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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 49, Number 1

September–October 2014

Walks and Talks

Indoor: Meetings begin at 7:30 pm 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.

September 9, 2014

Josh Feltham, Fleming College Professor: Road Ecology

Josh waxed poetic about skinks at our May meeting. He is an engaging, entertaining speaker and it is with pleasure that we welcome him back to kick off our new season. Josh will speak to us about the relatively new science of road ecology that seeks to mitigate the carnage that our road networks exact on wildlife. For some animals including reptiles and amphibians, road death is tremendously destructive. As we attempt to move towards a more sustainable future it is incumbent upon us to look for solutions.

October 14, 2014

Carolyn Zanchetta, Bird Studies Canada: Chimney swifts and barn swallows

Carolyn will speak to us about two species of birds in steep decline. Chimney swift populations in particular have plummeted in recent decades. Various factors may be responsible including fewer insects, reduced nesting sites and dramatic weather events. Both species are now listed as “threatened” by the Committee on the Status of Wildlife in Canada. For anyone who has thrilled to the aerial acrobatics of these master flyers this is bad news. Carolyn will explain how Bird Studies Canada is responding to the crisis.

November 11, 2014

David d’Entremont, Terrestrial Ecologist Royal Botanical Gardens: Damselflies and dragonflies (odonata)

They’re drop dead gorgeous, ancient and they dance upon the air. Damsels and dragons are David’s passion. He recently identified a new species for RBG where he works. Club members who work for CVC should be particularly interested in attending this talk as apparently “odonataphilia” is sweeping their ranks.

December 9, 2014

Our annual **Pot Luck Dinner**. Come for the conviviality and Ray’s legendary bean salad. Usually we invite members to share a few nature images after the feast and that will likely be the program again this year. Stay tuned for updates closer to the event.

President's Message

Greetings to all,

Goodbye summer, hello fall. Come to think of it, where was summer this year?

Summer was not a wow for those of us who like it hot (tomato crops were poor, moth numbers down), but we are seeing some very pleasant weather now that September has arrived. The trees have at least been able to take up sufficient moisture to encourage new growth after the ravages of winter, and I expect the fall colours will be especially good this year.

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

*Best wishes,
Fiona*

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Charity Registration number 869778761RR0001

Executive

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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.



Mayflies at Ballfield light, Glen Williams, August 18, 2014

Report on Evening Walks for 2014 – South Peel Naturalists And Halton North Peel Naturalists

During the summer of 2014 (May 26 to August 25), a total of 14 evening walks were organized for various areas of Halton and Peel Regions. The site locations are listed in the following table along with the names of the leaders and the numbers of participants on each walk. An attempt was made to alternate sites in the south and the north part of the area. Overall, there were five different leaders (Ray Blower, Kirsten Burling, W. McIlveen, , Dawn Renfrew, and Leanne Wallis).

One of the walks was cancelled due to heavy rain which reduced the potential attendance and to eliminate any safety concerns that wet trails might cause. Excluding the cancelled walks, the numbers of participants (excluding the leaders) ranged from two to 9 with an average of six participants per walk. This is very close to the attendance in 2013. There was a small core group of participants that came out for most walks but there were also many walks where the participants were infrequent attendants. Two were not typical walks. The trip that took place on the weekend of August 9 and 10 went to two oak savannah sites in Windsor and to two sites at Point Pelee. At those locations, the participants were treated to fine weather and saw many rare species of plants and butterflies. The trip on August 18 met in Limehouse but the event actually happened in Glen Williams where we participated in the 'Shadfly Festival' and we got to see huge numbers of mayflies emerging from the river.

Overall, comments from people that did come out for the walks indicated that they found the trips to be interesting and enjoyable.

