plants and seeds and nature themed artwork. You set the price and individual sellers handle their own transactions. We suggest a minimum contribution to the club of 20% of your proceeds. Of course, you can donate the proceeds in their entirety too. We encourage you to come early to the meeting to display your sale items or to have a look at what others have brought in. **Doors will be open at 7pm.** We'll then get the meeting started promptly at 7:30 and after the speaker has presented, the sale will take place.

Tuesday June 12, 2018

Our annual outdoor meeting prior to summer break. Meet at **7 p.m.** in the parking lot at Scotsdale Farm, entrance east off Trafalgar Road, north of 27 Sideroad, Silver Creek. We'll spend about 2 hours investigating nest boxes the club has put up at Scotsdale in recent years. This project, made possible by the construction efforts of club member Kim Dobson, has seen approximately 50 nest boxes installed at Scotsdale to attract nesting birds. We'll open them briefly to determine tenancy. Expect tree swallows, house wrens and, with luck, bluebirds.

Tuesday, September 11, 2018

Mark Stabb: Lake Iroquois

Mark Stabb is the Program Director, Central Ontario-East, Ontario Region for the **Nature Conservancy of Canada**. Mark is an avid hiker and naturalist whose current fascination is exploring the landscape legacy associated with glacial Lake Iroquois. Lake Iroquois existed approximately 13,000 years ago and was essentially an enlarged Lake Ontario. Ice sheets blocked the St. Lawrence at that time, so Lake Iroquois outflow was via the Hudson River Valley to the Atlantic Ocean. The shoreline of Lake Iroquois is still very noticeable as a ridge south of us in the GTA.

Outdoor Events:

Saturday May 5, 2018

Woodland wildflowers and early-arriving birds, Scotch Block Reservoir and Fiona Reid's escarpment property.

Please join Fiona for an afternoon outing to Scotch Block Reservoir for ducks, sparrows, meadowlarks and perhaps warblers and bluebirds, followed by a walk in Fiona's woods for wildflowers. Please RSVP Fiona (fiona.reid7243@gmail.com) for more details.

Saturday May 12, 2018

World Migratory Bird Day Event.

This event is promoted by the organization Environment for the Americas. For more information see <http://www.birdday.org/> To align with this initiative our club plans to count as many species of birds as possible on May 12 – not only migrants, but non-migrants as well. We'll form teams, much as we do for the Christmas Bird Count, with at least one moderately competent birder per team. We'll convene at the end of the day to compile sightings and brag a little. (Site yet to be determined.) The primary objectives of this event? Yes, to count birds, but also to simply have fun. We'll have a sign-up sheet at the May meeting if you'd like to take part. Vice-President Ian Jarvie will also be pleased to accept your requests to participate at auldscot1@cogeco.ca Birding will be restricted to our club's bailiwick. That is all of Halton Region and north Peel (Brampton, Caledon) Ability to identify birds is absolutely not necessary! (If you can point them out it would help though. ☺)

Sunday, May 20, 2018

Spring Birding at Thickson's Woods, Lynde Shores Conservation Area and Cranberry Marsh

If he had only one day in the spring to go birding, this is where Ray Blower would go. These locations provide a wide variety of habitats including mature forest, meadows, swamps, marshes, old fields and Lake Ontario and its shoreline. The result is a diverse collection of bird species, especially during spring migration. Scheduling on the Sunday of the Victoria Day holiday weekend has resulted, so far, in trouble-free driving to and from these Whitby birding hot spots. Bring a lunch, water, hat, sunscreen, binoculars, etc. Call Ray Blower, 519-853-0171, for starting location and times.

Watch your inbox for a dragonfly survey in June and a possible trip to the fabled Carden Plain, also in June.

Naturalist Club Evening Walks – Summer 2018

Halton/North Peel Naturalists and South Peel Naturalist Clubs

All walks are on Mondays and start at the meeting location at 7:00 pm sharp.

Date	Location	Meeting Place	Leader
14-May	Oakville - The Parkway	Bayshire Drive	Bill McIlveen
21-May	Winston Woods	Winston Woods	Bill McIlveen
28-May	Speyside and Scotch Block	Hwy 401 at Hwy 25	Fiona Reid
4-Jun	Acton Swift Watch	Acton	Emily Dobson
11-Jun	Scotsdale Bird Box	Scotsdale Farm	Bill McIlveen
18-Jun	Fisher's Pond	Springer Crescent	Bill McIlveen
25-Jun	Vanderleck Trail, Speyside	Hwy 401 at Hwy 25	Dawn Renfrew
2-Jul	Morrison Valley Park	Oakville Town Hall	Bill McIlveen
9-Jul	Crozier Tract	Hwy 401 at Hwy 25	Ray Blower
16-Jul	Erindale Park	Erindale Park	Bill McIlveen
23-Jul	Britton Tract East	Hwy 401 at Hwy 25	Bill McIlveen
30-Jul	Sixteen Valley Creek	Lions Valley	Bill McIlveen
6-Aug	Swift Night Out	Oakville High School	Emily Dobson
13-Aug	Elliott Tract	Hwy 401 at Hwy 25	Bill McIlveen
20-Aug	Ratray Marsh	Green Glade School	Kirsten Burling
27-Aug	Speyside Bats	Hwy 401 at Hwy 25	Fiona Reid

