Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

The Esquesing

Sept/Oct 2015 Newsletter
Volume 50, Number 1

In this issue:

- President's Message
- Upcoming Events
- Outdoor Events
- Past Events
- Did you Know…
- False Ragweed - W.D. McIlveen
- Hummingbird-Cardinal Flower – Don Scallen
- Summertime Mothing – Don Scallen
- Marvelous Mints - Fiona Reid
- Report on evening Walks - W.D. McIlveen
- Newsletter Submissions & Ads
- Executive Committee List
- Welcome New Members
- Membership Form
- Map to Meeting Location

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello all members!

Summer seems to have rushed by, with rather a lot of cold and wet days. I am sure this makes for a healthy forest and should provide us with marvelous fall colors too.

It is good to be starting a new season of indoor meetings and other club activities. Please keep in mind that in October we have our Annual General Meeting and we will be hoping to encourage people to become more involved with the club. There will be spaces opening up on the executive and it would be great to see new faces join us. Our club has really come a long way in the last 5 years so please do help us for the next 5, or 10!

I hope to see you all soon, Fiona

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

Meetings begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of each month, September to June. The meeting location is St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church, 537 Main Street, Glen Williams.

September 8, 2015
Costa Rican sea turtles
Club favourite, Josh Feltham, a professor at Fleming College will kick off our new season with a talk about his conservation work with Costa Rican sea turtles. Josh is an entertaining speaker who engages his audiences through thought provoking questions and dialogue.

October 13, 2015
Whimbrels
Club member Johanna Perz has travelled to the Canadian Arctic to study whimbrels. These large sandpipers are seen in southern Ontario only on migration. Johanna will tell us about their fascinating biology.

November 10, 2015
The Once and Future Great Lakes Country
John Riley, a senior science advisor with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, will talk to us about *The Once and Future Great Lakes Country* his sweeping ecological and economic history of the Great Lakes watershed. His book is a triumph of painstaking research and has great resonance for all of us today. Read Don Scallen's review of John's book at
http://www.inthehills.ca/2014/11/back/the-once-and-future-great-lakes-country/

December 8, 2015
Our annual pot luck dinner and slide sharing. Come for the conviviality and Ray Blower's legendary bean salad.

OUTDOOR EVENTS

Sunday September 13: Outing to Scotch Block Reservoir and St Helena Road. Leader: Fiona Reid. We hope to see some early fall waterfowl, possibly shorebirds, and some confusing fall warblers. The St Helena Road forest is very pretty at this time of year and the mosquitoes should have abated at last. We will meet at Scotch Block at 1 p.m. Please contact Fiona (905-699-0705) for updates on weather, carpooling etc.

Past Events

Naturalists at work, *photo by Ramona Dobson*

Did You Know….

- …the diet of firefly larvae consists mainly of snail and slug larvae.
- …about 1,200 beats per minute, that's the heart rate of hummingbirds while flying.

Please feel free to submit any interesting one liner facts you have come across to newsletter coordinator for future newsletters

False Ragweed: A New Plant Species for Halton

W.D. McIlveen

This summer, we observed an unusual species growing in front of the house. It was eventually identified as False Ragweed (*Cyclachaena xanthifolia* (Nutt.) Fresen.). It also gets called by the less-than-pretty epithets Giant or Coarse Sumpweed and Burweed Marsh-elder. There is no obvious reason as to why these latter names were ever applied to this particular species. The name of False Ragweed is actually a pretty good one. Another name is Carelessweed. If you track the source of Latin names, you will find that it was once included in a different genus as *Euphrosyne xanthifolia*. That genus has been reserved for a related species. If you should find it in a field guide, you might see it listed as *Iva xanthifolia* Nutt. The '*xanthifolia'* part of the name is likely related to the resemblance of the leaves to those of the Cocklebur in the genus *Xanthium*.

Figure 1. A False Ragweed (*Cyclachaena xanthifolia*) plant. Note Annual Ragweed on the left and part of a Great Ragweed on the right.

