Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

The Esquesing

January - February 2022 Newsletter
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President's Message

Happy New Year! I hope you have all had a safe and healthy holiday break and that the New Year is off to a good start.

The winter season can definitely have its challenging weather, but it can be a spectacular and beautiful season if you get some fresh air and nature-watching in. It's worth it to get outside!

There are so many things to watch out for. From mammal tracking, to winter plant and tree ID, and of course birding, there is no end to the natural phenomena we can look for and observe! Birds, are, of course, one of the most active groups of wildlife in winter, so lots of people are happy to grab their binocs, and get out to look for them. The Winter Birding Challenge is on again, and the list is growing, so be sure to let Ian Jarvie know what you see!

The same Ian, of course, who did a great job coordinating our Christmas Bird Count. While the weather proved very challenging for birds and humans alike, the determined participants nonetheless came up with some very impressive sightings and made the whole day a success! Thanks, Ian, for organizing the day so well, and thank you to all the participants for your sharp eyes and your efforts! Be sure to check out the CBC results on page 9 of the newsletter.

Other upcoming events include a winter bird outing on January 12, and a tracking hike at Terra Cotta CA, on January 23. Look for the details on page 4.

Also in the newsletter, you will find a series of articles on the secret language of Chickadees, the late-flowering plant survey held in November, the amazing Snow Spider, and more! Then enjoy a fun challenge with the animal name quiz on page 19 and photo quiz on page 26. A big thank you to Laura Weihs for doing such a great job, as always, putting the newsletter together, and to all the authors who contributed such excellent articles!

At this month's meeting, Janet Pesaturo is going to share her expertise on camera trapping with us, in her talk, "Using Trail Cameras to Learn about Wildlife". Camera traps are an excellent means to get a look at the secret activities of wildlife that most of us can never observe otherwise. In February, biologist and author Bill Schutt will talk about the subject of his first book, "Dark Banquet: blood and the curious lives of blood-feeding creatures". He will tell us about a variety of blood-suckers, from mosquitoes to vampire bats. This will be a fascinating talk as well, so mark your calendar and be sure to be there!

Once again, my warmest wishes for a safe and healthy 2022, and I hope to see you at our next meeting!

Yves Scholten

Talks and Walks

Indoor Events

As you know your executive will continue to hold Zoom meetings online for the time being. Meetings will still begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of the month. You'll be treated to a captivating presentation as listed below. Zoom login details and information will be sent out closer to each event date. A half hour business meeting, hosted by our president, Yves Scholten, will follow the presentation. We hope you'll join us!

Note: If you wish some support from Alexis to ensure your Zoom connection is functioning smoothly, please log in to zoom at 7:20 pm, prior to the meeting, for helpful zoom tips.

Zoom meeting Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Janet Pesaturo

This engaging presentation introduces **trail cameras** – how they work, how to choose one, how to load them up and set them up, common pitfalls and how to find "hot spots". The concept of targeting specific animals and behaviors is covered, using camera trap photos and videos as examples, showing how you too can capture footage that reveals the secret lives of your wild neighbors.

With a master's degree in conservation biology and a Level III CyberTracker certificate, Janet Pesaturo teaches wildlife tracking and camera trapping at Winterberry Wildlife in Massachusetts. She is the author of "Camera Trapping Guide: Tracks, Sign and Behavior of Eastern Wildlife" and chronicles her nature discoveries and adventures in a blog at WinterberryWildlife.OurOneAcreFarm.com. She manages the popular Facebook group "Trail Camera Photos and Videos" where members can share their own material or simply follow along and enjoy what others post."

Zoom meeting Tuesday, February 8, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Bill Schutt

Biologist and author Bill Schutt will talk about the subject of his first book, Dark Banquet: blood and the curious lives of blood-feeding creatures. The late E. O Wilson wrote of Dark Banquet: "I was totally absorbed by this thoroughly charming and scientifically accurate account." Bill will introduce us to a variety of sanguivores, from vampire bats (the subject of much of his biological research), chiggers and candiru, to more familiar bloodsuckers such as leeches, ticks, bed-bugs and mosquitoes. He weaves a marvelous tale from amusing anecdote to scientific fact that is funny, enlightening, and somewhat alarming.

Dr Schutt is an Emeritus Professor of Biology at LIU Post and a research associate at the American Museum of Natural History. He is author of Pump, a natural history of the heart, two books on cannibalism, and several works of fiction.

Outdoor Events

Please Note:

As indicated below, please confirm your participation for each outing so that we can be sure to adhere to the ever changing Covid safety protocols.

Wednesday, January 12, 2022 at 1 pm
Winter Birds of the North

On this outing we will head to the area north of Fergus and tour a number of smaller roads in search of snowy owls, snow buntings, redpolls, rough-legged hawks, and other denizens of more northerly realms. This is mostly a driving outing, with short roadside walks. Due to covid, we will limit this trip to no more than 5 cars, and you should only carpool with members of your household. Please RSVP Fiona Reid (fiona.reid7243@gmail.com) to check if space is available and to reserve your spot. We will meet outside Winners in Georgetown at 1:00 p.m. and expect to return around 6 p.m.

Sunday, January 23, 2022 at 10 am.
Terra Cotta Conservation Area

Join Don Scallen to look for animal tracks. Be prepared for some potentially rigorous off-trail tracking – we'll go where the animals take us.

The San people of the Kalahari perform tracking spectacularly well without snow, but Don is bereft of their genius. If no snow, the walk will proceed but the focus will shift to trees, birds and other winter attractions.