Pinery Park – Parking lot on east side of Bayshire Drive north of Upper Middle Rd near Pine Valley Cr.

Winston Woods – Parking lot on north side of woods east of Winston Park Drive and north of Plymouth Drive

Hwy 401 at Hwy 25 – Commuter parking lot at SE intersection of Hwy 401 and Hwy 25, Milton

Acton – Meet at Greenore Parkette off Greenore Cr, near Kingham Rd. then check for Chimney Swifts in Town.

Scotsdale Farm - Parking lot at Scotsdale Farm, east off Trafalgar Rd north of Sideroad 27, Silver Creek

Springer Crescent – Take Cedar Springs about 0.6 km north of Dundas to Highview Drive then east to Springer Crescent, Burlington

Oakville Town Hall – Park in main lot of municipal offices on east side of Trafalgar but meet near trail entrance on north side near White Oaks Blvd.

Erindale Park – First parking lot north of Dundas St. and east of Credit River

Lions Valley – Lions Valley in parking lot below bridge south off Dundas St. at Sixteen Mile Creek

Oakville High School – Old closed high school east side of Reynolds St. between Sheddon Ave and former Oakville Trafalgar Hospital

Green Glade School – Green Glade east off Meadow Wood Road, Clarkson

For more information, call Bill McIlveen (519) 853-3948 or e-mail wmcilveen@sympatico.ca

Gifts of the Crow: How Perception, Emotion, and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans

by Tony Angell and John M. Marzluff, Simon and Schuster, 2012, 285 pages.

Reviewed by DJW

Crows and ravens have enjoyed a close association with humans and are well represented in our culture and myths. A raven named Grip was a chatty companion to Charles Dickens, and inspired Edgar Allen Poe. Ravens are the messenger of choice in George R.R. Martin's fictional *Song of Fire and Ice* (Game of Thrones), and were known as the gods' messengers in ancient Greece. In the Bible, ravens feed the prophet Elijah. In our more modern world, fears that the Kingdom will fall when the ravens leave the Tower of London results in there always being at least 6 ravens resident in the Tower, under the watchful eye of a Raven Master.

Corvids are found worldwide, apart from southern part of South America and Greenland. We average about 250 individual crows on our annual Christmas Bird Count. Most days, on a walk in the woods or through even the most urban of settings, it's uncommon to not see or hear a crow.

Crows and ravens belong to the genus *Corvus*. Along with jays, magpies and a few other genera, they belong to the family *Corvidae*. They're classified as songbirds – known scientifically as *Oscines* - because of their ability for diverse and elaborate song. They're classified as perching birds - known as *Passerines* - because they have three toes pointed forward and one backward to facilitate perching.

In *Gifts of the Crow*, Angell and Marzluff catalogue the amazing repertoire of behaviour exhibited by crows and their kin, probe their character and personality, and explore the neurobiology and inner workings of the brain of these amazing birds.

The authors recount numerous reports of fascinating and intriguing Corvid behaviour. Many of these are anecdotal and observational “citizen science” reports, which were investigated, questioned, and validated before being including in this book. However, there are also many reports from the scientific record, following peer-reviewed research and publication. For example, there are several references to the studies of Bernd Heinrich, such as on string pulling, deceptive caching, and gaze following experiments. Heinrich is an inspiring scientist who has written many wonderful books about all aspects of nature. His 1999 book *Mind of the Raven* is cited here in particular.

These reports are the “fun part” of the book, where one turns page after page to be astounded by these birds again and again.

When New Caledonia crows are presented with food that's unreachable inside a hollow cylinder, after considering the problem, they bend a hook into the end of a nearby wire to fashion a “long-handled” tool which they use to reach into the cylinder to retrieve the goodies. This puts them into the small and elite group of creatures that not only use tools, but make the tools for their own use.