Figure 2. Close-up of False Ragweed Flowers, *photos by W.D. McIlveen*

The plants can grow to three metres tall with pairs of toothed leaves, at least at the base (Fig. 1). It flowers from July to October with greenish flowers. The flower head has disk flowers only and lacks the strap-shaped flowers that most of the aster family display (Fig. 2). Closer examination shows a cluster of yellow stamens. The flowers are fairly similar to those of the related ragweeds (Annual Ragweed = *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* and Great Ragweed = *Ambrosia trifida*). Like those species, it is wind-pollinated. Like them it produces copious amounts of pollen and so can contribute to the pollen load that can cause hay fever in some people. As well, the leaves can cause dermatitis in some individuals. If it is consumed by cows, it can make their milk taste bitter.

It prefers disturbed sites, abandoned fields, riparian habitats, flood plains, and stream banks. It will tolerate fields and roadsides. It does not appear to be aggressively invasive and established stands often tend to peter out with time involving a number of years.

The species is believed to be native to the Great Plains of North America west of the Mississippi River. From there, it has spread widely. In North America, it has now been recorded in all the states in the United States except those in the southeast. It has been found in nine of the provinces of Canada (excluding Newfoundland). It has also been carried to Europe where it is quite widespread. There are records of the species at Potsdam, Germany, as early as 1858.There are records of the species from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy, and Serbia. It has also been found in New Zealand. The rate of reporting of new records is accelerating indicating that the species is spreading and naturalizing rapidly. The story for this species further illustrates that the exchange of unwanted species is two-way, not just the introduction of pests from Europe and elsewhere into North America.

In Ontario, the species is listed as an SE1. This ranking indicates a very rare exotic with perhaps five or fewer occurrences in the province. This likely is an underestimate for the species could be easily overlooked because it is simply not very showy.

An assessment of the state of the species in Europe concluded that it is most often associated with grain importation (incl. birdseeds, soybeans). It is usually found in port areas (unloading quays, under grain conveyors, wasteland), along road verges and canal banks or on dumps. That assessment is in perfect agreement with the observation in our yard. It is located within about two meters of the bird feeder along with two other ragweed species. The site is highly disturbed by squirrels and chipmunks searching for spilled sunflowers. So, depending on the origin of the bird seed that you use, you too could find other new plant species growing in your yard. And remember that at one time, hemp (= marijuana) was once a principal component of bird seed mixes.

Hummingbird – Cardinal Flower Connection

By Don Scallen

The migration of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds to and from the tropics puzzled early birdwatchers. How could such tiny birds manage the long distance flights? A tall tale gained widespread currency - our hummingbirds were hitching rides under the wings of Canada Geese!

An erroneous, but delightful, proposition.

But Ruby-throats are resourceful birds nonetheless. When they arrive in spring there is a dearth of hummingbird- friendly flowers. At that time of year, hummingbirds will often stalk Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, sipping the sap leaking from the holes sapsuckers drill in woodland trees. Small insects drawn to the sap provide the hummers with a protein boost as well.

Later in the year, there are hummingbird flowers aplenty. One of them is cardinal flower, an achingly lovely denizen of streamsides and wet meadows. Cardinal flowers, in an evolutionary sense, have bent over backwards to make themselves attractive to hummingbirds. Happily, but quite accidentally, the results also appeal to us.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird on Cardinal Flower, *photo by Don Scallen*

To ensure hummingbird pollination, the cardinal flower's blossoms are brilliant red, the hummers' favourite colour. The nectar supply pools at the bottom of a long tube, out of the reach of most pollinators, but perfect for the long beak of a hummingbird.

Most astonishingly though, the cardinal flower has a structure that arches outwards to fit perfectly over a hummingbird's head as it probes for nectar. First this structure is male and it dusts the hummer's head with pollen. After five days or so it grows female reproductive parts to receive the pollen from the hummer's head. Both male and female flowers are usually present at the same time, ensuring pollination.

If you come across the lovely cardinal flower in your summertime rambles, remember that its blossoms have been engineered – albeit unwittingly – by hummingbirds. A story of deep ecological connection almost as enchanting as hummingbirds migrating south, nestled snuggly in goose down.

See more of Don's stories and photos at www.inthehills.ca/blogs/notesfromthewild

Summertime Mothing

By Don Scallen

There is a breed of naturalist who eschews sleep and emerges after dark to prowl the woods in search of moths. Sometimes this is a solitary pursuit. More often it is gregarious - an activity conducted with other people afflicted with the same eccentricity.