This is a member's only event. Please let Don know if you plan to attend dscallen@cogeco.ca

Masthead Photo…

Snow Spider, *(Cicurina)*

Description and photo by Fiona A. Reid

Spiders typically are active during warm weather, but there are a considerable diversity of species (54 species were recorded in Manitoba for example) of spiders that can travel over the surface of snow. They are collectively lumped into a group known as snow spiders. The one that I photographed is in the genus *Cicurina*, the cave meshweavers or dwarf sheet spiders. These spiders are often associated with dark damp situations in caves, drains and cellars. They are frequently found on limestone substrates. Snow spiders may appear on the snow surface in search of snow fleas. These tiny oval specks can be seen in small to large groups. They often appear inactive, but if you try to pick one up they will spring away. These wingless arthropods are not fleas but springtails. These tiny creatures have glycine in their bodies that acts like antifreeze, and thus can be active even in sub-zero temperatures. I thought my spider would be using its club-like forearms to dig into snow, but apparently these enlarged palpal tips are used to grasp an unwitting female during copulation.

Youth Summit for Mother Earth

Below is feedback from Julia Crean and Sierra Kellman, students we sponsored for this year's Youth Summit for Mother Earth, organized and presented by Ontario Nature.

Dear Halton-North Peel Naturalists,

My name is Julia Crean, and I live in the town of Halton Hills. I am interested in getting involved in my community and participating in projects that support environmental stewardship. I also want to learn more regarding wildlife and ecological restoration, which is why I was so grateful to have been able to participate in the 2021 Youth Summit for Mother Earth. I would like to thank you for sponsoring me to attend this event as it provided me with such a great experience.

Hearing indigenous perspectives at the event was very interesting and gave me the chance to further my learning and look at some environmental issues from a new perspective. A value that I took with me from the event is; "take little of what is abundant, less of what is not and almost nothing of what is rare". During the summit I got to attend webinars about invasive species, bees, careers and networking in the environment, biodiversity, and learning from different perspectives. I learned valuable information and teachings from each webinar and I enjoyed feeling connected to a community of youth who also enjoy learning and taking actions that help the environment.

Thank you very much for sponsoring me, it is greatly appreciated,

Julia

Dear Halton-North Peel Naturalists

Thank you for sponsoring me this year at the Youth Summit since I am interested in learning about our environment and helping to protect it.

I am also interested in learning more about the Indigenous peoples in Canada so I really enjoyed the workshop "Lets speak Anishinaabemowin" where I learned some of the Anishinaabe language. Attending the summit inspired me even more to help save our natural environment as now is a critical time to act.

Miigwetch, thank you again for giving me this amazing opportunity and I hope you will consider sponsoring me in the Youth Summit next year.

Sincerely
Sierra Kellman

Stop Sprawl Halton Campaign

Article by Katherine Shaw

Hello fellow club members,

On February 9, Halton Regional Council will decide whether to designate 5,000 acres of Canada's best farmland for development, much of it between Georgetown and Milton.

I'm helping with a huge *Stop Sprawl Halton* campaign to convince Council to vote No to this land grab.

Halton Region has already approved thousands of acres for development within its current urban boundaries. This is more than enough land to create vibrant, walkable communities with residential, employment, and recreation spaces. "Gentle density" makes housing more affordable, and reduces car dependency and greenhouse gas emissions.

Will you help us win over Council? We want to flood them with letters from groups all over Halton: farmers, naturalists, young people, faith groups and more. Please edit and send the attached letter to Council by the end of January. I would be so grateful!

We are planning a visible public campaign that includes lawn signs, newspaper ads, which all cost money. A donation to Stop Sprawl Halton would be greatly appreciated and is eligible for charitable tax receipts. A free online Zoom fundraising event is planned for January 18 at 7:00pm. There will be musical performances by Hayley Verrall, Ablett and Cooper, and Greg Lawless as well as speakers. More information on this event and access to it will be available from our website.

Councillors are swayed by pressure from voters. We can do this! There is lots more information at https://www.stopsprawlhalton.org/home and you can sign up for a lawn sign there as well.

The letter to Council which you can edit is on the next page and should be sent by the end of January.

Many thanks,
Katherine

Your group's letterhead here, with return address

Date
Chair Gary Carr and members of Halton Regional Council
Halton Regional Centre
1151 Bronte Road
Oakville, ON L6M 3L1
c/o regionalclerk@halton.ca *(The clerk will circulate your letter to all Councillors)*

Dear Mr. Carr and members of Council:

Describe your group in a sentence or two, including how many members you have if significant.

On February 9th you will make a crucial decision about the future of Halton Region, determining the quality of life here for the next 30 years. We are asking you to vote NO to any urban boundary expansion.

Now give any or all of the following reasons, in these words or your own:

Halton Region has already approved thousands of acres for development within current urban boundaries. This is more than enough land to create vibrant, walkable communities with residential, employment, and recreation spaces.

Suburban sprawl costs us all. New developments require plenty of expensive infrastructure, including roads, sewers and hydro. Intensification within current boundaries brings in a larger tax base using existing infrastructure, increases ridership for transit systems, reduces car dependency and carbon emissions, and offers residents safer, healthier lives. "Gentle density" makes housing more affordable.

Farmland is precious. Please protect it, for future food security.

If you wish, explain how the land grab might affect your group in particular.

On February 9, **please reject any urban boundary expansion**, and say Yes to affordable housing development within Halton's existing urban boundaries.

Respectfully

(Title of person signing, e.g. President)

REPORT ON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2021

Article by Ian Jarvie

After missing the Christmas Bird Count in 2020 due to the pandemic, we held the 30th Christmas Bird Count on the usual date of 27th December. This year I have taken over the compiler's duty from Bill McIlveen, and since I have neither his historical recall, or his analytical skills, it will necessarily be somewhat abbreviated. So, here goes…..