Corvids in many different countries have been filmed sliding like otters down icy pitched roofs and steep snowy banks, and in Russia, using plastic lids as sleds to slide down steep roofs. In Colorado USA, ravens gripped 1/4" thin by 6" long concave strips of bark in their feet, spread their wings, and then launched into the air. Without flapping their wings they used the strips of bark like surfboards to ride the wind, slipping, sliding, and diving. Clearly it is not anthropomorphizing to say that the crows were having a ball.

In addition to these portrayals of the Corvid ability to problem solve and to frolic, the book recounts behaviours in chapters devoted to other categories such as language, insight, passion wrath and grief, risk taking, and awareness.

These chapters reveal that "...Corvids assume characteristics that were once ascribed only to humans, including self-recognition, insight, revenge, tool use, mental time travel, deceit, murder, language, play, calculated risk taking, social learning, and traditions."

Corvids have a brain-to-body-mass ratio equal to that of the great apes and cetaceans, and only slightly lower than humans. The book delves into the neuroscience and biology of these brains to better understand what's going on as individuals engage in various "advanced" activities.

For example, positron emission tomography (PET) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) were used to scan crow brains to see how they reacted to different stimuli. In one case, researchers wearing masks captured several crows – these masks were thus associated as "dangerous" by the crows. The researchers wore different masks while they cared for and tended the crows for a few weeks – these masks were perceived as "safe" by the crows. Then the crows' brains were scanned to see the differences as individuals were exposed to the dangerous masks and to the safe masks.

Key to this particular study was the ability of crows to recognize and remember faces; this was well established in numerous studies, including one in which researchers interacted with crows on a university campus whilst wearing neanderthal masks, much to the delight of passing students.

As with humans, crows were shown to use complex neural circuits to evaluate and process what they saw. While the discussions about neurology, anatomy, and avian endocrinology are informative, these sections of the book may be tedious for some readers, and certainly don't have the same allure as tales of idiosyncratic, unexpected, and endearing crow behaviour.

Marzluff and Angell do a fine job of exploring and highlighting the many complex similarities between crows' mental processes and our own. The book increases not just our understanding of these birds, but our appreciation for them, and stimulates us to know them better.

Available in old fashioned analog ink on paper at the Brampton and Halton Hills Libraries, and in audiobook at the Ontario Library Service Download Centre.

Flickers

Don Scallen

In the tropics armadillos, pangolins and anteaters have evolved to eat ants and termites. These pointy-snouted mammals insert long sticky tongues into ant and termite mounds to capture the squirming insects within.

We have anteaters too, but our anteaters fly. These are northern flickers, woodpeckers that are common throughout the Headwaters. Boldly and beautifully marked and a little larger than robins, northern flickers, like their tropical mammalian counterparts, catch ants with long sticky tongues.

During the breeding season flicker babies are fed ants and little else. Famed biologist Bernd Heinrich examined a single meal delivered to a flicker nestling and discovered that it consisted of 216 ants – larvae, pupae and adults. He then estimated that it would take about 21,600 ants to raise a single flicker nestling to fledgling stage!

The flickers' ant habit explains why these woodpeckers are often found in meadows or even in backyards feeding on the ground on or near ant hills.

Ants are a reliable and abundant food source spring to fall, but become largely inaccessible in winter, when their activity ceases and the ground freezes.

Carpenter ants, dormant in their tree galleries, are still available – a food source tapped into by the magnificent pileated woodpeckers. But flickers have a slightly curved beak, not as well suited to excavating wood as the stout chisel-like beaks of the pileateds.

So what's a respectable anteater to do when the snow flies? Fly of course, southward to places where the crawling ant legions are still active. Most flickers do this, excepting a few hardy (foolish?) individuals that tough it out by scarfing down berries and gorging occasionally at suet feeders.

The return of flickers in spring signals the thawing of the earth and puts birders in good cheer – a sentiment that clearly isn't shared by our resident ants.

Hear the calls of northern flickers:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Flicker/sounds

(This article originally appeared in Don Scallen's blog:

<https://www.inthehills.ca/category/blogs/notes-from-the-wild/>)



*Northern Flicker male. (note presence of "moustache" technically "malar".)
Photo Don Scallen*



*Northern Flicker Female (note lack of "moustache"- technically "malar")
photo Don Scallen*

Morning at Great Pond

by Mary Oliver

*It starts like this:
forks of light
sticking up
out of the east,
flying over you,
and what's left of night –
its black waterfalls,
its craven doubt –
dissolves like gravel
as the sun appears
trailing clouds
of pink and green wool,
igniting the fields,
turning the ponds
to plates of fire.
The creatures there
are dark flickerings
you make out
one by one
as the light lifts –
great blue herons,
wood ducks shaking
their shimmering crests –
and knee-deep
in the purple shallows
a deer drinking:
as she turns
the silver water
crushes like silk,
shaking the sky,
and you're healed then
from the night, your heart
wants more, you're ready
to rise and look!
to hurry anywhere!
to believe in everything.*

Photos by Don Scallen



May-June Quiz

(Answers are on the last page.)