Photo by Don Scallen

These moth-ers communicate largely in hushed tones, punctuated on occasion, by excited squeals when a particularly "good" moth is found. Part of their kit is moth bait, a sugary concoction brewed for the event. Over-ripe bananas, molasses, brown sugar and alcoholic drinks are common ingredients. This glop is smeared on trees as an offering to discerning moth tipplers.

Lights are also set up to attract the night flyers. Mercury vapour lights are de rigueur, the illumination of choice despite their lofty price tag and their retina-scorching brilliance. More refined moth-ers summon moths with ultraviolet lights. The lights shine on white sheets, pressed into service from the participants' unused beds.

Representatives from this quirky nocturnal tribe met twice this summer at events arranged by Leanne Wallis of Credit Valley Conservation. The first was at Terra Cotta Conservation Area in June, the second at Caledon Lake in July. Appearing at both events was David Beadle, co-author of the Peterson's Field Guide to the Moths of Northeastern North America.
David, has merely to glance at a smudge on a hanging sheet and give it a name. "Feeble Grass Moth" he might say or "Carmine Snout Moth" or "By George it's a Confused Eusarca!" Now to

a confused moth novice like myself, this is all quite impressive, and to be truthful, I'd accept just about any pronouncement David makes when it comes to moth naming.

But others know of what David speaks. Fiona Reid, our president, has embarked on the mastery of her local moths. Most nights she can be found prowling her garden and woods bleary-eyed, long past her bedtime. Now she can proudly distinguish between an Exhausted Brocade and a Connected Brocade. Leanne of CVC is also stretching her mothing wings to the point where she can snap off moth names like they were members of her extended family.

Hologram Moth, *photo by Don Scallen*

To be serious for a moment however, mothing is fascinating and informative. These creatures offer almost infinite variety. Some, like the underwings and sphinx moths, are large, opulent things. Their appeal is obvious. But among the vast squadrons of smaller moths are many -- if viewed closely – that display complex patterning, outlandish shapes and often, exquisite colour. For anyone out there who thinks that moths are dull and uninspiring take a look at the picture of the Hologram Moth accompanying this article.

Mothing builds important knowledge about the diversity of life that inhabits our local area. And what diversity! At Terra Cotta 198 moths have been identified over three sessions. The single evening at Caledon Lake yielded 173! Further mothing outings at these locations would push these totals much higher.

The biggest prize at Terra Cotta, according to moth guru David Beedle, was the Purple Plagodis. This uncommon moth is uncommonly pretty, with its lower forewings washed a deep purple. Sadly the Purple Plagodis may become even less common – its larvae feed on ash, a genus of trees currently being hammered by the emerald ash borer.

At Caledon Lake the moth group encountered the rare Curved Halter Moth. Apparently no one knows what its larval food plants are. This illustrates one of the premier attractions of studying moths. There is much to learn.

Moths are hugely important to ecosystems. They are of course directly connected to our shrubs, trees, grasses and wildflowers, through their flora-chomping caterpillars. Caterpillars that in turn are crucial food for many songbird young. And the adult moths feed a multitude of other creatures from frogs and bats to nightjars and spiders. So it behooves us to learn more about moths and that starts with lights, moth bait and an eccentric assembly of moth enthusiasts.

Our great thanks to David Beadle for lending his expertise and to Leanne Wallis of CVC for organizing both events. Hats off as well to the Peel Board of Education for allowing access to their Finlayson Field Centre at Caledon Lake.

Marvelous Mints

By Fiona A. Reid

I am hoping to start a regular feature in the newsletter focusing on native plants, in particular the species that are good pollinator and/or host plants. In this issue I am going to focus on two of the lesser-known wildflowers in the mint family, Lamiaceae.

