



The Esquesing

March-April 2016 Newsletter
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Talks and Walks

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.

Tuesday March 8, 2016

Don Scallen: Vernal 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.

Tuesday April 12, 2016

Jack Imhoff: Navigating the Biodiversity of Canada's Stream Corridors

Jack Imhoff is a National Biologist and Director of Conservation Ecology for Trout Unlimited Canada. He is also one of our club members. Jack has credentials that exceed the limits of a short bio but I'll highlight a few. In 2012 he received the Conservation Pioneer Award at the Latornell Conservation Symposium. (This symposium has been called the most prestigious and well attended annual conservation conference in Ontario.) He was recognized for his work with freshwater ecosystems over more than four decades. Along with his work with Trout Unlimited, Jack had a career with the Ministry of Natural Resources and he has taught as an adjunct professor at the Universities of Waterloo and Guelph. Suffice to say, Jack knows streams and the remarkable diversity of life they support. This will be an excellent talk.

Tuesday May 10, 2016

Dave Beaton: The Credit Valley Trail

Long rumoured, an initiative to establish a trail from the Credit River headwaters to Lake Ontario is now gaining traction. Dave Beaton, Manager of Community Outreach for Credit Valley Conservation will provide an overview of the proposed trail. Trails – the Bruce Trail is a great example – provide exceptional access to natural areas. While a great boon to naturalists and others who value being outdoors, trails can also have negative impacts – erosion and off-leash dogs come to mind. Dave will invite feedback from our club about areas of natural and cultural interest along the Credit River that the trail should pass through, or alternatively, avoid.

Tuesday June 14, 2016

Our annual “outdoor” meeting. As a follow-up to the May meeting about the Credit Valley Trail, we’ll walk an existing section upstream from the River Road Bridge. A few parking spaces are available at the fenced off Barber Mill property on Maple Avenue. Otherwise you will have to park along a roadside in the area. Meet at the Barber Mill site on the west side of the river at 7:30 Estimated walk time will be an hour and a half.

Outdoor Events

Sat. March 12, 2016.

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:519-853-0171)) by Thursday, March 10 for more details.

Sat. April 23, 2016.

Beamer Conservation Area Hawkwatch, Grimsby: Stops on the way to Grimsby include Scotch Block reservoir and La Salle Park to see waterfowl and early songbirds. Beamer C.A., at the top of the escarpment in Grimsby, provides a large clearing and two cliff-edge platforms to search the sky for migrating hawks. Walking trails in the surrounding woods show early wildflowers and more songbirds. Bring a lunch, hat sunscreen, binoculars. Call Ray Blower ([519-853-0171](tel:519-853-0171)) for starting location and time.

Sun. May 22, 2016.

Spring Birding at Thickson Wood, Lynde Shores Conservation Area and Cranberry Marsh: Ray says: If I had only one day in the spring to go birding, this is where I would go. These locations provide a wide variety of habitats including mature forest, meadows, swamps, marshes, old fields and Lake Ontario and its shoreline. The result is a diverse collection of bird species, especially during spring migration. Scheduling on the Sunday of the Victoria Day holiday weekend has resulted, so far, in trouble-free driving to and from these Whitby birding hot spots. Bring a lunch, water, hat, sunscreen, binoculars, etc. Call Ray Blower ([519-853-0171](tel:519-853-0171)) for starting location and times.

Stand by for: Salamander Nights! Coming to a pond near you in late March or early April! We will be arranging an outing or two to watch this incredible annual event, but dates and times are weather dependent so you will be notified by email.



Red Eft, by Fiona Reid

President's Message

This is a magical time of year. We're on the cusp of spring and all the renewed life that the season brings. Skunk cabbage is already thrusting its flowers out of the sodden earth, assisted by a heat-generating chemical reaction that can melt ice. Male Redwing Blackbirds will soon utter their iconic "o-ka-lay" notes from atop cattail stalks. At dusk, male Woodcocks will strut on their staging grounds and then spiral into the heavens to impress the females with exciting aerial displays.

In the woods, snowmelt trickling through subterranean hideaways will summon the *Ambystoma* salamanders to the surface. In an age-old migration, thousands of Spotted and Jefferson Salamanders will wend their way through emerging wildflowers to their natal ponds.

Spring Peepers, Wood Frogs, Chorus Frogs and Leopard Frogs will join the salamanders at the ponds and their voices, muted for months in icy stasis, will again rise in glorious chorus.

These natural phenomena have heralded spring for thousands of years. They are life-affirming and, for those who take the time to witness them, fascinating. They persist in places that we haven't yet destroyed – places like the Niagara Escarpment. We are so fortunate that this ancient landform, colourfully known as "The Giant's Rib", courses through our communities and that forward thinking people had the wisdom to grant it some measure of protection through the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The Giant's Rib is a priceless repository of natural life – it fairly resounds in spring to frog call.

If you've been hibernating yourself, now is the time to awaken and venture into woodland and wetland and nourish the spirit. This is a time for celebration, a time of renewal and a time to ask what we can do to make the world a little better for ourselves and the myriad life forms we share it with.

Our next two meetings will offer glimpses into some of the wondrous life that finds refuge in the ponds and streams of the Giant's Rib and in other special places.

Outings will provide opportunities to experience the springtime exuberance of life. Ray Blower's annual excursion to Long Point is a balm for winter-weary souls and an excellent way to welcome early migrants including Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes. A little later in the spring we'll visit a pond to witness the spectacle of amphibian breeding, and another outing will find us staring upwards at sunset watching woodcock display.