Fake News:

Nature Stories in the Media - the Need for Critical Thinking.

Don Scallen

Stories about nature in the popular media need to be viewed through a critical lens. There is a dearth of “nature literacy” out there. Sometimes the errors in stories and news reports are innocent – simply the result of this lack of nature literacy. At other times, though, misrepresentations about the environment and the natural world are calculated attempts to manipulate. As naturalists who care passionately about the environment we can be susceptible to misinformation that purports to support causes we believe in such as the battle against climate change. It is important to consume stories about nature and the environment with a healthy dose of skepticism. This is especially true when the stories don’t reference any scientific evidence. We also need to be wary of the power of charisma and celebrity to influence our opinions.

I’ll begin with a story that didn’t fool many – at least here in Canada.

When Leonardo DeCaprio was in Alberta in 2015 to shoot *The Reverent* he witnessed some strange weather that he described in this quote from a Variety.com article: “We were in Calgary and the locals were saying, ‘This has never happened in our province ever.’ We would come and there would be eight feet of snow, and then all of a sudden a warm gust of wind would come. ...it was scary. I’ve never experienced something so firsthand that was so dramatic. You see the fragility of nature and how easily things can be completely transformed with just a few degrees difference. It’s terrifying, and it’s what people are talking about all over the world. And it’s simply just going to get worse.”

Unfortunately, no one had told Leonardo about chinooks, the warm winter winds that have been melting snow in Alberta through recorded history. DeCaprio’s comment that about the locals having never experienced this phenomenon is probably a bit of artistic license on his part.

DeCaprio’s statements were widely ridiculed but they likely continue to find some traction on social media.

Then there was the story in the Toronto Star two years ago about venomous serpents poised to invade Canada. Have a look here if you like:

<https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2016/03/07/climate-change-could-send-venomous-snakes-slithering-north.html>

Here’s the headline:

Climate change could send venomous snakes slithering north

New research has found that rising temperatures could drive several deadly species northward to new areas, bringing them as far north as Alberta, Quebec and southern Ontario.

When I mentioned this story at a club meeting, Ray Blower astutely observed that it might be time to build a wall on Canada’s southern border.

What's wrong with this article? It's hard to know where to start. Perhaps with the photo of a pair of Timber Rattlesnakes that accompanies it – apparently one of the “deadly species” that climate change could send our way. So my first quibble: Timber Rattlesnakes once lived in Ontario and were found perhaps as far north at Manitoulin Island. The last Timber Rattlesnakes in the province lived in the Niagara Gorge as late as the 1940's. Thus, they have been suited to our climate for a long time and remain so. Climate change isn't necessary to spur their northward advance. (The reasons they are no longer with us include active persecution and habitat loss.)



Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons

Quibble two: Speaking of habitat loss... these “deadly” snakes would need to sprout wings to get here. We – the Americans and us – have eliminated great swaths of snake-friendly habitat and replaced it with houses, roads and farm fields. Formidable barriers to dispersal now exist.

Quibble three: The range of Timber Rattlesnakes, like so many other reptiles, is contracting as the human footprint expands. These rattlesnakes will be hard-pressed to survive where they live now, let alone reinvade Canada.

Quibble four: Timber Rattlesnakes, while venomous, hardly deserve to be labelled as “deadly”. Deaths from Timber Rattlesnakes are vanishingly small. Snake bite deaths in the U.S. during the period of 2008 to 2015, according to a study published in the journal *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine* averaged less than *one* per year. And most of those according to Wikipedia were from Eastern and Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes. For comparison, the number of fatalities attributed to domestic dogs during that time? 272

Here is another dubious nature story from the Toronto Star – an editorial from March 13th of this year. The headline is beyond reproach: **Save the monarch**. So far so good – what could be nobler than saving monarch butterflies? But read on and you'll come across this

statement: *Such foodstuffs as coffee, chocolate and apples could suffer from the loss of **this** pollinator.* Sound credible? Here's what monarch butterfly researcher Anurag Agrawal writes, in his 2017 book *Monarchs and Milkweed*: "[The] nonpollinating aspect of monarchs is not widely appreciated. Although monarchs may successfully pollinate some plant species (perhaps in the sunflower family, Asteraceae), this phenomenon has not been well-studied, and they are surely unimportant compared with the myriad other flower visitors." (p. 30)

But let's suppose for a moment that Agrawal is wrong – that monarch butterflies are, in fact, effective pollinators of food crops. Would coffee and cocoa production suffer? Not likely, considering that these crops are largely absent in the North American migratory range of the monarch. And apples typically bloom in May, before the return of most monarch butterflies to Canada.