Of the 80 or so natives I have planted around my house **Downy Wood Mint**, ***Blephilia ciliata,*** is one of my favorites. Why? First of all it grows and flowers very well in partial shade (I have it in a spot that gets less than a half day of sun). Second, it has attractive, long-lasting flowers that appeal to many daytime pollinators and also to my favorite nocturnal visitors, the moths, including some of the showy species. It is very easy to grow and trouble free. It doesn't spread rampantly, but I've been able to successfully divide my clump every year. It seldom self-seeds, which puts it in a favorable light compared with Giant Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) another mint that is attractive to bees and other pollinators. Hyssop throws its numerous seeds far and wide – in between rocks, on paths, in lawn, and as a result of this I've moved my large plants to a far corner of my garden. Downy Wood Mint grows in rich or poor soil and flowers best with a few hours of sun. Flowering season is from June or early July to about mid-August.

This plant can be used to make a minty tea that can treat indigestion, colds, coughs, fever and colic. A warm poultice of leaves is said to cure a sinus headache, and fresh leaves can be chewed to kill bacteria and freshen teeth and gums. Historically this plant was used as a smudging herb to drive away evil spirits from a person on their death bed. I am glad to say I have not yet tested this use.

Bridled Arches (*Lacinopolia lorea*) on Downy Wood Mint, *photo by Fiona Reid*

Perhaps the best reason to grown Downy Wood Mint in your garden is for long-tongued pollinators including honeybees, bumblebees, little carpenter bees (*Ceratina spp.*), mason bees (*Osmia* spp.), leaf-cutting bees (*Megachile* spp.), cuckoo bees (*Epeolus* spp.), long-horned bees (*Melissodes* spp.), and Anthophorid bees (*Anthophora* spp.). Other visitors of the flowers include Halictid bees, wasps, bee flies (Bombyliidae), thick-headed flies (Conopidae), Syrphid flies, butterflies, and skippers. These insects seek nectar primarily, although some of the Halictid bees collect pollen and some flies feed on the pollen.

Another mint that is a star performer in my garden is **Virginia Mountain Mint, *Pycnanthemum virginanum***. There is a very similar species**, Slender Mountain Mint, *P. tenuifolium*** , which differs in having no hair on the ridges of the stems and leaves under ¼ inch in width. It is

similar in habits and usage therefore this account refers to both species. Mountain mints prefer full sun or at least a half a day of sun. They grow into an attractive, compact mound about 2-3 feet high, topped with small, dense, whitish flowers which bloom in late summer and are still blooming now. Seen close up, each flower is dotted with purple. These mints are highly aromatic, a feature said to deter deer and many insects from eating the leaves. For human purposes the plants can be brewed to make a mint tea and for other culinary uses replacing spearmint or peppermint. A strong decoction is said to cure festering wounds (again I am happy to report I have not had occasion to test this). Crushed leaves applied to an aching tooth provide rapid relief. Dried sprigs or flowers can be used to freshen air and repel pests from clothing, and may also help as an insecticide. Apparently a handful of crushed flowers stuffed up the nose of a person near death will revive them. Yet a third use I have not yet been called upon to test in my garden!

Many insects are strongly attracted to the flowers of mountain mints, including honeybees, cuckoo bees, Halictid bees, Great Golden Digger, Great Black and Eumenine wasps, bee flies, Tachinid flies, Wedge-shaped Beetles, and Banded Hairstreak and Pearl Crescent butterflies. At night a good array of moths visit the flowers for nectar.

Master's Dart (*Feltia herilis*) on Virginia Mountain Mint, *photo by Fiona Reid*

It is surprising how little press these lovely mints receive – Neither genus is featured in Wildflowers of Ontario, and Downy Wood Mint is not mentioned in Pollinators of Native Plants. Despite the fact that these plants are very good substitutes for the much more rampant and less biologically useful peppermints, you will have a very difficult time finding them for sale in most plant nurseries. I got mine from native plant suppliers: My mountain mints from St Williams Nursery, and Downy Wood Mint from the NANPS sale in Markham.

Report on Evening Walks for 2015 – South Peel Naturalists and Halton North Peel Naturalists

By W.D. McIlveen

As has been the case for many years, the South Peel Naturalists and Halton North Peel Naturalists clubs hosted evening walks for the members during the summer of 2015 (May 18 to August 24). A total a total of 15 evening walks were organized in various areas of Halton and Peel Regions as indicated 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 six different leaders (Ray Blower, Kirsten Burling, Emily Dobson, W. McIlveen, Dawn Renfrew, and Don Scallen).