Date	Location	Leader	Attendance
26-May-2014	Conely Tract	Bill McIlveen	6 people
2-Jun-2014	Indian Ridge Trail	Bill McIlveen	6 people
9-Jun-2014	Jacquith property	Dawn Renfrew	9 people
16-Jun-2014	Arbourview Woods	Bill McIlveen	5 people
23-Jun-2014	Silver Creek at 8th Line	Leanne Wallis	Rained out
30-Jun-2014	Iroquois Shoreline Park	Bill McIlveen	5 people
7-Jul-2014	Limehouse Area	Dawn Renfrew	4 people
14-Jul-2014	LaSalle Park	Bill McIlveen	3 people
21-Jul-2014	Limehouse Area Springle	Dawn Renfrew	6 people
28-Jul-2014	Beachway Park	Bill McIlveen	10 people
4-Aug-2014	Limehouse Area	Ray Blower	4 people
9-10-Aug-2014	Windsor Weekend	Bill McIlveen	6 people
18-Aug-2014	Limehouse Area	Ray Blower	6 people
25-Aug-2014	Ratray Marsh	Kirsten Burling	8 people

It is anticipated that evening walks will be continued in 2015. If possible, we will try to time one of the evenings in August to take place at the time of the Shadfly Festival. Consideration will also be given to having one evening walk coincide with a Chimney Swift count (e.g. Oakville).

By W. D. McIlveen

Great Egrets

Great egrets evoke notions of southern swamps - of alligators, bald cypress trees and Spanish moss. And yet, they are now common inhabitants of Ontario wetlands. At this time of year, post- nesting egrets are assembling at foraging sites, prior to their southward migration. Sandy Gillians and I counted about 50 egrets along the Beaver River near Kimberly recently. Other late summer roosts include Luther Marsh and Cootes Paradise.

Great egrets are a balm to disillusioned naturalists all too familiar with the loss and retreat of wildlife. They represent the promise of recovery. Once teetering on the brink of extinction, they were rescued by a remarkable conservation effort initiated by a small group of women in Boston.



Egrets were being slaughtered by the thousands in the 19th century America. Fashion mavens of the day advertised their status by adorning their heads with wildly extravagant hats, sprouting flowers and fruit. But more exotic accoutrements were desired.

Milliners obliged by affixing feathers, heads or the bodies of colourful birds to the hats they sold. Feathers of bluebirds, blue-jays, orioles and, of course, egrets were all commonly used. Stuffed warblers and hummingbirds peeked out blindly between the plumes. Even small stuffed mammals and reptiles clung to the hats of Patrician ladies as they sipped their afternoon tea.

Like today, most 19th century consumers thought little about the provenance of the products they bought. As now, purchases of clothing and accessories were motivated primarily by style and price. Sometimes though, uncomfortable truths rattle the public conscience: Think the Bangladeshi garment industry or the blood diamond trade.

The uncomfortable truth of bird slaughter for the millinery trade dawned on a group of well-connected Bostonian women in 1896 and the Audubon Society was born. They launched the first modern-style conservation campaign, successfully pressuring politicians to end to the killing.

The success of those early conservation pioneers is evident in the magnificent egrets that grace Southern Ontario in the 21st century.

By Don Scallen

The Significance of the Transit of Venus

W.D. McIlveen

About two years ago, there was an event that made a notable item in the news. This was the phenomenon where the planet Venus traces a course across the face of the sun. This happened on June 5, 2012. A similar transit took place on June 8, 2004. Transits of Venus are rare events, occurring in pairs about eight years apart but separated by periods of over a century. As notable as this recent event might have been, it was rather minor in significance by comparison with the attention paid in 1769 as described below.

During the 18th Century and onward, marine shipping around the world was increasing in importance, whether for commercial or military purposes. A critical part of this activity was the dependence upon the ability of ships to navigate the seas. At this time, ship captains could determine their latitude reasonably well based on the technology that existed at the time. The matter of knowing their longitude was an entirely different matter. By not knowing both the latitude and longitude, it was very difficult to know their true position and as a result, a great many ships were lost in various mishaps at sea.

In 1716, Edmund Halley realized that the problem of longitude could be resolved by understanding the direction, angular separation of planets and stars and the distance between them. A critical factor is knowing the distance of the earth from the sun. Halley realized that an ideal opportunity for making this distance measurement would occur by accurately observing the transit of Venus across the face of the sun and using this information in some complex mathematical calculations. He knew that the next such opportunities for making the needed observations would happen in 1761 and 1769. Although he never lived long enough to witness the results of the work carried out by astronomers making the measurements, he did set in motion an international process to collect the critical information.

