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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 41, Number 3

March – April 2007

Club Activities

Indoor: Meetings begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of the month, October to June at St. Andrew's United Church, 89 Mountainview Road South (at Sinclair) in Georgetown unless stated otherwise.

Feb. 13: Central and South America, and the Bruce Peninsula. Bev Whatmough will be giving a presentation on some of the flora and fauna, and a look at the new Bruce Peninsula Park and Fathom Five Park interpretive centre.

Mar. 13: Re-introduction of Elk into Ontario. Meagan Hazell will speak about her research on the release of large ruminants into Ontario

Apr. 10: Halton Natural Areas Inventory. Andrea Dunn, Conservation Halton, will be talking on the results of the Sixteen Mile Creek Monitoring Study. Andrea was the coordinator of the project.

Outdoor: Trips begin at the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) parking lot at Guelph and Mountainview Road, Georgetown, unless stated otherwise. If you would like to meet the group at the trip site, please speak to the trip leader for the location and directions to the starting point.

Jan. 21: Burlington Waterfowl. Meet 8:00 am. In case of inclement weather, check ahead with the trip leaders, Kelly Bowen and Andrew Kellman (905) 873-7338

Feb.18: Butterfly Conservatory, Niagara Falls, Ontario. Meet at the NEC parking lot at 8:00 am, or at the conservatory at about 9:30 am. Admission is \$11 for adults. This should be a great opportunity to photograph butterflies and get a winter taste of the tropics! Depending on the weather and the group's interests we may do some birding along the Niagara River or Lake Ontario in the afternoon. In case of inclement weather, check ahead with trip leaders Kelly and Andrew (905) 873-7338.

Mar. 17: Annual trip to Long Point. Long Point is a resting and feeding stop for Tundra Swans on the way to their breeding grounds in the far north. Many other species of waterfowl and some returning songbirds are usually seen too. Meet Ray Blower at 8:00 a.m. Bring lunch or money for lunch, binoculars, and scopes. Call Ray to join the outing at another location (519) 853-0171.

Apr. 21: Beamer Conservation Area Hawk Watch, Grimsby. Meet 9:00 am. On this trip, we stop at the Scotch Block reservoir, Islay Lake, and La Salle Park on the way to the Beamer Hawk Watch at the top of the escarpment in Grimsby. Even though the hawks may not blacken the sky during our trip, we always see some of them. In addition, a good variety of songbirds and waterfowl are seen. Some things to bring: binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. Call Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171 with any questions.

May 20: Thickson Wood Spring Birding, Whitby. Meeting times and locations to be arranged with trip leader, Ray Blower, (519) 853-0171 in Acton or (905) 444-9454 in Whitby. This trip is scheduled on the Sunday of the Victoria Day weekend to minimize the effect of traffic on participants coming from points west. Meeting times at Thickson Wood can be arranged for any time between 06:00 to 11:00, if the weather is reasonable. Lynde Shores Conservation Area and Cranberry Marsh are the other places visited. All locations are near the cool Lake Ontario, so bring warm clothing, binoculars, scope, water, lunch, hat and sunscreen. These places provide a variety of habitats including mature forest, meadows, marshes, swamps, scrub land and Lake Ontario. Almost any song bird may be seen as well as a variety of the "late" ducks

Young Naturalists

Note: Meetings and outings begin at 1:00 pm the last Saturday of the month.

Jan. 27: For details call Nancy and Andy Kovacs (905) 702-1132.

President's Message

I hope that everyone had a great Christmas holiday season, and best wishes for the year to come. I think that everyone who attended our Christmas potluck at Limehouse had a good time, and much food and photos were shared by all. The lack of winter weather this year so far has made it easier to travel about, but I'm sure a few club members are itching to don their skis and snowshoes and head into the woods. Oh well, winter's not over yet – maybe you'll be reading this in the middle of a snowstorm!

