Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

The Esquesing

Nov/Dec 2015 Newsletter
Volume 50, Number 2

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Autumn outing to Scotsdale . *Photo By John Beaudette*

President's Message

Though Thanksgiving has passed, this is an apt time for me to offer thanks to the people who help make our club strong. As your new president my first order of business must be a heartfelt thankyou to Fiona Reid, our outgoing president. Under Fiona's leadership our club has thrived as a vibrant community of naturalists. Fiona effectively communicates her passion for nature through art and writing. We are fortunate that she served and can be thankful that she will continue to contribute to our club as "past-president".

Many other members have also made valued contributions to our club in recent years. I shudder to think where we'd be without the various Dobsons. Club secretary Emily Dobson produces excellent minutes of our executive meetings, contributes thoughtful ideas and manages SwiftWatch with great effectiveness. Ramona Dobson, Emily's mom, has the newsletter well in hand. Another Dobson unrelated to Emily and Ramona, except in commitment, is Valerie. Valerie is a fine membership coordinator. Her welcoming messages to new members and gentle haranguing to pay membership dues are much appreciated.

Yet another Dobson, Kim - Ramona's partner and Emily's dad – is the club's construction engineer, building homes for swallows and bluebirds in need of accommodation.

Our treasurer, Janice Sukhiani, has almost as much history with the club as I do. I am grateful that she has decided to continue in her position for at least another year. And in this era, it is crucial to have a website and I'm grateful that John Beaudette has brought his expertise to this important task.

I'd also like to formally welcome Ian Jarvie to the executive. Ian is a passionate birder and an all-round great guy. His fine sense of humour will add welcome levity to future executive meetings.

Your executive will continue to offer the membership engaging talks on a diverse range of topics of interest to naturalists. We will try to offer at least one outdoor activity each month as well. We will also look for opportunities to make a difference in our community and beyond.

Please speak to any member of the executive if you have any suggestions for walks or meetings. Your input is valued.

Finally, my thanks to all of you for making the atmosphere of our club so welcoming. I look forward to seeing you soon!

Don Scallen

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.

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

January 12, 2016
Dr. Kevin Kerr: The Role of the Modern Zoo in Conservation
Club member Kevin Kerr, curator of birds and invertebrates at the Toronto Zoo, recently presented this talk to the Guelph Naturalists and it was very well received. Here is Kevin's synopsis:

Zoos have a centuries-old history, but their role as conservation centers has only evolved in recent decades. While attitudes toward zoos remain variable, the growing consensus is that they have a responsibility toward the preservation of species and the education of the general public. In this talk, Kevin Kerr will provide an inside peek into how modern zoos manage healthy captive populations, decide which species to include, and endeavor to modify visitors' behaviour for the benefit of the natural world.

February 9, 2016
Dr. Hamish Duthie: Wildlife Photography in Central America:Birds
What better time of year to be spirited away (virtually at least!) to the New World tropics?

Club member Hamish Duthie, Professor Emeritus of biology at the University of Waterloo provided this synopsis of this talk:

My wife, Lynn, and I have led naturalist trips to Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua since 2001, both with university student field courses and with adults. The presentation will give an account of some of our adventures, especially with watching and photographing the abundant and magnificent bird life. We have stayed at remote jungle lodges, primitive cabins, luxury resorts, and famous tropical research laboratories. At one extreme we have trekked five hours through a remote, steamy Panama rain forest to find a nesting Harpy Eagle, and at the other extreme we have opened our cabin door in the morning to find a beautiful Emerald Toucanet watching us a few metres away. Even after all these years we are still exploring!

March 8, 2016
Don Scallen: *Pond Life*
Club president Don Scallen has spent an inordinate amount of time peering into local ponds, often well after dark. Much of his talk will focus on the wondrous amphibian breeding activity that animates these ponds in springtime.

Outdoor Events

November 15, 2015
Late Flowering Plants Survey Hike
Bill McIlveen will be leading this 14th annual survey to find and identify any flowering plants that are still blooming late in the season at sites around Halton Hills. Meet at the parking lot of the old public school, Mary Street, Norval at 1:00pm.

December 28, 2015
Christmas Bird Count
The 25th annual Christmas Count for Halton Hills will take place in the standard survey area around Halton Hills on Monday December 28. The area will be divided into smaller areas with participants assisting experienced leaders. This is a great way for beginners to learn their birds. If you would like to join in any aspect of the count, please contact Bill McIlveen via e-mail at wmcilveen@sympatico.ca, at (519) 853-3948, or send us a message at info@hnpnc.com, or call Fiona at (905) 693-9719.