The weather on the day did not cooperate, with snow falling heavily at times, and low light levels hampering visibility, making finding the birds challenging. Despite that, and snow cover on the ground in most areas, the participants made valiant efforts to find whatever birds were moving around. Temperatures ranged from around minus 5 to minus 2 during the day.

The results for Count Day and Count Week are shown on the table below. In total we counted 59 species, 51 on Count Day itself and 8 during Count Week. Note that Count Week runs 3 days before and 3 days after the actual Count Day. The total number of birds reported was 10,853 which is roughly 1,100 above average and 1,600 more than counted in the last CBC in 2019.

Considering the adverse weather, and since neither Maple Lodge farms nor Upper Canada College were available to us due to the pandemic, this I think is a good result.

Here are some observations, and some comparisons of this year's results to those from previous years:

- Canada Geese and Starlings were present in large numbers - not unexpected.
- A good number of duck species were absent this year, since most are usually reported from Maple Lodge Farms.
- Red-tailed Hawk numbers were much lower than previously seen, possibly due to the poor visibility blocking distant birds from being seen.
- A similar story from various locations such as Scotch Block reservoir where, although birds such as Canada Geese could be heard, poor visibility made viewing even relatively close waterfowl impossible.
- A total of 27 Eastern Bluebirds were reported, which is much higher than the average, and is in line with what appears to be an increasing presence of these birds in winter.
- American Goldfinches were present in huge numbers, with 437 being seen, more than twice the average previously reported.
- Winter finches seen were Purple Finch, Common Redpoll and a group of 3 Evening Grosbeaks were seen flying over.
- Particular highlights this year were unexpected treats of a Hermit Thrush seen in Area 1, and an Eastern Phoebe seen in Area 3, the only two species not reported during previous counts. See the photo of the Phoebe below.

I would like to extend a huge thank you to the leaders and participants for their part in contributing to this longest running Citizen Science project.

Please find the complete table of our area's results below.

SPECIES	AREA 1	AREA 2	AREA 3	AREA 4	AREA 5	AREA 6	AREA 7	AREA 8	TOTAL
Canada Goose	1349	157	1668	110	73	716	227	192	4492
Trumpeter Swan		2							2
American Black Duck	4						5		9
Mallard	306	128	64	3	14	2			517
Common Goldeneye	5		1						6
Hooded Merganser	2		2						4
Common Merganser	5								5
Ruffed Grouse						2	1		3
Wild Turkey		40				19			59
Great Blue Heron	1		1						2
Bald Eagle	3								3
Northern Harrier	3								3
Sharp-shinned Hawk				1		1			2
Cooper's Hawk	2	1		1	1	1			6
Red-shouldered Hawk						1			1
Red-tailed Hawk	7		CW			2	1	2	12
Rough-legged Hawk				1					1
American Kestrel	CW								CW
Ring-billed Gull	71		11						82
Herring Gull	2		1						3
Rock Pigeon	205	6	44	73		47	19		394
Mourning Dove	80	9	27	1	13	109	57	29	325
Eastern Screech Owl							1		1
Great Horned Owl								CW	CW
Barred Owl								CW	CW
Belted Kingfisher	1						CW		1
Red-bellied Woodpecker	2	2	3		1	3	3	3	17
Downy Woodpecker	2	1	10	1	3	11	8	6	42
Hairy Woodpecker	6		5		1	7	2	2	23

Pileated Woodpecker	1							CW	1
Northern Shrike								CW	CW
Blue Jay	18	4	6		8	21	20	10	87
American Crow	54	5	10	3	4	59	20	38	193
Common Raven	14	1					1	1	17
Black-capped Chickadee	76	13	37	2	24	59	35	45	291
Red-breasted Nuthatch	3		19		1	5	7	3	38
White-breasted Nuthatch	11		8	2	6	6		5	38
Brown Creeper							1		1
Eastern Bluebird	4					5	11	7	27
American Robin	6	5	1			4	1		17
Hermit Thrush	1								1
Northern Mockingbird			CW						CW
European Starling	661	115	174	85	782	321	551		2689
Cedar Waxwing	36	20				33			89
Eastern Towhee	CW								CW
American Tree Sparrow	40	12	21		21	52	6		152
Song Sparrow	2				3				5
Swamp Sparrow	CW								CW
White-throated Sparrow			2			1			3
White-crowned Sparrow	1					1			2
Dark-eyed Junco	49	14	23		32	168	97	30	413
Northern Cardinal	32	8	4	1		20	6	3	74
Red-winged Blackbird					CW				CW
Purple Finch					1			20	21
House Finch	1	10	2		2	20	29		64
Common Redpoll	1						50		51
American Goldfinch	86	30	15		69	157	51	29	437
Evening Grosbeak					3				3
House Sparrow	118	2	8			15			143
Eastern Phoebe			1						1
TOTAL BIRDS	**3271**	**585**	**2168**	**284**	**1062**	**1868**	**1210**	**425**	**10873**
No. SPECIES	**40**	**22**	**26**	**13**	**20**	**30**	**25**	**17**	**51**
COUNT WEEK	**3**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**4**	**8**

Summary of Late-flowering Plant Records from Halton Hills

Article and Photos by W.D. McIlveen

In 2002, we started to monitor what local plant species were still flowering late into the fall season. In addition to having a good excuse to just be outdoors, the purpose of the monitoring was to compile a database against which others, in future, could determine if there was a change in the flowering dates of plants. It was presumed that global warming in general will see a more-prolonged growing season or delayed occurrence of late fall frosts. There may be other factors that influence the flowering dates but warmer temperatures in general and/or delayed frosts would potentially be changes that could affect any plant flowering period. As such, the alterations in flowering time could affect abundance of different plant species or the insects associated with them (e.g., pollinators). With the most-recent survey completed in 2021, 20 surveys have now been completed and a summary report is warranted. A previous report [McIlveen] was prepared at the six-year mark.