The Christmas bird count, held on December 27, was a success as always. A big thanks goes out to Bill McIlveen for organizing this annual event. My overall impression of the count this year was that some songbirds seemed to be less abundant, especially blue jays and mourning doves. This may have been due to mild weather, lack of snow and the lowered dependence on feeders this year. Similarly, snow buntings, longspurs, horned larks and redpolls were absent this year. However, the abundance of waterfowl, (especially Canada geese and mallards) brought our total numbers up to about average levels. I'm sure you'll hear more from Bill about actual numbers from the count.

On another note, I wish to congratulate and thank all the people involved in the Halton Natural Areas Inventory, completed in 2006. Again, Bill was instrumental in making this project a success. Copies of the inventory's final report have been distributed to the local public libraries. Andrew and I also have a copy of the two-volume report and a CD if anyone would like to borrow them. Finally, for those people involved in the salamander boards or the Hungry Hollow ecological monitoring programs, now is a good time to get your results organized and submitted! Thanks!

Sincerely,
Kelly Bowen

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

Executive

President: Kelly Bowen (905) 873-7338
Past-President Andy Kovacs (905)702-1132
Vice-President: Andrew Kellman (905) 873-7338
Secretary: Vacant
Treasurer: Janice Sukhiani (905) 693-8227

Appointments

Membership: Vacant
Newsletter: Gerda Potzel (905) 702-1681
Ontario Nature Representative: Teresa Rigg
Public Relations: Vacant
Young Naturalists: Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132

Membership for one year: \$20 Single; \$30 Family
The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club is an affiliated member of Ontario Nature

Email submissions/questions/concerns to: gpotzel@sympatico.ca
<http://haltonnorthpeelnaturalists.org>



The Upper Credit Humane Society Thrift Shop

Moore Park Plaza, Georgetown (next to the Laundromat)

We have now been open two months! We have a fantastic array of collectibles, china, glassware, children's toys, CD's – a store easy on the pocket book!

Hours – Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – 10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Saturday – 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Ongoing donations of merchandise are needed, but NO CLOTHES are accepted at this time. All proceeds go to the animals. For more information or volunteer call (519) 833-2287.



Love Potion Number Nine?

All of us have witnessed the proliferation of little stickers of fruits and vegetables. Some people get annoyed with them. So what is their purpose when the fruit producers all go to the trouble of attaching them to every fruit, not just to representative ones in a box? Certainly, they are a form of advertising but they also allow the shopper to know who the producer was. The earliest ones I can remember were those on Chiquita brand bananas.

In recent years, the stickers have had a number added. This is the major advance that I wanted to discuss. These numbers are formally called Produce Look-up Number or PLU. In part, they help the cashier know what numbers to punch in at check out time. With so many different kinds available, it is hard for the cashiers to remember every form of fruit and vegetable that is in stock. The numbers can be informative to the consumer as well. Most of the numbers printed on the stickers consist of four digits starting with a '3' or a '4' for fruits. These are for conventionally grown produce. Some special items have a 5-digit number and these are the ones to watch for. The importance here lies in the first digit of the 5-digit numbers. Organically grown fruit have a five-numeral PLU beginning with the number '9'. Genetically engineered fruit has a five-numeral PLU beginning with the number '8'. So using this numbering system, a conventionally grown banana would be 4011, an organic banana would be 94011 and a genetically engineered banana would be 84011.

The numbering system was brought in to use in 2000 by the Produce Electronic Identification Board, an affiliate of the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) (a trade group for the produce industry). Because stickers were not always adhering the way they were supposed to, the PMA resorted to making 'security cuts around the edge of the sticker that made them conform to the rounded shapes of most fruits. That made their removal by the consumer more difficult so small tabs were added though the sticker still often tears and you are left with more but smaller parts of the label! Different forms of the adhesive have been tried. The adhesive now used to attach the stickers is food-grade, but the stickers themselves aren't edible. To remove stubborn ones, soak in warm water for a minute.