Did You Know….

- …One photo is a crow and one is a raven, any guesses…

Figure A

Figure B *Photos By Ramona Dobson*

- …In winter when chipmunks hibernate their body temperature can drop to between 5-7°C. Brr, that's cold.
- If you guessed figure B as Raven you are correct. Notice the difference in tail shapes.

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

Results of the 2015 Monitoring of Bird Boxes Established at Scotsdale Farm, Halton Hills

W.D. McIlveen and Emily Dobson

In April 2014, the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club initiated a project that involved the erection and monitoring a network of bird nest boxes, primarily at Scotsdale Farm located at Silver Creek north of Georgetown. Sixteen boxes were placed at Scotsdale and three were placed at St. Albans Church in Glen Williams. Some old boxes located at Scotsdale were incorporated into the network - three in 2014 and another ten old boxes were included in 2015. In 2015, 27 boxes were added at Scotsdale. The positions of the boxes are shown in Figure 1. As well in 2015, one box

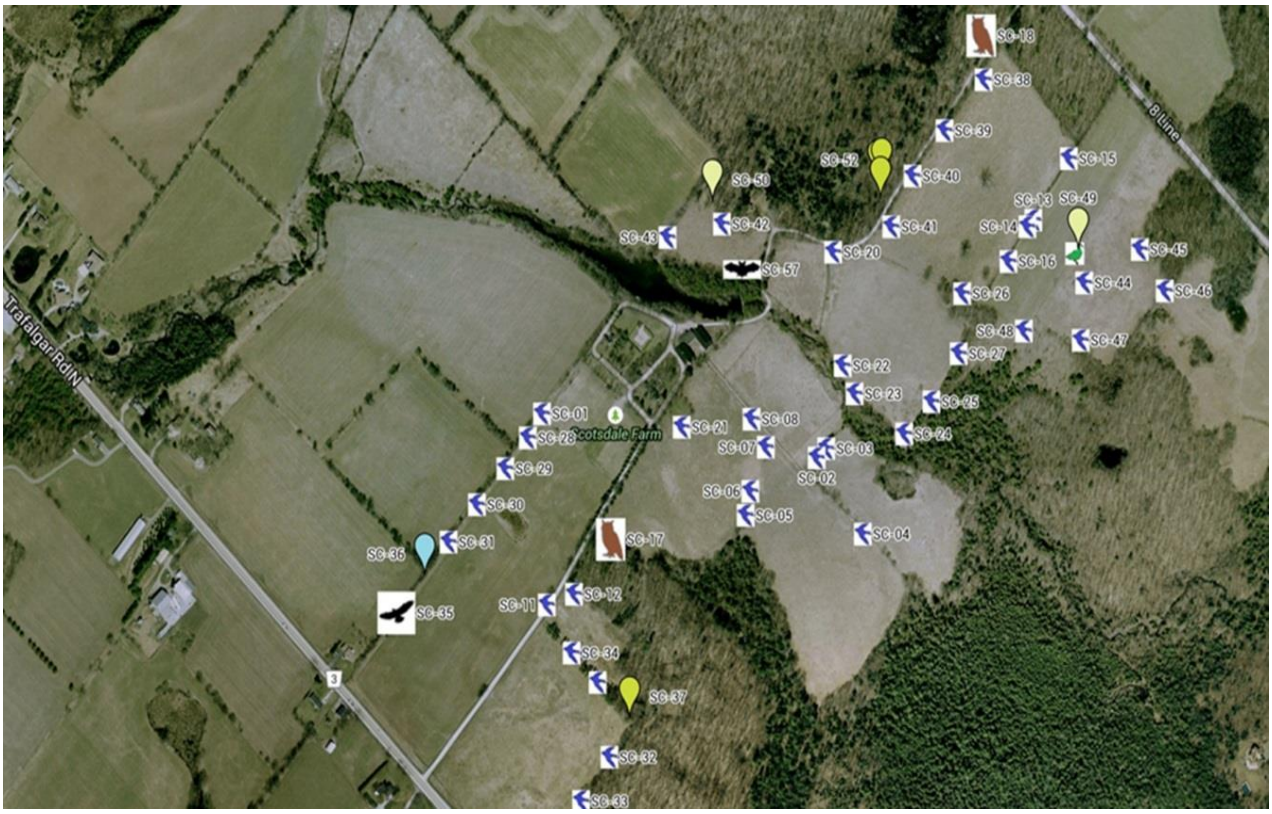


Figure 1. Map of Scotsdale Farm showing the locations of bird nest boxes established in 2014, 2015 and previously erected boxes. *Photo produced by Emily Dobson using Google Maps*