As I've written before there are many reasons why we should work towards the survival of monarch butterflies. We don't need to confer dubious pollinator services on them to justify their conservation.

Misinformation about the natural world, though rampant in popular media, can also be found in films and documentaries. *Call of the Forest*, a documentary written by Diana Beresford-Kroeger, is chock full of unsubstantiated assertions and errors – some glaringly blatant. I don't have the space to write about all of my objections, but I'll highlight a few.

I was uncomfortable panning this film at our club meetings but felt an obligation to speak out. Celebrating and protecting trees is wonderful, but this needs to be guided by truth.

First, I realize that I'm criticizing a woman of some renown. Who am I to take issue with someone who describes herself thusly? (This from an interview with Diana Beresford Kroeger in *The Georgia Straight*, a weekly Vancouver newspaper): "I am the last of a very ancient family in Ireland. I am the last child of the kings of Munster. My family castle is the castle of Ross in Killarney, we were the teachers of the high king of Ireland, and my pedigree goes back maybe 3000 years. I am a very, very important person in Ireland for that reason" (2017).

My heritage is Irish as well, but unlike Diana I come from a long line of commoners and ne're do wells. My ancestors lived on the other side of the tracks from the "kings of Munster."

Beresford's film is slick and visually beautiful. The choice of narrator was brilliant: Gordon Pinsent's sonorous voice could make the Easter Bunny seem credible. The topic – the glory of trees – is one that resonates with just about everyone. I wanted to find it worthwhile. I didn't.

Beresford-Kroeger likes jargon. In the film she tosses terms like oleic acid, linoleic acid, alpha pinene, beta pinene, bornyl acetate and camphor compounds with flair. She fails though, to adequately support her assertions that these chemicals, allegedly given off by

trees, are good for us. And she says things like this: “Pinenes have an anesthetic reaction on my mylar sheaths” Huh?

My objections to *Call of the Forest* go beyond the use of technobabble however. Consider this passage from the film: “In this heart of America were forests beyond your thinking. Great canopy systems which were called savannas and they stretched hundreds of miles and the squirrels could walk hundreds of miles without touching the ground. Remnants of these forests are now miniscule.”

Quibble one: Savannas in North America do have trees, but the defining characteristic of a savanna is that those trees don’t form a closed canopy system. Grasses and light-loving herbaceous plants thrive in these savannas. Even a flying squirrel, with its ability to glide between trees, would have great difficulty travelling “hundreds of miles without touching the ground.”



Oak Savanna
Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons

But perhaps we can forgive Beresford-Kroeger the use of “savanna”. She surely was referring to the great forests of Eastern North America. This raises quibble two: There is now lots of evidence that the forests of eastern North America were not as unbroken as once believed. Indigenous peoples managed them with fire to create large open areas for agriculture and to encourage animals important to the hunt, like deer and elk, to thrive. This is not something that is widely known, but surely someone like Beresford-Kroeger who promotes herself as a tree expert, should know this.

Quibble three: What is the veracity of “Remnants of these forests are now miniscule”? Degraded yes, miniscule, no. Forests in many parts of the Eastern United States have returned in a big way. For example, about 80% of the New England states are now covered with forest compared to only 30-40% after the cutting of the 19th century.

I could go on and on, but I’ll finish with Diana Beresford Kroeger’s take on black walnut, a tree that I’m privileged to have growing in my backyard. She loves walnut. So do I. But she perceives this tree differently than I do. Here is one thing she says about it: *“Everything around this tree benefits from it.”* The truth: black walnut is well known for producing the toxin juglone, which inhibits the growth of many other plants. (Allelopathy is the scientific term.) In fact, a Wikipedia entry states that, [juglone] “is sometimes used as a herbicide.” Black walnut trees are wonderful, but don’t plant your tomatoes near one.



Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons

Here is another Beresford-Kroeger black walnut assertion: “Black walnut is a medicinal tree.” Eating the nuts, according to Beresford Kroeger, supplies the “essential fatty acids to protect the mylar sheaths of humans and animals” and helps “to develop and repair the brain.” I’m not certain my “mylar sheaths” need protecting, but some brain repair certainly wouldn’t hurt me. Obviously, I should eat black walnuts! Beresford-Kroeger’s recommendation for your daily serving of black walnuts? “Four or five per day”. But have you ever tried to extract nutmeat from a black walnut? A hammer or vise can open black walnuts, but then you need to extract bits of nutmeat tucked into a latticework of hard woody chambers. Good luck meeting your complement of “four or five per day.”

