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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 48, Number 3

January-February 2014

Walks and Talks

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

January 14, 2014

Rod Krick and the Grassland Birds Recovery Program

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

February 11, 2014

Paloma Plant, Program Coordinator: Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP)

For years FLAP, headquartered in Toronto, has been battling the carnage that results when migratory birds strike office windows. In 2012 FLAP found 3734 birds of over 90 species felled by collisions with buildings in Toronto. Most were dead but a significant minority was found alive and later released. These totals, of course, represent the tip of the iceberg. Many millions of migrants die each year in cities across North America. FLAP does more than simply recover downed birds. It has also been involved in court cases involving businesses that fail to take measures to protect migratory birds. Ms. Plant will give us an overview of the actions FLAP engages in to rescue birds and of the initiatives FLAP is involved in to mitigate the terrible toll of window collisions.

March 11, 2014

Sheila Colla, Bumblebee identification and conservation

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

April 8, 2014

Michelle Gorrie, Fish of the Credit River

Club member Michelle Gorrie will talk to us about the fascinating fish that inhabit the watershed. The Credit River, just metres away from our meeting venue in Glen Williams, is home not only to trout and Atlantic salmon, but to a host of lesser known fish that also merit our attention such as sculpins, darters and dace. Michelle will help us identify some of these fish and teach us about their ecology. Invasive gobies and the ominous possibility of an Asian carp invasion of Ontario waters, will also receive attention.

Outdoor Events

January 18th, La Salle Park, Burlington; Waterfowl and other winter birds. **Fiona Reid** will lead a walk to this area (assuming the lake is not frozen at that time). We will also visit other areas in search of owls or bald eagles that have been seen in Burlington recently. This is planned as a morning outing, but time and day will depend on weather. Contact Fiona (905-693-9719) fiona.reid7243@gmail.com for details and carpooling.

January 26th, Snow bunting banding, organized by Emily Dobson; car poolers meet at 7:45 banding from 9am to 12pm. For those wishing/able to carpool, please meet at the Payless Shoe Store parking lot in Georgetown. If you need a ride you can send Emily an email or call to ensure there is an extra spot for you. If you'd like to meet us at the banding site, try to be there 15 minutes early as it's a bit challenging to find, and is about an hour from Georgetown.

David bands in West Garafraxa at the intersection of Sideroad 25 and 6 Line, just east of Arthur. If you are coming from Orangeville, simply get on 109 (the old HWY 9) heading towards Arthur and cross into Wellington county. The town line is concession 8 -- so go two more concessions to 6 Line and turn left - go one concession over and there is Sideroad 25. Look for a blue Mazda truck and a cold guy banding Snow Buntings. David will be backed into a driveway. Please park in a safe location along the road.

Here is a map with directions from Georgetown:

<https://maps.google.ca/maps?saddr=Georgetown,+ON&daddr=6+Line+and+sideroad+25&hl=en&ll=43.744313,-80.156937&spn=0.294657,0.676346&sll=43.744809,-80.238647&sspn=0.294654,0.676346&geocode=FZ0MmgIdeMQ8-ylllogGKQ0riDFmhE4nSma9hQ%3BFtLTnAIdXAo1-yk3FK8207kriDHilKAF9sdnSQ&mra=ls&t=m&z=11>

If you plan on coming, get lost along the way, or need further information, please call Emily at 647-996-6512 or email emilydobson@hotmail.com. And don't forget to dress warmly and keep your eyes open for snowy owls as you're driving!

Sat. March 15, 2014. Tundra Swans at Long Point; Flocks of Tundra Swans stop at Long Point during their spring migration to their northern breeding grounds. Many other species of waterfowl, early-returning songbirds, Bald Eagle, and Short-eared Owl may also be seen on this long day trip. Be advised that lunch at the restaurant is usually after 1:00 and we usually do not head for home until around sunset. Bring snacks, water, a lunch or money for the restaurant, and layers of warm clothing, etc. Call **Ray Blower**, [\(519\)853-0171](tel:5198530171) by Thursday, March 13 for more details.

President's Message

Happy New Year to all our Club members!

And how incredibly welcome the New Year was, arriving shortly after power was at last restored. For me it was a 7-day blackout, and I know for others it was longer still. Being in a cold house in midwinter just makes me admire all the more the small birds and animals that brave the outdoors year-round. The chickadees at the feeder, puffed up in the cold, have to find food and shelter every day, and throughout such inhospitable weather. Don't forget to help them out!