was placed at the Sixth Line and Sideroad 15, one was placed near Scotch Block Reservoir, and two were placed on a property on Highway 25 north of Sideroad 15. The majority of boxes were of a standard design suitable for Tree Swallows or Bluebirds. The boxes included two boxes designed for owls and one was for kestrels. The old boxes had mostly been designed for Tree Swallows. Each box was assigned a unique identification number to assist with the anticipated subsequent monitoring. A bat box was discovered on a tree located along the trail to the 8th Line. It too was assigned a number to facilitate possible monitoring.

Table 1. Summary of bird boxes established at Scotsdale Farm and elsewhere, 2014-2015			
Location	2014	2015	Total
Scotsdale old	3	10	13
Scotsdale new	16	27	43
St Albans	3		3
Other sites		4	4
Total	22	41	63

In 2015, the boxes were evaluated twice. The main evaluation took place over two evenings in June (8th and 9th) (Figure 2.). The second evaluation was made on October 18 during the fall cleaning. As well, some additional observations were made during the summer but that specific data was not explicitly analyzed and is not included here. During the evaluation, notes were made of the contents of the boxes and included species involved, activity, nest contents, eggs, young or signs of use by other animals.

Figure 2. Members of the Halton/North Peel Naturalists in the field to evaluate bird box use June 8, 2015. *Photo By William McIlveen*

The results of the monitoring for 2015 are summarized in Table 2. Three species of bird and two species of mammal were found to use or have used the boxes. As well, some materials of uncertain origin (leaves, grass, fungi) were found in some boxes but usually no particular species could be identified and often it was not possible to even conclude that there was even a nesting attempt involved. The bird species known to use the boxes were species that commonly accept nest boxes. These were Eastern Bluebird, House Wren and Tree Swallow. The mammals were Red Squirrel and an undetermined mouse (*Peromyscus* sp. - e.g. White-footed or Deer Mouse). As well, one of the three boxes at St. Alban's Church had been used unsuccessfully by Tree Swallows.

Because the nest boxes were not monitored with sufficient frequency, it is not possible to know the exact nesting success of each box. Despite this, we do have some information regarding the use of the boxes by occupants and contents and by the appearance of characteristic nests. Failed nests included those eggs remaining (e.g. with holes) or dead young. Empty nests with signs of obvious use at the time of the final visit were considered to be successful. Because we have insufficient data with respect to numbers of eggs laid, eggs hatched or emergence from the nest box, we cannot report on the total number of fledglings produced.

Table 2. Summary of the occupation of bird boxes in 2015

Species	Scotsdale		Other	Total**
	June	October		
Eastern Bluebird	1	2	1	3
House Wren	4	4	1	5
Tree Swallow	10	8	3	13
Mammal (squirrel, mouse)	3	6		6
Unoccupied/lost*	38	36	2	36
Total	51	56	7	63

* Includes vandalized, unchecked boxes

** Maximums from two periods at Scotsdale

Generally, it appeared that the majority of nesting attempts were successful (Table 3). In the case of the Bluebirds, the first attempt failed but the second attempt appeared to have succeeded. As might be expected, the largest number of successful nests was made by the Tree Swallows which were the most frequent users of the nest boxes. None of the old nest boxes were used. There was no evidence that any of the owl or kestrel boxes were used other than by squirrels.

Table 3. Summary of overall nesting results by bird species in 2015.

Species	Eastern Bluebird		House Wren		Tree Swallow	
Results	Successful	Unsuccessful	Successful	Unsuccessful	Successful	Unsuccessful
Total	3	1	4	2	9	3

The contents of boxes ascribed to small mammal were diverse in nature. This included coarse grass, packed fibrous materials, rounded grass nests, and small round balls of a fluffy plant material. In one case, a mouse had constructed a grass nest on top of a nest built by a House

Wren (Fig. 3). As well, in some boxes, there was varying amounts of organic material such as dried grape leaves and smaller quantities of grass that were not in any obvious nest arrangement.

It is anticipated that the monitoring of the nest boxes will continue in 2016. Consideration will be given to removing or replacing some or all of the old boxes. Some of the new boxes may be repositioned or given greater visibility by removal of vegetation that grew during the year. At this point in time, all of the boxes have been cleaned so any occupation by mammals by spring 2016 will indicate new attempts to use the boxes for shelter over the coming winter.