The last Beresford-Kroeger black walnut assertion I'll object to: "And there are no wild stands of black walnut remaining in the United States." Beresford-Kroeger is as fond of such sweeping unsubstantiated statements as she is to the use of impenetrable jargon. No wild stands remaining in the *whole* U.S.? Let's start with the situation north of the border. Here in southern Ontario black walnut is a common tree in its favoured floodplain habitat. When I kayak the Grand River I see loads of black walnut. In Georgetown it is a common tree and the squirrels see to it that it is planted throughout our neighbourhoods. It does very well here. In fact, if I didn't manage my yard, it would eventually be taken over by black walnut and the invasive Norway maple.

But maybe I'm being myopic. Maybe in a wider context, black walnut is rare. But no, it isn't. From the website of Ohio's Division of Forestry: "Black walnut, a rapidly growing tree common in all of Ohio, is most common in moist bottomlands and open fields, but is found everywhere due to squirrels burying its nuts." How about Illinois? This from the Illinois Wildflowers website: "In Illinois, the native black walnut is a common tree that is probably found in every county of the state. Habitats consist of rich mesic woodlands, moist bottomland woodlands in valleys and along rivers, and the bases or lower slopes of bluffs."

So much for Beresford-Kroeger's statement that there are no wild stands of black walnut remaining in the United States.

Why does all this matter? Maybe the ends justify the means. If people walk out of a showing of *Call of the Forest* more motivated to save trees, isn't that a good thing? If a story about climate change, while unsubstantiated, nevertheless spurs people to take action against climate change, isn't that good too?

I submit that it isn't. Environmental advocacy needs to be science based. The causes we pursue need to be bolstered by real evidence. Without such science-based evidence, advocacy will wither in the face of scathing criticism. There are plenty of legitimate reasons to save trees and monarch butterflies. There is a truckload of science-based research to support climate change initiatives. We don't need to embrace pseudo-science or the questionable assertions of a charismatic figure like Beresford-Kroeger to build our cases.

In short, truth matters, doesn't it?

the need for critical thinking...

How Can “We” Manage the Plastic Crisis?

Laura Weihs

A segment on BBC regarding plastics in the oceans prompted me to write this article. I’m sure you’ve all seen images of water entirely saturated with floating plastic items in “the Great Pacific Garbage Patch” as well as similar areas in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. We shake our heads in dismay, but are “we” personally doing anything about it? There are so many reasons that we need to address this issue that I don’t know where to start... the amount of information available on the internet is incredible. Finally, the momentum to do something about it is starting to build!

For about 6 years I've regularly picked up litter on the beaches in Florida. I started when I found out that many sea turtles die when they eat plastic bags and party helium balloons that have gotten loose, sunk and the print has washed off. Sea turtles think they are jelly fish which are their favourite food. They eat them, can't pass them, then die. You would wonder how many of these balloons could end up in the ocean... well one day at St. Augustine Beach I picked up 26! Hard to believe, but they were probably all cut loose after an event. Apparently they are a problem here too. I understand that when there was a club outing a few years back at the tip of Long Point, the beach was littered with spent helium balloons. Not only unsightly, but potentially bad for wildlife.



Just last week here in Florida a sea turtle was brought in for examination to see what had killed it. Perhaps that sea turtle’s death wasn’t caused by litter, but it is a common occurrence and litter can also trap fish and animals. I’ve picked up many fishing lures with rusty hooks and pieces of sharp glass just waiting for someone walking the beach in bare feet to step on, so collecting litter not only helps the environment in many ways, it also helps other people. People will often say a heartfelt ‘thank you’ when they see what I’m doing which is an unexpected gift in itself on top of feeling like I’m doing something for the health of our wonderful planet!

Photo: <http://earth911.com> eco-techstop-plastic-pollution shutterstock

Creatures everywhere are affected by this litter problem. Further down are suggestions as to how we individually can make a difference on a daily basis. I challenge you to avoid using plastic wraps, straws, bags and so many things that are ingrained in our daily lives that we don’t even give a second thought to. For leftovers use glass containers with lids to save money on disposable wrapping and not have the worry of chemicals leaching out of plastic into the food. Avoid buying prepackaged meat with Styrofoam trays, plastic wrap and chemical filled pads that your meat sits on for days. You’ll avoid that extra packaging at the butcher and can confirm that the meat is locally sourced and humanely raised. If possible grow your own veggies or buy them unpackaged at the Farmer’s Market.