Site Selection

When the survey was first established, all options were open for consideration. The dates for completing the assessment were based on having the bulk of the flowering already completed so that those species still flowering would indeed be late in reaching that stage. On the other hand, the survey should not be so late that everything would definitely be killed off by winter conditions. It was considered that the period covering the third week of November would be most suitable. The monitoring dates within November ranged between the 10th and the 26th but most dates reflect the weekend in the middle of the month.

It was considered that the sites should offer a diverse range of plant species that could be monitored. Such conditions were offered by the gardens and plantings in Norval including the Lucy Maude Montgomery Garden and the Willow Park Ecology Center. The monitoring could also provide a benefit to the programs at those sites. In following years, additional sites were added to the monitoring site list. This site list has generally been extended with the most-recent additions being made in 2020. Separate records have been kept for nine distinct areas though not every area was visited every year.

NEC Parking lot area	McNab Pollinator Garden
Lucy Maude Montgomery Garden	Georgetown Fairground Woods
Willow Park Ecology Center	Seedhouse Gardens
Mary Street, Norval	Incidental Observations
Highway 7, Norval	

The garden sites are those with the greatest diversity of plant species present. Many, if not most, of the species at these gardens are ornamental in nature and are not native to our area.

Definition
For this project, any plant flower that was still relatively fresh and apparently still capable of being fertilized was deemed to still be in flower. Even a single such flower on a plant qualified the species as flowering though the majority of plants that had open flowers usually had at least small clusters of flowers. Realistically, even if the flower had been pollinated, the chance of it forming a viable seed is near nil.

Flowering Species Encountered
In total, the list of species seen in flower includes 182 different species over the 20 years of monitoring. Of these, 85 species were noted on a single occasion. The records were dominated by non-native species which accounted for nearly 80% of all records (79.3%).

The number of records increased over the first 8 years from 12 to 47 species. From 2009 to 2019, the numbers fluctuated between a high of 53 (2014) to a low of just 9 in 2019. The records for 2021 reached a high of 88 records. The numbers did not appear to vary much in relation to the monitoring date. Weather records were not consulted but despite a few known cold nights before some monitoring visits, the number of records was not obviously altered.

The efforts applied during the monitoring process may have been different from year to year. By 'effort', it is meant that the number of places examined each year was changing. The time and physical activity expended in each visit remained fairly consistent across all years. Almost certainly, differences would be expected due to the different number of sites visited each year. In the earliest years, limited effort was spent at the Lucy Maude Montgomery Garden so species there were likely under represented. Also, time was spent checking the woods adjacent to the Fairgrounds in Georgetown but hardly any flowering plants were seen there. Later the Lucy Maude Gardens were added as were the Seedhouse Gardens and this increased the probability for obtaining more records. At one point near the midpoint of the monitoring, the Gardens underwent significant changes including the creation of a sensory garden. Following the construction, changes were made to the plants being grown. In 2020, the McNab pollinator garden was created in Norval. It was decided that the presence of those plants deserved to be monitored as well so that garden was added to the list of sites. A walk was included between Willow Park and McNab Garden. Any flowering plants on the properties along the route were also documented. In addition, the flowering plants were noted along the roadside at Mary Street, in the roadside area adjacent to the parking lot at Guelph Street and Mountainview, as well as incidental sites along streets in residential parts of Georgetown

Common Species
The 17 most-frequently recorded species (10 or more records) are listed in the table below. Dandelion was the most-frequently seen species with 49 records. Tall Goldenrod provided 28 records while late garden roses provided 23 records.

Chart on the next page…

Most-common late-flowering plants in Halton Hills, 2002-2021		
Common Name	**Latin Binomial**	**Records**
Garden Snapdragon	*Antirrhinum majus*	10
Pot Marigold	*Calendula officinalis*	16
Garden Mum	*Chrysanthemum x morifolium*	17
Yellow Camomile	*Cota tinctoria*	10
Annual Fleabane	*Erigeron annuus*	11
Wormseed Wallflower	*Erysimum chieranthoides*	16
Petty Spurge	*Euphorbia peplus*	10
Fall Hawkbit	*Leontodon autumnalis*	10
Common Mallow	*Malva neglecta*	11
Prostrate Knotweed	*Polygonum aviculare*	18
Rose sp.	*Rosa sp.*	23
Common Ragwort	*Senecio vulgaris*	15
Tall Goldenrod	*Solidago altissima*	28
Panicled Aster	*Symphyotrichum lanceolatum*	12
New England Aster	*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*	19
Common Dandelion	*Taraxacum officinale*	49
Scentless Chamomile	*Tripleurospermum inodorum*	10

Factors Affecting Flowering

Under normal circumstances, plants will flower within a timeframe appropriate to that species. That flowering is the product of the species evolution and assumes that the plant is allowed to develop without disturbance. Some species prefer to flower early in the growing season, some in the middle, and some flower late. There are others that flower over extended periods. But there are different factors that can alter the flowering dates. A warm spring could accelerate the onset of flowering. Dry periods or cooler weather or other stresses could slow the developing flowers. These conditions are unlikely to lead to delayed flowering. By contrast, plants that are mechanically damaged may develop new growth (e.g., new side shoots) that leads to its own flower development. Such a situation will lead to plants with late flowers. Vegetation that is subject to mowing once or repeatedly is likely to produce late flowers that were tallied during the site visits. When this happens, the late flowers are not related to climate factors but are present due to direct human intervention.