Figure 3. Contents of bird box used by a House Wren then a mouse, October 18, 2015.
Photo By William McIlveen

Talking Turkey

By Don Scallen

On the 8th Line north of Georgetown I recently had the pleasure of observing a "gang" of turkeys foraging in a cornfield. Groups of all-male turkeys (toms) congregate at this time of year, and though the mating urge is temporarily supressed, it is clear that status and pecking order remain primary concerns. The toms puffed out their outlandish feathers, spread their tail feather fans and charged at each other repeatedly.

Photo By Don Scallen

I must admit, I've never watched turkeys as closely prior to this encounter. I was gobsmacked. They are at once magnificently splendiferous and gloriously ugly. Their feathers can be iridescent green, chestnut and copper depending on how the sun strikes them. The patterning of these feathers is exquisite and complex. And turkeys can animate these adornments in ways that would humble a peacock.

Then there is the head of a turkey. A more grotesque visage would be difficult to imagine – wrinkled skin, coloured prurient pink or blue with a bloated pink "wattle" hanging down from the chin. In some toms a fleshy protuberance hangs wormlike from the forehead, obscuring the beak.

I was conscious, as I watched the turkeys, that this was a scene I could not have witnessed in Ontario prior to the 1980's when the species was re-introduced to the province from Michigan and Missouri. The second coming of turkeys has had a brief tenure. It is remarkable, then, to note how commonplace it is to see them now. Since their re-introduction, turkeys have behaved like an invasive species scuttling with blinding speed to every corner of southern Ontario and expanding north beyond their historic range in the province, aided by agriculture and the opening of the forest.

The ramifications of this turkey conquest are yet to be fully appreciated, but it is worthy to consider that the thousands of kilos of turkey flesh that now amble through our woodlots and

meadows had to come from somewhere. Turkeys are omnivores and their great size suggests that the quantity of vegetable and animal matter that they consume must be prodigious. Certainly a lot of turkey fodder comes from cropland, but much comes from our meadows and woodlands as well. It is interesting to speculate on how turkeys have changed our ecology and how their presence will continue to shape nature in the decades to come.

Another thought I had was how the reintroduction of turkeys represents the constant change that our ecosystems undergo. The explosion of turkey numbers is only one manifestation of profound change that has occurred in southern Ontario and eastern North America over the last century.

Photo By Don Scallen

Believe it or not the natural world was, in many respects, far worse off a hundred years ago than it is now. In the 19th century an orgy of killing eliminated or greatly reduced many species of birds and mammals that inhabited our area. There were few hunting or trapping regulations. Market hunting brought wagonloads of dead birds to growing cities. Fashion dictated that women wear hats adorned with feathers and even the entire stuffed bodies of songbirds. Victorian morality separated birds and other animals into categories of good and evil. Predators of any sort were reviled and slaughtered relentlessly.

Where did this leave us 100 years ago? The last passenger pigeon had died two years previously. Turkeys were gone from southern Ontario. Raptors of all species were decimated; their lifeless bodies hung from fence lines in Ontario. Egret numbers were severely depressed with their plumes highly sought after for hats. (This egret slaughter angered New England women who went on to successfully advocate for the protection of these birds. Their organized protest evolved into the Audubon Society.)

Among mammals, beaver had been largely eliminated through trapping. Deer were uncommon – their very existence in eastern North America was considered by some to be in peril. To add credence to this concern, their relative the wapiti (or elk) *were* extirpated from Ontario and eastern North America. Cougars and wolverine were pushed far to the north and west. Otter, fisher, marten and wolves were eliminated from our area of southern Ontario.

The turkeys that I saw on the 8th line represent part of a recovery or re-wilding that is taking place in our lifetimes. Other participants in this re-wilding include ravens, fisher, otter and black bear, all currently making forays into the south from their strongholds in the north. These former

residents will join immigrants from the south and the west - opossums, coyotes and red-bellied woodpeckers to create a novel ecology never before experienced.

Nature is resilient. Given half a chance it will bounce back and fill its innumerable niches with wildlife. Positive change is possible, as indicated by profound changes in attitude and behaviour that have allowed many species to rebound. As naturalists we can contribute to this positive change through our actions and advocacy. We can make a difference. It is worthwhile to remind ourselves of this fact in an era beset with environmental challenges.

Past Events

September 2015 outing to Upper Canada College. It was worth the walk through Stinging Nettles and wading across the Credit River to witness this magnificent Burr Oak, measuring in at 131.5cm diameter. *Photo by Fiona Reid*

Newsletter Submissions & Ads

A limited number of Bird Boxes will be for sale at Novembers meeting for $20.00 each. The profits will go to HNPNC for future projects.