Also, help with litter clean ups. This is done so easily on your own or as a group. What is on the land often ends up in the water. Every day should be “Earth Day” not just once a year. We can make a difference both individually and together... please consider my invitation to you at the end of this article!

Ten helpful suggestions to reduce plastic pollution are listed below:

These are taken from <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/10-ways-reduce-plastic-pollution>

1. Wean yourself off disposable plastics.

Ninety percent of the plastic items in our daily lives are used once and then chucked: grocery bags, plastic wrap, disposable cutlery, straws, coffee-cup lids. Take note of how often you rely on these products and replace them with reusable versions. It only takes a few times of bringing your own bags to the store, silverware to the office, or travel mug to Starbucks before it becomes habit.

2. Stop buying water.

Each year, close to 20 billion plastic bottles are tossed in the trash. Carry a reusable bottle in your bag, and you'll never be caught having to resort to a Poland Spring or Evian again. If you're nervous about the quality of your local tap water, look into using a water filter.

3. Boycott microbeads.

Those little plastic scrubbers found in so many beauty products—facial scrubs, toothpaste, body washes—might look harmless, but their tiny size allows them to slip through water-treatment plants. Unfortunately, they also look just like food to some marine animals. Opt for products with natural exfoliants, like oatmeal or salt, instead.

4. Cook more.

Not only is it healthier, but making your own meals doesn't involve takeout containers or doggy bags. For those times when you do order in or eat out, tell the establishment you don't need any plastic cutlery or, for some serious extra credit, bring your own food-storage containers to restaurants for leftovers.

5. Purchase items secondhand.

New toys and electronic gadgets, especially, come with all kinds of plastic packaging—from those frustrating hard-to-crack shells to twisty ties. Search the shelves of thrift stores, neighborhood garage sales, or online postings for items that are just as good when previously used. You'll save yourself a few bucks, too.

6. Recycle.

It seems obvious, but we're not doing a great job of it. For example, less than 14 percent of plastic packaging is recycled. Confused about what can and can't go in the bin? Check out the number on the bottom of the container. For the specifics in your area, refer to your local recycling directory or municipal website. For additional information go to <https://earth911.com/>

7. Support a bag tax or ban.

Urge your elected officials to follow the lead of those in San Francisco, Chicago, and close to 150 other cities and counties by introducing or supporting legislation that would make plastic-bag use less desirable.

8. Buy in bulk.

Single-serving yogurts, travel-size toiletries, tiny packages of nuts—consider the product-to-packaging ratio of items you tend to buy often and select the bigger container instead of buying several smaller ones over time.

9. Bring your own garment bag to the dry cleaner.

Invest in a zippered fabric bag and request that your cleaned items be returned in it instead of sheathed in plastic. (And while you're at it, make sure you're frequenting a dry cleaner that skips the perc, a toxic chemical found in some cleaning solvents.)

10. Put pressure on manufacturers.

Though we can make a difference through our own habits, corporations obviously have a much bigger footprint. If you believe a company could be smarter about its packaging, make your voice heard. Write a letter, send a tweet, or hit them where it really hurts: Give your money to a more sustainable competitor.

If you are interested in more, there are 50 ideas on reducing or eliminating plastic usage at: <https://www.reefrelief.org/2013/01/51-ways-to-reduce-plastic-use-or-completely-eliminate-it/>

Are you tired of people littering and dumping in your city or neighborhood?

At http://www.litter-bug.org/report_littering.asp?STATE_PROVINCE=Ontario

you can **post** your witness account, description and evidence of littering and dumping!

Neighbors, communities, and law enforcement can use Litter-Bug.org data to help prevent and deter future littering and possibly catch perpetrators of illegal dumping activity.

I'd love to see more clean ups to preserve habitat and shield our local wildlife from the harmful effects of plastics and litter. If you are interested in joining me in a local group litter pick up, please e-mail me at biker_chic@sympatico.ca and let me know whether you are available weekdays or weekends and provide your cell number. If you have any suggestions of specific areas that you've seen have an abundance of litter, please let me know. I'll put a plan together so that we take action ASAP to make a difference in our own area!