The June 22nd walk to Boston Mills Sideroad was relocated to the nearby rail trail at Terra Cotta due to rain to eliminate any safety concerns that wet trails might cause. Fortunately, the relocated walk proceeded without much rain. The Swift Night Out scheduled for August 10 was delayed due to rain but a highly successful watch was conducted the following evening. During the summer, the numbers of participants ranged from four to 15 with an average of 9.7 participants per walk. This was the highest participation rate in the last four years when notes were kept. It is certainly much higher than the average of only 4.1 participants in 2012.

It is uncertain whether there was simply greater general interest in the walks this year or whether the choice of venues made a difference. Several of the walks were timed to allow people to participate in other projects or events. Two walks (May 18 and August 10) were set to allow people to participate in Chimney Swift watches. The June 8 trip to Scotsdale Farm allowed members to check half of the bird boxes that the Club set up there. (The other half was checked by HNP members during the last monthly meeting of the year). Although the walk was scheduled for August 17 to match the date for the Shadfly Festival at Glen Williams based on the date of the event in 2014, there was no 'official' festival for the village residents that particular evening. The people that did attend the evening walk were still treated to a fairly good emergence of the insects.

Date	Location	Leader	Attendance
18-May-2015	Acton Swift Watch	Emily Dobson	13 people
25-May-2015	Cox Tract	Bill McIlveen	4 people
1-Jun-2015	Milton Pond	Bill McIlveen	4 people
8-Jun-2015	Scotsdale Bird Boxes	Dawn Renfrew	14 people
15-Jun-2015	Hardy & Crozier Tracts	Ray Blower	8 people
22-Jun-2015	Boston Mills Sideroad	Dawn Renfrew	6 people
29-Jun-2015	Joshua's Creek Trail	Bill McIlveen	11 people
6-Jul-2015	Nassagaweya Canyon N.	Bill McIlveen	7 people
13-Jul-2015	McCraney Creek	Bill McIlveen	11 people
20-Jul-2015	Halton Hills Town Line N.	Bill McIlveen	6 people
27-Jul-2015	Lion's Valley	Bill McIlveen	14 people
3-Aug-2015	Currie Tract	Don Scallen	7 people
10-Aug-2015	Swift Night Out	Emily Dobson	12 people
17-Aug-2015	Shadfly Festival	Bill McIlveen	8 people
24-Aug-2015	Rattray	Kirsten Burling	15 people

By all accounts, comments from people that did come out for the walks indicated that they found the trips to be interesting and enjoyable. One exception to that was the walk on July 20 which had to deal with extra mosquitoes and the aftermath of the 2013 ice storm. Over the year, participants did get to witness many interesting things from nature – birds, animals, plants, insects, etc., had an opportunity to learn from each other, got to visit sites that were new to them, and got to share these things with members of both naturalist clubs. And after all, isn't that the real purpose of the walks.

It is anticipated that evening walks will be continued in 2016, likely using the same general approach as in 2015. We would be interested in hearing from members about other suitable venues and from anyone that would be willing to act as leaders for the walk.

White Tailed Deer grazing at Rattray Marsh, *photo by Ramona Dobson*

Although not part of the aforementioned evening walks, there were several other comparable events held during the year. One of the events was a morning trip to look at the wildflowers at Crawford Lake Conservation Area on April 26. Other field event opportunities included three butterfly inventory sessions in the general Orangeville area hosted by our sister club, the Upper Credit Naturalist Club, on June 7, July 5, and August 9. Hardly any information exists for butterflies in that area so the events were organized to rectify that situation. The SPN Club held a follow-up field trip to visit the Apiculture facility at the University of Guelph on June 22. Two moth nights were held within the Credit River watershed in 2015. One of these was held at the Terra Cotta C.A. on June 19. The other was held at Caledon Lake on July 18 when 173 species of moth were tallied.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS & ADS

The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club newsletter is published five times a year – every two months except July and August. Contributions from members are welcome.