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:	Don Scallen	(905) 877-2876	Membership:	Valerie Dobson	(905) 828-1729
Past President:	Fiona Reid	(905) 693-9719	Publicity:	Johanna Perz	(647) 289-9386
Vice-President:	Ian Jarvie		Ontario Nature Representative:	Johanna Perz	
Secretary:	Emily Dobson	(647) 996-6512	Newsletter:	Ramona Dobson	(rkdobson@bell.net)
			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!

Hart Brasche & family
Lorysa & Mike Cornish
Hamish Duthie & Lynne Allen
Sandra Heimbecker
Peter Ostrowski, Jane Fera & Mary Hogan, Helen Pettingill
Grace Szydlowski

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.

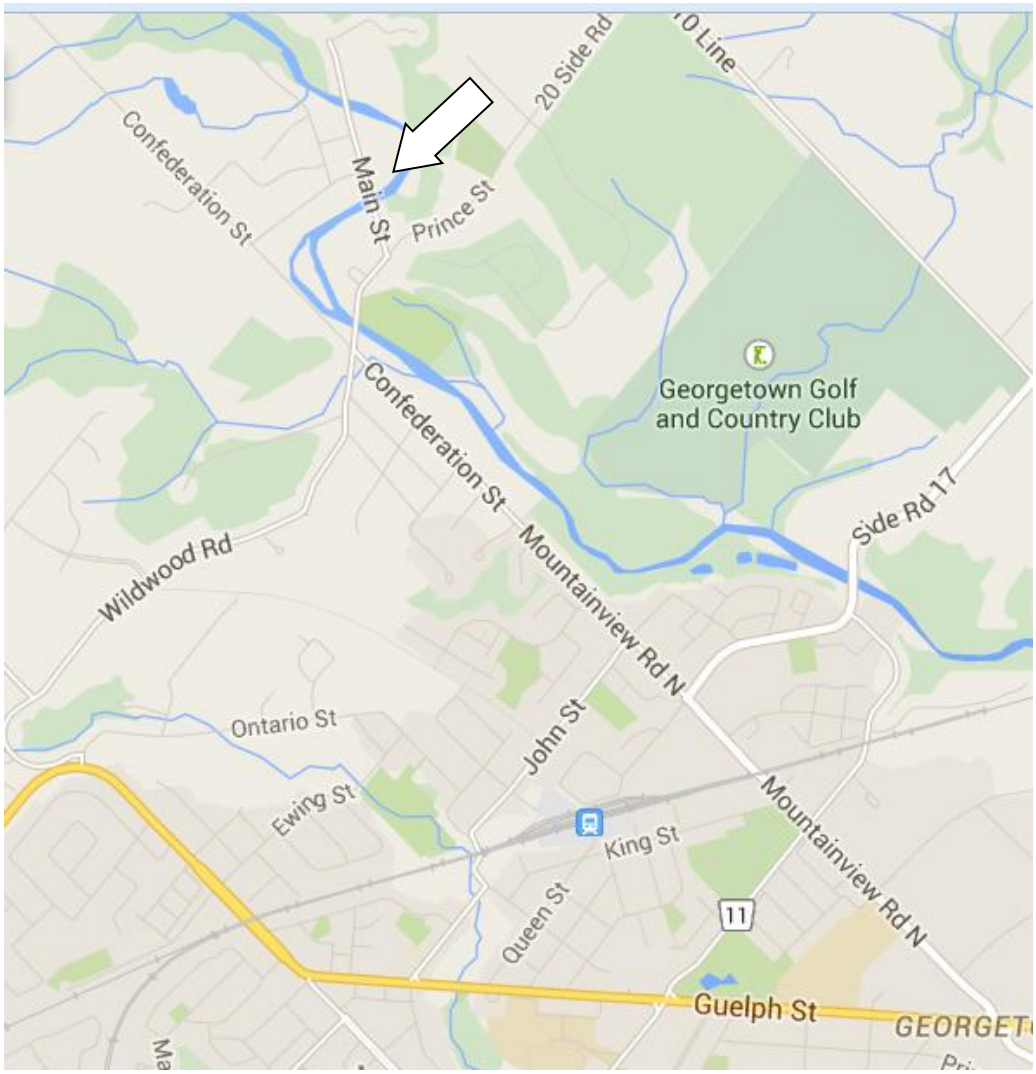
Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

_____ 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