Forsythia is normally a spring-flowering species. It was noted flowering at the Seed House Gardens on several occasions. The exact cause of this aberrant flowering is uncertain.

Miscellaneous

Although the surveys were strongly biased towards plants still retaining viable flowers, other interesting biota forms were not forgotten. At different times, birds, animals, fungi, insects, fish, and other life forms were noted. Below are examples of plants flowering past their normal period and as well as the Tree Volvariaella mushroom found during the 20 years of survey.

Spotted Dead-nettle (*Lamium maculatum*) Lucy Maude Montgomery Garden, Norval, 2020

Bird's-eye Speedwell (*Veronica persica*) Lucy Maude Montgomery Garden, Norval 2015

Inland Pigface (*Carpobrotus modestus*) Lucy Maude Montgomery Garden, Norval, 2021

New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*) Seed House Garden, Georgetown, 2009

Forsythia (*Forsythia viridissima*) in bloom, Seed House Garden, Gardem,2011

Tree Volvariaella (*Volvariella bombycine*) Willow Park, Norval, 2015.

Reference Cited:

McIlveen, W.D., and I. McIlveen. 2007 Late-Fall Flowering Plants in North Halton. The Esquesing. Vol. 41 No 2. Pp. 6-7.

How is your Chickadeeish?

Article by Don Scallen, Photos by Yves Scholten

My thanks to Dan Strickland whose chickadeeish is far better than mine. (Dan Strickland authored the Algonquin Park newsletter *The Raven* for over three decades. I consider him the best nature writer Canada has produced. His articles are deep dives into the fascinating natural histories of our plants and animals.)

In his article "*Could We Pass a Chickadee Exam*?" Dan tells us that chickadees communicate with at least eight different body postures and over fifteen different vocalizations. Here's a few examples of the information that chickadees convey through their varied calls.

Fee-bee

Meaning: Given mostly by males this says "This is my patch! Stay out, unless of course you're a female looking for a good place to raise a family." This distinctive vocalization can be heard any time of year but most frequently in late winter or spring. I welcome it as an early hint that winter is on the wane.

Gargle

A jumble of notes that chickadees in close proximity – living in the same general area – develop together and use as a marker to identify their group. When they meet a group of chickadees from another area with a different series of "gargle" notes, clashes ensue. The function is believed to protect the foraging territory of one group from incursion by other Chickadees.

Tseet

This faint call is one heard frequently (if your hearing is still acute!) as chickadee flocks move through woodlands in the winter. It likely serves to reassure the birds that they are not alone and to maintain flock cohesion.

Chick-a-dee-dee

A call all of us are familiar with. Though seemingly innocent to us it appears to express different levels of alarm associated with the presence of other animals on the ground or predators perched in trees. Of interest is that subtle differences in this characteristic call identify different levels of threat. The number of "dees" at the end of the call, for example, seem to increase in response to the severity of threat. Thus, a roosting Sharp-shinned Hawk

might warrant over 25 “dees” and a lesser threat like a fox on the ground below might warrant only four or five “dees”. A big, lumbering creature like you or me might evoke only the more usual one or two “dees”.

High zee

I’ve heard this call several times in my own backyard. Though bad with languages (I almost failed grade nine French) I finally learned the meaning of this call and learned to look up after hearing it, sometimes to see a raptor sailing overhead. This call is perhaps of highest urgency in a Chickadee’s world for a flying predator is usually the greatest threat a chickadee faces. When chickadees hear it they freeze in place, making it more difficult for the raptor to see them.

So there you have it. **Chickadeeish 101**. The second- year course will focus on Chickadee body language.

Raven Foodies

Article and Photo by Don Scallen

The raven pair cast covetous eyes at our sandwiches, and we soon weakened. My hiking partner and I tossed them bread and strips of ham and tempted them to come closer by placing morsels near our feet.

The largest and boldest bird took sideways steps towards us and then, with a rapier-like thrust of its bill, snatched the food, retreated a safe distance away, and ate it.

In recent decades ravens have recolonized southern Ontario. Clever and adaptable they eat just about anything we do and a wide assortment of things most of us would never dream of eating, like frogs, shrews, and butterflies.

But like us they can be picky. They balk at bees and wasps, even dead ones that can't deliver nasty stings. And, according to raven expert and author, Bernd Heinrich, they recoil in disgust from earthworms.

Also like us – especially like many children – ravens display neophobia, the fear of new things including potential foods they haven't seen previously.

Ravens also exercise caution with foods that they normally relish. Deer carcasses, and northwards, moose carcasses, sustain ravens during the winter.

But, if predators and fellow scavengers are not feeding at those carcasses, ravens will give them a pass. This may be the legacy of poison campaigns that laced carcasses with strychnine to kill wolves and coyotes.

A hunter told Heinrich a possibly apocryphal story about a raven at a carcass that would roll over and play dead when other ravens flew overhead.

This raised the possibility that the raven knew that other ravens would see his "lifeless" body, conclude that the carcass was dangerous to eat, and then fly off. Deception successful, the wily raven would then "revive" and continue to feed without having to share.

True or not, this story is but a drop in an ocean of tales that celebrate the intellect and appetites of these feathered Einsteins and avian epicures.

See more of Don's blogs at Notes from the Wild

Quiz - Do you know the name of the young of the animals listed below?