*Don't forget to check the last page for your answers
to the Spring Quiz on page 11!*

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1

Charity Registration number 869778761RR0001

Executive

President: Don Scallen (905) 876-6180
Past President: Fiona Reid (905) 693-9719
Vice President: Ian Jarvie (905) 877-1441
Secretary: Ann Fraser
Treasurer: Janice Sukhiani (647) 408-9515

Appointments

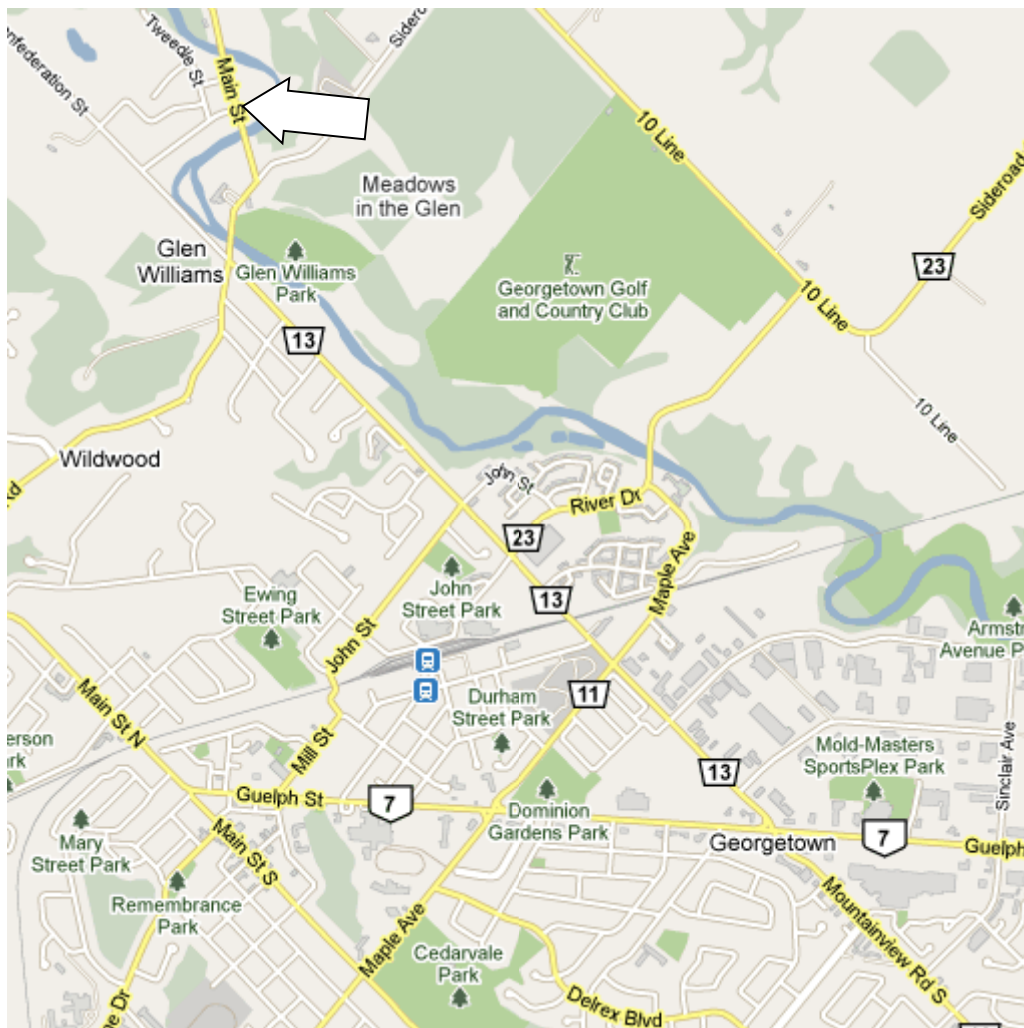
Membership: Lorysa Cornish
Newsletter: Laura Weihs
Ontario Nature Representative: Don Scallen
Webmaster: John Beaudette
Crozier Property Steward
Hardy Property Steward Ray Blower

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

www.hnpnc.com

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

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



Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

_____ Renewal or _____ New Member(s) Date _____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

New 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)
March through to August	_____ Single (\$15.00)	_____ Family (\$20.00)
from June through to August	_____ Single (\$ 7.50)	_____ Family (\$10.00)

Would you like to make a donation to help send a youth to the **Ontario Nature Youth Summit for Biodiversity and Environmental Leadership**? If yes, amount of donation:

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: _____

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

Answers to Spring Quiz on page 11

1. Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Tree: Elm
2. Male Rufous-sided Towhee
3. American Copper Butterfly
4. Spring Peeper (male)
5. Gray Treefrog (male)
6. House Wren
7. Foamflower
8. Green Heron (and unknown minnow)
9. Showy Ladies Slipper Orchid
10. Killdeer (background) Semipalmated Plover (foreground)

An invitation to members:

If you'd like to submit a visual quiz for the newsletter just let Don Scallen or newsletter editor Laura Weihs know. Laura's e-mail is biker_chic@sympatico.ca

Our next newsletter will be published in early September. Fall things could be the theme, but other nature related themes would be fine as well.