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

Executive			**Appointments**		
President:	*Vacant*		Membership:	Valerie Dobson	(905) 828-1729
Past President:	Fiona Reid	(905) 693-9719	Publicity:	Johanna Perz	(647) 289-9386
Vice-President:	Don Scallen	(905) 877-2876	Ontario Nature Representative:	Katie MacDonnell	
Secretary:	Emily Dobson	(647) 996-6512	Newsletter:	Ramona Dobson	
			Webmaster:	John Beaudette	
Treasurer:	Janice Sukhiani	(647) 408-9515			
			Stewards:		
Roving:	William McIlveen, Kevin Kerr, Nikki Pineau, Anne Fraser		Crozier Property:	Marg Wilkes	
			Hardy Property:	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 | info@hnpnc.com

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Hamish Duthie and Lynn Allen

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: _____

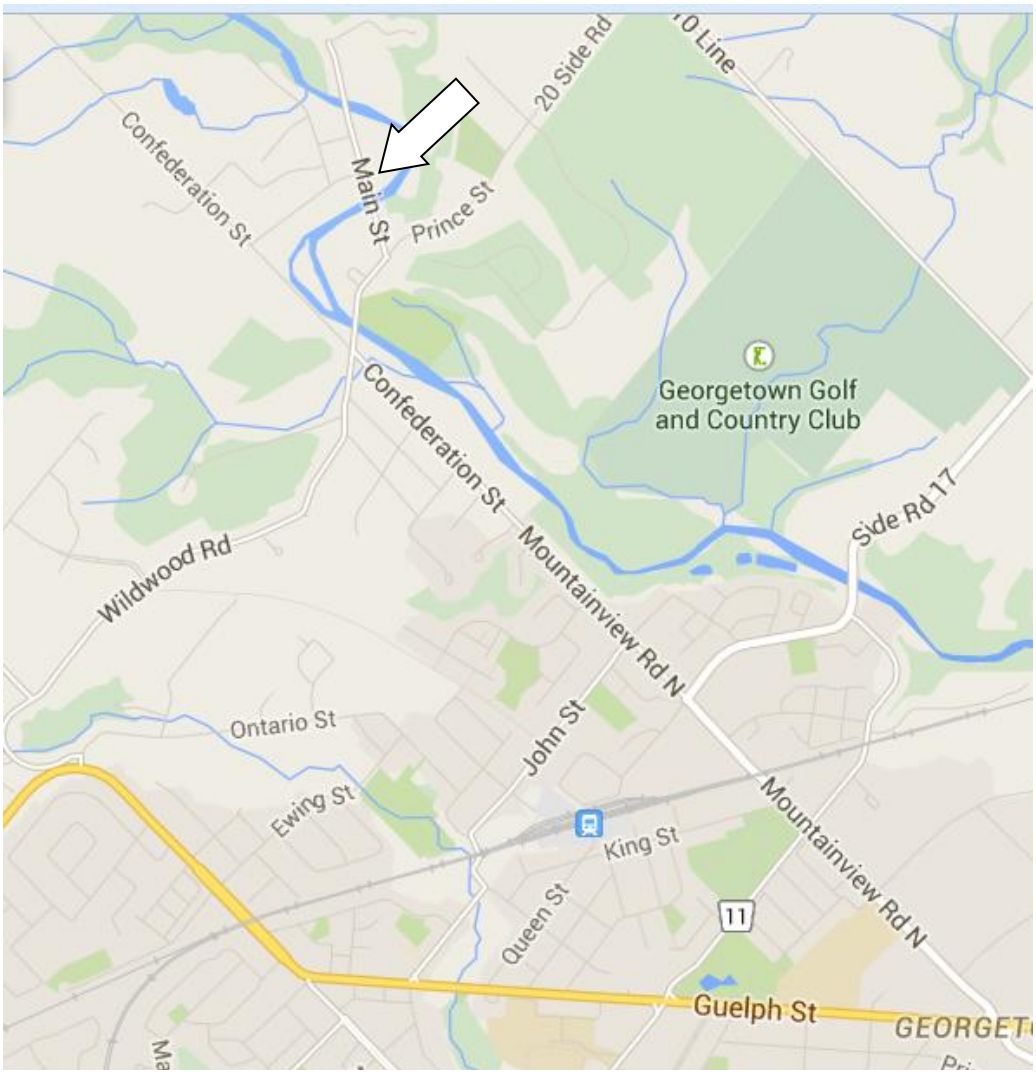
_____ Date: _____

****

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