Animal:

Alpaca
Crane
Dove
Echidna
Elephant seal
Guineafowl
Hare
Hawk
Jellyfish
Mosquito
Mouse
Oyster
Porcupine
Puffin
Sandpiper
Swan
Turkey

Answers to Animal - Name of the Young:

Alpaca - Cria
Crane – Colt
Dove - Squab, Squeaker
Echidna - Puggle
Elephant seal - Weaner
Guineafowl – Keet
Hare - Leveret
Hawk - Eyas
Jellyfish - Ephyna
Mosquito - Nymph, Wriggler, Tumbler
Mouse - Pup, Pinkie, Kitten
Oyster - Spat
Porcupine - Porcupette
Puffin - Puffling
Sandpiper – Peep
Swan - Cygnet, Flapper
Turkey - Poult, Jake (male), Jenny (female)

The above came from:
https://animalsake.com/baby-animal-names and
https://www.thespruce.com/names-of-baby-birds-386825

Monarchs and Suburban Milkweed Revisited

Article and Photo by Don Scallen

In our October newsletter I floated the idea, based on my experience, that planting milkweed in suburbia may not benefit monarch butterfly populations. This because in my garden the mortality of monarch caterpillars is a dependable 100% each year if they are not protected. Knowing that a sample of one is hardly scientific, I asked at the end of my article for feedback and advice.

In the December newsletter Fiona Reid gently took me to task for suggesting that milkweed in suburbia may not be a good idea. She conducted a Facebook poll which yielded a larger sample size. Some of her respondents did report the successful pupation of unprotected monarch caterpillars. Good news. Fiona also stressed that milkweed feeds not only monarch butterflies but many other insects as well. I agree. We shouldn't judge milkweed solely on its importance to monarch butterflies.

Recently I had an opportunity to listen in on a Zoom conversation with Chip Taylor, the founder and director of Monarch Watch. Taylor has studied monarch butterflies for several decades and initiated the monarch waystation project. For a yard to be certified as a monarch waystation some simple criteria need to be met including having at least ten milkweed plants.

Taylor had some interesting things to say. He stated that monarch waystations proceed along a predictable trajectory after establishment. In the first few years they support good numbers of monarch caterpillars through to adulthood, but then become less and less productive in this regard over time. He doesn't see this as a concern, but simply a replication of what happens in the wild. The reason for the decline in monarch butterfly production over time? The classic predator-prey paradigm. A prey species increases in number and then declines as predators increase their numbers in response. In this case predatory insects and spiders increase in number in response to the monarch caterpillars.

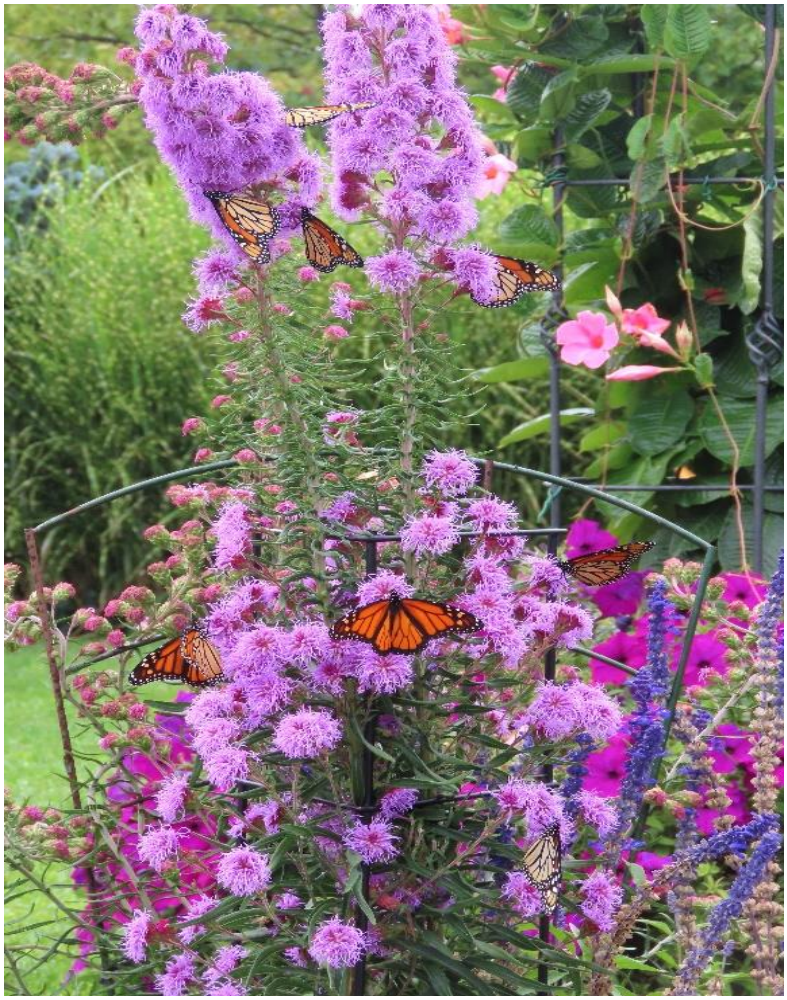
Taylor's comment put me at greater ease. My garden and the milkweed I grow, have been in place for many years. Monarch caterpillar predators have had plenty of time to become established.

Taylor also affirmed Fiona's assertion that milkweed plays a greater ecological role than simply feeding monarch caterpillars. He bemoaned the fact that some monarch enthusiasts kill other insects that compete with monarch caterpillars for monarch foliage.

Another interesting discussion item during the Zoom call, was the efficacy of rearing monarch caterpillars in protective enclosures to increase their survivability. Taylor didn't advise us not to do this. But he did indicate that the survival rate of monarch butterflies reared in this fashion, as per recoveries in their overwintering sites in Mexico, is far less than the survival rate of monarchs that develop naturally. He suspects that "captive" rearing allows less fit monarchs to survive – monarch caterpillars that would be "weaned" out of the population if left to fend for themselves.