Our trees have taken a tremendous beating, their tops lopped off as if by a drunken giant wielding a very dull machete! It will be interesting to see how the new growth appears and if there is any benefit to this strange kind of pruning. In town, many trees were split in half. If you have lost a Weeping Willow or Norway Maple, now is a good time to consider replacing those non-natives with a native species. Native trees are adapted to local weather and they also provide food and homes for our native wildlife.

We have a great line-up of talks and several outdoor walks of interest coming up, so I hope to see everyone at these events.

*Best wishes,
Fiona*



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

Executive

President: Fiona Reid (905) 693-9719
Past President Andrew Kellman (905) 681-3701
Vice President: Don Scallen (905) 877-2876
Secretary: Anne Fraser (905)-877-1844
Treasurer: Janice Sukhiani (647) 408-9515
Roving: Bill McIlveen, Emily Dobson

Appointments

Membership: Valerie Dobson (905) 828-1729
Newsletter: Jeff Normandeau
Ontario Nature Representative: Freyja Whitten
Public Relations: Sandy Gillians
Webmaster: Sarah Lalonde
Crozier Property Steward: Marg Wilkes
Hardy Property Steward: Ray Blower

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

www.hnpnc.com

Field Reports

Sam Smith Park, November 16th

Fiona Reid and Sandy Gillians

Our party of two had a great outing to this urban park. It is closer than Leslie Street Spit, with a lot less walking and some really good wetland and lakeshore habitats. Our first bird of interest was a Gray Catbird near a small pond. On the pond shore we also saw a young Black-crowned Night Heron and some Shoveler and Gadwall. Up ahead a Hooded Merganser caught our eye. On the lake were many ducks and grebes, and we had excellent views of a nice male Harlequin Duck! On our way back we saw many signs of Beaver (we had already seen a Muskrat swimming) and then we saw a Northern Mockingbird that has been residing in the area for some time, according to local birders. I hope we can return with more club members in future.

Our species list for the day is below.

Black-crowned Night-Heron	Black-capped Chickadee
Northern Cardinal	Redhead
Blue Jay	Horned Grebe
American Black Duck	Gray Catbird
Bufflehead	Northern Mockingbird
Common Goldeneye	Downy Woodpecker
Gadwall	Red-necked Grebe
Harlequin Duck	Tree Sparrow
Hooded Merganser	American Goldfinch
Lesser Scaup	American Robin
Long-tailed Duck	Mourning Dove
Mallard	Northern Shoveler
Mute Swan	Red-tailed Hawk (on way back)
Red-breasted Merganser	



Long-tailed Ducks, Fiona Reid

Results of the 2013 Halton Hills Christmas Bird Count

W.D. McIlveen

The 23rd annual Christmas Bird Count that took place on December 27, 2013 will be a most memorable one. The outstanding feature of the Count will be remembered not so much for the count results as for the weather that occurred a few days earlier. That weather included freezing rain that amounted to at least three cm of ice over all exposed surfaces. The consequence of the ice was extensive breakage of tree branches and electrical power outages that were still happening in parts of the survey area. Overall, there were 23 participants that took part in the field observations or checked their feeders.

Generally, the Count produced close to average results based on comparisons with previous counts in the case of numbers of species reported - 49 species on count day vs. 50 species for the long-term average. By contrast, the total numbers of birds seen was 5239 - slightly over half of the average of 9760. The results for the individual species are presented in the attached table. A new species for the Count was a Turkey Vulture that was reported to the OntBirds website. Only one species, the Red-bellied Woodpecker was present in record high numbers with 15 birds seen. Many species were reported at low numbers, both below average and at new lows. The new low numbers were noted with Mallards (26), Black-capped Chickadees (243), American Tree Sparrow (55), and Northern Cardinal (22). No Black Ducks were observed. Wild Turkey (50), Hairy Woodpecker (26), Blue Jay (171) and American Robin (95) were noted in above average numbers but not in record high numbers. The species that made it onto the Count Week list were Snowy Owl and Snow Bunting.

The impact of the ice storm that appeared to generally lower the observed bird populations cannot be assessed with any certainty. In part, the lower numbers of ducks and geese might also be correlated with early freeze-up of local water bodies. This would not explain the lower numbers of the more-terrestrial species. Only time will tell whether the decreased numbers are merely a blip or part of a long-term trend.