Based on sea voyages to St. Helena and Barbados in 1764 and celestial observations made there, Nevil Maskelyne, Astronomer Royal of England, was able to produce a book of tables, *The Nautical Almanac*, in which the position of the moon for every noon and midnight was forecast for several years into the future. From these tables, navigators could estimate a longitude to a greater degree of accuracy than they could before that

date. The required accuracy was still not sufficient and detailed observations on the next transit of Venus were needed.

Some early measurements of the transit of Venus were undertaken at Tobolsk, Siberia by Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche on June, 6, 1761. Despite support from the empress, his trip from Paris to the viewing site was difficult to say the least, but he did manage to obtain the needed data.

Various competing but cooperative ventures were launched to observe the transit of Venus on June 3, 1769 at different points around the globe. A number of these failed completely because the skies were covered in cloud at the critical moment or because of travel logistics and political conditions. For example, Le Gentil from the French Academy of Science could not land at the intended outpost of Pondicherry in the Indian Ocean because the port had fallen into the hands of the British. He could not operate the telescope properly on the deck of a floating ship so his efforts produce nothing of consequence. Also, in 1769, the surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon (whose names live on in the form of the Mason-Dixon Line in the United States) were commissioned to set up an observatory at Bencoolen, Sumatra. A series of delays beyond their control caused them to shorten their trip so that they were only able reach Cape Town. They set up their observatory there but were able to collect only partial details due to clouds on the critical day.

Three teams of observers did collect the required data. One team consisted of Father Maximilian Hell and Joannes Sajnovics from Hungary. After a harrowing trip along the edge of fiords, stormy fall seas and spending the previous long dark winter on an island at Vardos off the north coast of Norway, they set up an observatory and made the needed observations. By comparison, Chappe was sent to collect the data San Jose del Cabo on the tip of Baja California. This required a trip on horseback across Mexico in the company of Spanish co-observers Vincente de Doz and Salvador de Medina followed by a boat trip across the Gulf of California. Chappe had the misfortune to arrive at his destination in the midst of a serious outbreak of typhus. Although he fell victim to the disease himself, sheer will power saw Chappe complete his task. He survived until August 1 when he too died. Fortunately, his assistant was able to bring the data back to Europe where the information could be utilized. Perhaps the most famous observer team that successfully collected transit information was that of Captain James Cook and his senior observer Charles Green. They made their way to the island of Tahiti in the Pacific Ocean after rounding Cape Horn. On that trip, the young botanist/naturalist Joseph Banks was a paying passenger. He was out to collect botanical and other natural history information along with his own team of servants and assistants. Fortunately for the expedition, Banks was more diplomatic than Cook and so he was able to retrieve the critical instruments stolen by the Tahitian natives who were enthralled by any metal objects. But Cook's expedition experienced good weather for the observation date and they obtained all of the required data.

The data collected by all of the observers eventually was to pass through the clearing house set up under the auspices of the Royal Academy of Science in Paris. At the time, Jerome Lalande was in charge of processing the data. He was somewhat arbitrary in selecting the data that he accepted and rejected. This led to a public and heated spat with Father Hell. Lalande's approach led to a measurement of the distance to the sun that was less accurate than some of the collected data would have indicated. Since then, more

accurate measurements have been made using other techniques but the technology used in 1769 was the most advanced at that time.

The next pair of Venus transits will occur on 10–11 December 2117 and in December 2125. Not many people alive for the most recent transit will be alive to witness the next.

by W.D. McIlveen.

Reference

Anderson, Mark, 2012. *The Day the World Discovered the Sun*. DaCapo Press, Philadelphia. 280 pp.



Venus (small dark circle) entering face of sun, Acton Library, June 5, 2012. Photo made with hand-held digital camera and telescope. Photo by W.D. McIlveen.

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