Importantly, Taylor emphasized, captive reared monarchs should be exposed to the natural rhythms of sunlight. Best are enclosures kept outdoors. Indoor reared monarchs may not be able to respond to the solar cues that facilitate migration upon release.

The upshot of all this for me? I'll continue to grow milkweed and will try not to lament the high monarch caterpillar mortality rate. However, questions still swirl. The Liatris ligulistylis (Meadow or Rocky Mountain Blazing Star) that I grow in my yard is a fantastic monarch butterfly attractant. Is it a siren call though, luring an artificial abundance of monarchs to my yard which then subsequently lay eggs on my milkweed? (Eggs that, in my yard at least, have little or no chance to develop into adult monarchs.)



Monarch Butterflies nectaring on Liatris ligulistylis in Don's front yard.

I'll attempt to answer another question by planting some milkweed in hanging baskets this coming spring. My yard is infested with European fire ants. (Their sting is far more unpleasant than a mosquito bite!) I wonder if these abundant invaders are killing some of my monarch caterpillars. The elevated milkweed may shed some light. If some caterpillars survive, it may mean that ground-based predators, including perhaps the fire ants, are significant agents of mortality.

In the meantime, I'll continue to ask questions and sometimes challenge prevailing views about the natural world. That's how we refine knowledge and move towards a more complete under-standing of the stunning complexity of nature.

Diseases of Raccoons

Article and Photos by W.D. McIlveen

Raccoon in Sideroad 25 right-of-way south of Acton, 2016

On November 20, 2021, a small group of naturalists were doing a walk at LaSalle Park in Burlington. During that walk, we observed a Meadow Vole behaving very abnormally, generally running in tight circles. We thought that it likely had become infected with some sort of parasite which was inducing the Vole to behave in the way it was. A quick search for information quickly suggested that it had become infected by the Raccoon Roundworm. That information as well as general knowledge that Raccoons in the Hamilton area have recently suffered from Raccoon Rabies and that populations generally have declined in recent years due to distemper triggered the idea to become more familiar with Raccoon diseases in general. In addition, the prevalence of Raccoons in urban and rural areas made it important to know how the diseases that afflict Raccoons might impact pets, other wildlife, and humans. The following is a summary of information that is available.

Nematodes

An important parasite in raccoons is *Baylisascaris procyonis* which is an intestinal roundworm of raccoons [Gavin]. *Baylisascaris* is known to cause cerebral nematodiasis and ocular and visceral larval migrans in domestic and non-domestic animals, as well as humans. Transmission commonly occurs through the ingestion of infective eggs.

The Vole that was behaving erratically and that triggered the present article was running in tight circles. The Vole behavior observed at LaSalle and that described for a Vole believed to be infected by the Roundworm included:

- always running clockwise
- circles are about 6-12” in diameter
- running bouts lasting from 5-120 seconds with short pauses between
- at rest, the vole was leaning down to the right (in the same direction it was running) often coming to a rest when it ran into a leaf

The Raccoon Roundworm has a long list of host species that includes humans. The eggs are shed at Raccoon latrines where any other prospective host animals might be encountered.

Viruses

Raccoons suffer from several different viral diseases. The list includes rabies, canine distemper, raccoon parvoviral enteritis, infectious canine hepatitis, and pseudorabies. The first two have been implicated in local decreases in Raccoon populations. Personal observations are consistent with that contention. Certainly, not all Raccoons have been eliminated but fewer individuals have been seen over the last approximately five years.

In 2015, an outbreak of the Raccoon strain of rabies occurred in the Hamilton area to the extent that it was newsworthy at the time. The disease had been known from the US including New York State. At first, it had been expected that disease had spread into Ontario from sites just across the U.S. border. Further testing showed the source was via long-range transport from the southeastern part of New York [Nadin-Davis]. This would likely involve the movement of an infected animal from that area via a vehicle such as a transport truck.

Cases of Raccoon Rabies			
Year	Hamilton	Halton	Ontario
2015	9	0	10
2016	126	7	171
2017	45	6	86
2018	29	0	50
2019	6	0	9
2020	0	0	3
2021	0	0	2

It was feared that the outbreak would spread to other parts of the province. In response, the Ministry of Natural Resources started to drop vaccine-laced bait within and beyond the known area of disease. The numbers of infected animals that were detected by laboratory testing are summarized in the table above [Lobo]. The data indicate that most of the infected animals were found in the Hamilton area. A few were found in nearby parts of Halton. The peak of the outbreak occurred in 2016 the declined in subsequent years. This would suggest the vaccination program has worked very well and that a full pandemic of the disease was prevented. Around that time, at least two Raccoons were observed wandering during daylight hours in areas of Burlington. Their behaviour was consistent with that of animals infected by rabies. A number of other diseases cause fairly similar symptoms so a definitive diagnosis of rabies could not be made. For certain, the animals observed were not behaving normally.

Canine Distemper (CDV) is caused by infection with the Canine morbillivirus. The disease affects animals in the canine families in addition to some other mammals including Raccoons and Skunks. Raccoons and dogs are particularly susceptible to this disease. Fortunately, humans do not contract this particular virus.

The symptoms of distemper in Raccoons are very much like those of distemper in dogs. The behavioral signs are barely distinguishable from those caused by rabies. The virus infects the respiratory tract, the gastrointestinal tract, the spinal cord and the brain. Infected animals generally act disoriented, lethargic, or may have seizures. Animals that recover may display permanent neurological damage.

Up until recently, the virus has always remained at low levels in the raccoon population. It is highly contagious and is transferred through inhalation or through contact with raccoon feces, airborne droplets and bodily fluids such as saliva. The virus has become so rampant lately that it's increasingly being spread from raccoon to raccoon within their natural habitat. It is frequently fatal and has become the second leading cause of death in raccoons. It has been suggested that the recent decline in the Raccoon population is largely due to this disease.