Thanks to the following participants: Judy Biggar, Ray Blower, Brent Chase, Mark Cranford, Kim Dobson, Ramona Dobson, Pam Forsyth, Ann Fraser, Sandy Gillians, Betty Ann Goldstein, Dan MacNeal, Katie McDonnell, Irene McIlveen, W.D. McIlveen, Fiona Reid, Dawn Renfrew, Don Scallen, Dan Shuurman, Janice Sukhiani, Patrick Tuck, Tom Wenzel, George Wilkes, and Marge Wilkes.

Many thanks once more to Larry May for arranging access to the Maple Lodge Farms property and to the Halton Regional Police Service for making their community boardroom available for the wrap-up session.

Results of the 2013 Christmas Bird Count at Halton Hills

Species	Total	Avg.	Low	High	Species	Total	Avg.	Low	High
Canada Goose	1622	2153	229	4577	Northern Shrike	3	4	1	19
Mallard	26	557	135	1636	Blue Jay	171	149	60	333
Common Goldeneye	1	5	1	18	American Crow	205	357	55	692
Common Merganser	6	12	1	66	Common Raven	3	2	0	3
Ruffed Grouse	2	4	0	8	Black-capped Chickadee	243	654	244	1211
Wild Turkey	50	21	0	55	Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	9	1	22
Great Blue Heron	1	1	0	4	White-breasted Nuthatch	24	43	19	82
Turkey Vulture	1	NA	NA	NA	Brown Creeper	2	3	1	8
Bald Eagle	1	1	0	3	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	7	1	30
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	4	1	11	Eastern Bluebird	1	4	0	8
Cooper's Hawk	4	3	0	6	American Robin	95	41	1	266
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	1	1	2	European Starling	959	1991	485	3490
Red-tailed Hawk	42	63	39	117	Cedar Waxwing	3	84	7	240
American Kestrel	1	10	0	16	American Tree Sparrow	55	311	95	837
Ring-billed Gull	10	159	1	2010	White-throated Sparrow	2	2	1	10
Herring Gull	4	39	1	222	Slate-colored Junco	246	275	91	693
Rock Pigeon	291	601	210	1455	Snow Bunting	CW	241	1	1118
Mourning Dove	510	670	191	1385	Northern Cardinal	22	61	29	101
Eastern Screech Owl	2	2	0	4	Purple Finch	2	13	1	52
Great Horned Owl	2	2	0	5	House Finch	44	213	23	456
Snowy Owl	CW	1	0	1	Pine Siskin	1	17	1	58
Belted Kingfisher	2	3	1	7	American Goldfinch	279	197	37	470
Red-bellied Woodpecker	15	4	0	11	House Sparrow	211	624	196	1316
Downy Woodpecker	35	50	21	91					
Hairy Woodpecker	26	17	2	32	Total Birds	5239	9760	3131	15507
Pileated Woodpecker	1	3	0	12	No. Species	49	50	41	57



Articles

A Solst**ICE** to Remember

W.D. McIlveen

There is little doubt that the winter solstice of 2013 will be one to remember for a long time to come. The situation was certainly not unprecedented for some freezing rain occurs in most winters. And the amount of rain that fell was less than that which happened in the great ice storm of 1998 in Ontario. Yet the extent of area that was impacted and the number of people affected in 2013 might well be much greater. More time will be required for a proper assessment of the effects to be completed but the following is a preliminary set of observations from our area.

The storm was not a single event but two similar storms that followed the same track about two days apart. As it turns out, our area fell in the zone where the ambient temperatures were too low for the precipitation to fall as rain and too warm to fall as snow. As measured at the Pearson Airport, the amount of rain that fell on December 20 was 8.6 mm followed by 16.6 mm and 13.6 mm on the two days following respectively for a total of 38.8 mm. The distribution of the rainfall as shown in the attached map obtained from the CBC weather forecast indicates that the highest amount of rain was expected further west of Toronto so it would not be unreasonable to expect that we experienced well over 40mm. By comparison, the amount of rain reported during the 1998 storm was 85 mm in Ottawa, 73 mm in Kingston, 108 in Cornwall and 100 mm in Montreal.



Fig.1 - Map of precipitation pattern in Ontario for December 20, 2013 from CBC News

The net result was an accumulation of a thick layer of ice on all exposed surfaces. The thickness on tree branches was observed to be at least 30 mm on the upper side surfaces. Considering the possibility of dripping, three dimensional distribution and multiple of layers branches, it is conceivable that the true amount of rain here was perhaps double

that measured at Toronto. It appeared that the amount of damage above the Niagara Escarpment was greater than that at lower elevations.