The consumer can sometimes recognize where some produce originates based on the information on the stickers. The points of origin posted on vegetable bins in the store are not always correct so the stickers can serve as a control system. The importance of this is the environmental need to purchase food that is grown locally. Such a practice reduces the amount of energy (i.e. fossil fuels) required to transport the produce over long distances and also promotes sales to help local producers. So whenever possible, the environmentally sensible thing to do is purchase local produce with that sweet number '9' leading the PLU. You and the environment will love it!

Of course technology will not let the current state last long. Originally, the PLUs were used by only certain countries in the developed world. Now more players have become involved and this has resulted in the creation of the International Federation of Codification (IPFC) for fruits and vegetables. The PLU system will disappear in a few years. In its place, there will be the RSS 14, a sort of mini bar code system. These will be tattoos created on the surface of produce with lasers. There is talk that these new laser labels will carry a lot more information such as specific point of origin and harvest date. While the proposed system does eliminate the addition of a material object to fruits and vegetables, it now creates a label that could be considered a disfigurement that cannot be peeled or soaked off. Another case of 'beware what you ask for'?

By W.D. McIlveen

Kayaking Adventures on Georgian Bay

Kelly and I headed to the north end of Georgian Bay in August for a sea kayaking trip starting at Killarney Provincial Park, and ending at the Key River and Hwy 69. With 12 days' supply of food and gear all packed into the 16' kayaks we started out late afternoon for our first trip, by ourselves, on the Great Lakes of Ontario. We camped on small rocky islands – some were designated sites near the French River, but most were isolated spots we picked on crown land. Tent pegs were often impossible given the bedrock, and the last day the only way we could hold the tent down in the howling wind was to put a rock in each corner.

On our journey out of Beaverstone Bay to the French River delta, we passed through a group of islands called The Chickens. We saw many Monarch butterflies here, but no chickens. The butterflies were often far from shore, but on land they seemed to prefer goldenrod.

On the nights that were clear we were treated to the Perseid meteor shower. What a sight when you have no light pollution! The trick was to hide in the tent at dusk, then lie on the still warm rocks when the mosquitoes died down. Sometimes the stars were joined by the call of loons.

We paddled across Georgian Bay from the French River to a group of islands called the Bustards. They sit about 5 km offshore with a few cottages and a couple of camp sites. This was a thriving commercial fishing settlement until the 1950s when the Sea Lamprey and over-fishing depleted the stocks. When reading about the history of Georgian Bay we also learned that fishermen blamed the saw mills as early as 1900 for destroying spawning beds with saw dust. You can still see the remnants of both these industries in Collin's Inlet, the Bustards, the French River and Key Harbour. In some spots, old dock pilings still line the water's edge.

While out in the Bustards we experienced some windy days, so we explored the sheltered channels between the islands. We were quite taken by the swirling colourful rock formations, and enjoyed going places that the big cruisers and sail boats could not go. One day we watched a water snake eat a sculpin, a small bottom-dwelling fish. We also put our "new" used kayaks through their paces and learned what we could handle in terms of waves. Lots of fun once our confidence grew a bit!



We did not see many birds, but we did see a Bald Eagle, Common Loons, Caspian Terns and mergansers. The gulls, ravens and turkey vultures were our other companions. Some sites had many frogs living in the stagnant, mosquito-filled pools in the bedrock hollows. On the Bustards, a very bold vole repeatedly explored our cooking area. On our last night there, we also had a close visit by a young bear. Andrew yelled and scared it off, but we kept the bear bangers handy in case of any more visits.

After 10 days on the water, we headed up the Key River back civilization and the land of french fries. We really couldn't complain as we ate well on the trip (e.g., fresh baked pizza and cinnamon rolls)!

On our way back home we drove across Manitoulin Island – unexplored country for us. While driving across the island we saw over 20 Sandhill Cranes in the fields. That was a memorable sight to see, and a good ending to our fantastic trip.

Andrew Kellman