Dogs that have been vaccinated for distemper do not become infected if they come in contact with a raccoon with the disease. Vaccination of pets against distemper is an effective measure against the virus.

Protozoa

The single-celled protozoan *Toxoplasma gondii* has a long list of host species. It is particularly common in cats which shed the disease in their feces. It is spread through ingestion of infected rodents, birds or other small animals. Considering the wide host range which includes humans, it should not be surprising to learn that toxoplasmosis is also an important parasitic disease of Raccoons. In Raccoons, it is commonly associated with immunosuppression related to canine distemper virus infections.

Bacteria

Raccoons suffer from several different bacterial diseases. The bacteria *Leptospira* (several species) cause Leptospirosis which is common in raccoons. It is believed to be spread from urine to feed and water. Other bacterial infections among raccoons include listeriosis (*Listeria monocytogenes*), yersiniosis (*Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*), pasteurellosis (*Pasteurella multocida*), and tularemia (*Francisella tularensis*). Diagnosis of these diseases requires tissue testing in the laboratory. Typically, these bacteria can infect multiple host species and are spread via urine, feces, saliva or other forms of contact. Humans can also be infected.

The ready contacts between Raccoons and other forms of wildlife makes it very easy for disease organisms to be spread among susceptible hosts. The abundance of Raccoons known to occur in urban settings. thanks to human behavior, only enhances the chance for infected Raccoons to spread their particular infections. This includes exposure of various host to these diseases, many of which could be contracted by people. Some common-sense measures will minimize the risk for humans to contract any of the diseases. This includes avoiding direct contact with the animals themselves or the handling of their wastes without some protective equipment. Simple social distancing between people and wildlife, and Raccoons in particular, will go a long way towards living peacefully with these animals that are going to be in our midst for a very long time.

Mother Raccoon with two young, Acton, 2016

Raccoon exhibiting odd behavior, Marie Curtis Park, 2010

References:

Gavin, P.J., K.R. Kazacos, S.T. Shulman. 2005. Baylisascariasis**.** Clin Microbiol Rev.18(4): 703–718.

Lobo, D., C. DeBenedet, C. Fehlner-Gardiner, S. Nadin-Davis, M. Anderson, T. Buchanan, K. Middel, C. Filejski, and J. Hopkins. 2018. Raccoon rabies outbreak in Hamilton, Ontario: A progress report. Can. Commun. Dis. Rep. 44(5):116-121.

Nadin-Davis, S., T. Buchanan, L. Nituchm and C. Fehlner-Gardiner. 2020. A long-distance translocation initiated an outbreak of raccoon rabies in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases Mar 25;14(3).

From the Web

Amazing images from the 2021 Audubon Photography Awards. Scroll down the page for specifics on every shot:
https://www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2021/the-2021-audubon-photography-awards-winners-and?fbclid=IwAR306US9B1Hkt3F_aNVKfm9ZM7_dP7aBMYXvhmdfaBRMEkGAD-8M1qHspmk

Stunning photography of not only "bugs" but other small invertebrates as well.
Winners 2021 | Buglife Bug Photography Awards 2021 | Photocrowd photo competitions & community site

Anyone who has participated in the club's annual nest box inspections and cleaning will be familiar with the phenomenon of Tree Swallows adding feathers to their nests – especially white ones. Now a possible explanation: the birds may be faking a crime scene! Check out this Atlantic article.
https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/11/birds-nest-feathers-crime-scene/620711/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=atlantic-daily-newsletter&utm_content=20211123&silverid=%25%25RECIPIENT_ID%25%25&utm_term=The%20Atlantic%20Daily_

A generous serving of balderdash from our own Independent Free Press. I admit that one of the animals – the deer or black-legged tick – is undeniably scary. Aside from that, beware of fearsome Fishers and lurking Io Moth caterpillars.
10 most-feared Ontario animals and insects: How dangerous are they? (theifp.ca)

Winter Florida Birds Photo Quiz

Photos by: Dave Welfare

Answers on page 27

Answers to the Photo Quiz on page 26

1. Black Vulture
2. Anhinga
3. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
4. Great Horned Owl
5. Northern Mockingbird
6. Ruddy Turnstone
7. Loggerhead Shrike
8. Red-shouldered Hawk
9. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
10. Reddish Egret

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Application Type: New_____ Renewal_____

Membership Type: Single ($30)____ Family ($40)____

If "Family Membership", please list additional names:

_____

The membership year is September 1 to August 31. Renewals are due in September. For new members who join after April 1, the fees are applied to the following year's membership.

****

Participation in our outings involves walking or hiking on various trails. By voluntarily participating, you assume full responsibility for all risks of personal injury. Make sure that any outing you choose to participate in is within your fitness level. Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear.

****

Please fill out this form and bring it to our next indoor meeting, or mail it along with a cheque payable to Halton/North Peel Naturalist club to:

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

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1

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Interim Vice President: Ian Jarvie (905) 877-1441
Secretary: Helen Pinchen (519) 766-8876
Treasurer: David Williams (905) 877-1539

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Membership: Lorysa Cornish
Newsletter: Laura Weihs
Webmaster Communications Director: John Beaudette
Member at Large: Fiona Reid
Member at Large: Andy Kovacs
Ontario Nature Rep: Don Scallen
Roving: William McIlveen
Hardy Property Steward: Helen Pinchen
Crozier Property Steward: John & Margaret Beaudette

Meetings are currently held via ZOOM.
When in person meetings resume, they will once again be held at
St Alban's Church at 537 Main St, Glen Williams
Meetings start at 7:30 p.m.