The ice that accumulated resulted in a huge weight stresses on the tree branches. Although many factors are involved, the stress resulted in a great amount of branch breakage. It was estimated that about a quarter of the tree canopy in Toronto was damaged by the ice. Falling branches caused extensive damage to power lines and many support poles were broken. It took up to ten days to get all power restored. Fallen branches also blocked sections of roadways.

There are additional factors to consider including species involved and branching patterns of individual trees but two patterns were evident in the breakage. Large branches that broke were often suffering from some previous damage or decay, especially when the branch crotches were narrow. The second thing was there were huge numbers of smaller branches that were broken, usually in the upper crown. The branches affected exhibited a reasonable consistency in diameter where the break occurred. This was at branch diameters of 6 to 10 cm. It seems reasonable to conclude that the wood strength at diameters greater than this were able to support the load of ice. At lower diameters, the individual twigs were flexible enough to withstand the ice. But at the indicated diameters, the branches supported a certain combination of number of twigs of a particular length such that the critical load-bearing strength of the supporting branch was exceeded and so it broke. A very similar pattern was evident in Eastern Ontario following the storm of 1998. When trees did not break, the trunks bent under the load. In some cases, species such as poplars and birch bent to a high degree, sometimes involving trunk diameters that were well in excess of what one might expect as possible.

Despite the obvious damage, especially where entire trees had to be removed, the long-term impact likely to be limited. Broken branches will undoubtedly reduce the rate of growth of the trees for a short period of time. It is to be expected that broken branches will create potential infection courts for decay to become established. Studies of this kind were initiated following the storm of 1998 but the results of those studies have not been widely distributed. When one travels through eastern Ontario, it is becoming increasingly difficult to see broken branches as the branches lower on the trunk have grown and surpassed the point of the break.

While we cannot say with certainty that a similar storm will or will not occur again in the near future, the possibility for such a storm will always remain. While it may be counter intuitive that an ice storm resulted from global warming, that may in fact be the case. Global warming is expected to alter the frequency and severity of storms but storms can occur in all seasons. It will not be possible to attribute any individual storm to climate change. All we will be able to do is observe that more storms occur and deal with them as they arise.



Fig. 2. Woods with ice damage, Nassagaweya-Esquesing Line north of Sideroad 15



Fig. 3. Ice damage to willows, Dublin Line.

One Step Forward, One Step Back – Recent Changes in Invasive Species

W.D. McIlveen

The situation regarding invasive species is never static. Periodically we get good news mixed in with the gloomy reports of some new species that has appeared at our door. And so it is that we have some recent changes in local matters pertaining to invasive alien species.

Starting with the bad news first, the Asian Longhorn Beetle (*Anoplophora glabripennis*) which attacks a wide range of tree hosts had been declared eradicated from the Cities of Toronto and Vaughn. By 2003, the beetle had established a modest area of infestation in the boundary area between those municipalities. An intensive program was launched to eliminate the infestation by cutting and destroying all of the host trees within a 400 metre radius of the infestation. After detailed surveys of the area had found no more indications of the beetle for a period of five years, the pest was declared eradicated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on April 5, 2013. Unfortunately, a new infestation was detected in an industrial area on American Drive near Pearson International Airport in Mississauga on September 20, 2013. It is not known if the two areas of infestation are connected. They are not located too far apart so a connection cannot be ruled out though a new source of infestation is presumed. Multiple points of infestation are known at other locations in North America where similar eradication programs had been carried out. Some trees have already been cut down and it is expected that a similar form of eradication program will be undertaken to insure that the beetles do not spread.

On August 23, 2013, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) reported that two round gobies (*Neogobius melanostomus*) were caught in the west Credit River at Hillsburgh. Additional surveys found at least 50 more of the fish just downstream. Previously, the species had been found only at sites in the catchment area where the water was closely connected to Lake Ontario, a location where the species has become well-established. It seems improbable that the fish had made it to Hillsburgh across dams and other obstacles without some sort of human intervention, whether intentionally or unintentionally. A program to manage the problem species needs to be developed in concert with MNR, CVC, local land owners and other stakeholders.

Not all news concerning invasive species is bad. In 2006, moth larvae were found feeding on swallow-worts in southern Ukraine. The larvae were brought to the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI), a highly recognized facility that studies biological control agents, in Switzerland for rearing and initial testing. The moths were found to be host-specific and very effective in controlling the host plant. Additional testing was done at the control facility at the University of Rhode Island to verify the results. The tests were so successful that the University petitioned the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2012 to allow for the release of the moth to control the Swallow-wort problem. The US still requires one additional step before approval is granted but that approval appears to be easily achievable (after the current political financial situation is resolved in that country). The application though has met all of the conditions set by Canada concerning the release of a biological control agent. As a result, 500 of the moth larvae were released at infested sites near Ottawa. So far, the caterpillars appear to be surviving well and the populations are being monitored. In time, it is not unreasonable to

expect to see the moths make their way to our area. While there are many areas in the Province where Swallow-worts are a problem, there are many places around Toronto (e.g. Don River Valley) where the populations are very dense. The moth is known as *Hypena opulenta* (Figure 10). It resembles a few other *Hypena* species that occur in our area; however, those other species do not feed on Swallow-wort. This similarity and any resulting confusion may hinder the monitoring of the spread of the species into our area but the presence of the distinctive caterpillars (Figure 2) feeding on the plants should be easy enough. Naturalists should be on the lookout for these caterpillars wherever the Swallow-wort is present though it may take several years to reach here on its own.



Figure 1. Adult *Hypena opulenta*



Figure 2. Larva of *Hypena opulenta*

Groundhogs

Don Scallen

Our landscape is networked by roads – ribbons of death where myriad animals from butterflies to deer meet their demise. And though morbid, an objective look at this mortality can provide insight into changing animal populations.

In the 1960's and 70's groundhogs, aka woodchucks, were among the most frequent victims of vehicular faunacide. Their bodies littered roadsides as raccoon carcasses do today.

Groundhogs are now rare road-kill victims. No, they haven't evolved the ability to look both ways before crossing. Rather, the lack of road killed groundhogs suggests that their population has fallen off an ecological cliff.

When I was young, groundhogs - when not playing Russian roulette with cars - stood sentinel in meadows. Boys with 22's shot them, with the approval of landowners who reviled groundhogs as varmints – diggers of holes that could snap the leg bones of cattle and horses.

I didn't wield a rifle as a child, but I would sit patiently beside groundhog burrows, waiting for the myopic mammals to poke their heads above ground and sniff the air for predators.

I enjoyed these close interactions with groundhogs and imagined that First Nation's hunters may have used this technique – crouching like polar bears at the breathing holes of seals – to capture the plump rodents.

So what happened to the groundhogs? Well, certainly their population has been reduced by the aforementioned road-kill, but it is likely no coincidence that the fall corresponded with a rise in coyote numbers.

In southern Ontario and throughout much of North America, coyotes have flourished in recent decades, assuming the role of top predator, filling the void left by the disappearance of wolves.

If a 12 year old boy can approach a groundhog near enough to see its whiskers twitch, consider how easy this would be for a coyote - with predictably unpleasant consequences for the groundhog.



For more photos: <http://www.inthehills.ca/2013/12/blogs/groundhogs/>

We Need Your Input!

Recently the club has been looking at different options for our website. Two choices emerged. In order to help make a final decision between the two we want to ensure the chosen site will be accessible by as many people as possible. So please have a look at the two sites and give us your input. We don't need to know which site you prefer as style can be changed on either. Simply all we want to know is; **do the various pages on the sites load properly for your computer?** So please have a look at the below links and email Fiona (Fiona.reid7243@gmail.com) with your observations.

If you are a webmaster on the side, please let us know if you want to access the site and see how easy it is to use. At this time we have great people who can add material to either site, but we never know when that will change, so ease of editing is also a consideration.

Thank you for your help.

<http://hnpnc.com/site/about>

<http://hnpnclub.wix.com/hnpnclub>

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

_____ Renewal or _____ New Member(s) Date _____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership renewal fee

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

New members' fees from sign-up date:

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

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

June through to August _____ Single (\$ 7.50) _____ Family (\$10.00)

Do you have any suggestions for programs or field trips?

WAIVER OF LIABILITY

(**must** be signed by anyone planning to attend field trips or other outdoor activities)

In making this application, I affirm that I am in good health, capable of performing the exercise required to participate, and that I accept as my personal risk the hazards of such participation and will not hold the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club or its representatives responsible.

In consideration of the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club accepting my application, I hereby and forever release and discharge the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club and its officers, directors, servants and agents from any liability whatsoever arising as a result of my participation in these trips and declare that this is binding upon me, my heirs, executors, administrators and assigned.

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

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

Please fill out this form and bring it in to next indoor meeting or mail with payment to:

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

**Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club
Meeting Location
St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams**