Hope to see you out!

Don Scallen



Pileated Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers have remarkably strong beaks that are often compared to chisels because of their shape and their primary purpose – excavating holes in wood. A more apt comparison might be the pickaxe. The pounding stroke of a woodpecker from the neck up is like the motion of a swinging pickaxe and the beak is analogous to the business end of the axe.

Woodpeckers use these organic pickaxes to great effect. The largest of our woodpeckers, the pileated, can excavate cavities that could swallow big French baguettes. The wood needn't necessarily be punky. A determined pileated can penetrate hard, healthy timber.

All this pounding would quickly concuss the brains of most other animals. But woodpeckers have evolved bone structure and shock absorption that cushions their brains very effectively.

So effective, in fact, that researchers in the field of biomimicry are now attempting to use woodpecker-head inspired design to make better helmets for soldiers and football players. And coming soon to a sporting goods store near you, may be a bicycle helmet modeled after a woodpecker's skull.

It is fair to wonder what all the pounding achieves for a pileated woodpecker. The energy expenditure is surely immense. So the reward must be commensurate. It is: carpenter ants and their plump, protein-rich larvae.

Carpenter ants carve elaborate galleries inside trees, creating cozy accommodation for their colonies. In these woody labyrinths the ants enjoy protection from the elements and from predators - except of course from the pickaxe-wielding pileated woodpeckers.

Not only do these woodpeckers have remarkable adaptations for excavating wood, they also have acute hearing that allows them to pick up the telltale sounds of ants scurrying within trees.

Imagine the havoc inside these ant colonies when a pileated woodpecker comes a-knocking!

by Don Scallen

Read other nature tales by Don at <http://www.inthehills.ca/blogs/notes-from-the-wild/>



Pileated Woodpecker Excavation, by Don Scallen

The Problem with Inukshuks



Figure 1. Rock Sculpture at Goderich Beach, 2015

For many years, especially through the 1970s and 80s, it was a very common thing to see graffiti painted on the many rock cuts that line the highways of Northern Ontario and elsewhere. The graffiti was mostly made by someone adding their names and the date of their visit to the site. The presence of such things appeared to simply encourage other people to do the very same thing and, as a result, large numbers of names were spread all over the roadsides and the landscape appeared defaced. The practice was so common that people must have carried cans of spray paint in their vehicles simply for this purpose. At some point, the Ministry of Transportation decided that the number of autographs was getting to be excessive and adopted the practice of painting over the names on the rocks. Over time, this resulted in far fewer names being added to the rock cuts. Without examples for others and the prospect that one's travel history would soon be wiped out, the potential sign painters lost interest in creating this type of graffiti.

After this, a new practice came into vogue. This was the building of inuksuk or inukshuks from stones available at the rock cuts. Instead of painting one's name, people were now piling stones in the manner of the native people of the Arctic. Of course, the stones involved in Ontario are far smaller than the ones in the north but the basic design is the same. There are two things that are wrong with the building of these false inukshuks. The first is that they are culturally inappropriate and out of place relative to their point of origin and do not serve in any way as way markers as was their original purpose. The second and far more serious problem is that the moving and piling of stones has a severely negative ecological effect on the various animals that shelter beneath them.

Often, the stones that are used are the only shelters available for many species that are eking out an existence on a hard rocky surface. The species involved include many insects (ants, wood roaches, and many others), spiders, centipedes, millipedes, snails, snakes, skinks, and the like.

Recently, the news media picked up on a story about the inukshuks that had been built on the beach at Goderich by visitors and local residents (Fig. 1). At least 150 had been created there and many had been damaged or toppled. This event was covered by CTV News on Sept. 30, 2015 (Scott Miller / CTV London, Dave Flaherty of the Goderich Signal-Star). Prior to this, the Town of Goderich had several complaints about the safety of the towering inukshuks so town council had an entire beach safety audit completed. Local residents were very upset that the structures had been damaged and set about to rebuild them. One resident put out the call for a “rebuilding party” claiming that the inukshuks showed a lot of community spirit and gave the people in town a lot of pride. The people there obviously have much to learn about the functioning of the natural environment. The toppling was blamed on ‘vandals’. The real vandals were the people that created them in the first place. Rebuilding the inukshuks was a simply a second round of environmental vandalism. Word needs to be distributed that the practice is harmful and should be stopped.



Figure 2. Sculpture at Humber River, 2010

A similar issue is involved with people that create ‘sculpture’ in rivers using rocks that they obtain from the beds of those rivers (Figs. 2 and 3). The animals affected there are necessarily aquatic species. The removal of the rocks takes away shelter for fish, crayfish, snails, and a host of aquatic insects. The activities can certainly be interpreted as damage to fish habitat and should be actively discouraged or even prosecuted.

The practice of constructing false inukshuks requires active discouragement. Any efforts to restore rocks used in the construction of these structures to their rightful position should be applauded. Do nature a favour and kick of over the next inukshuk that you see!

By W. D. McIlveen



Figure 3. Sculpture at Ottawa River, 2008

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Charity Registration number 869778761RR0001

Executive

President: Don Scallen (905) 877-2876
Past President Fiona Reid (905) 693-9719
Vice President: Ian Jarvie (905) 877-1441
Secretary: Emily Dobson (647) 408-9515
Treasurer: Janice Sukhiani (647) 408-9515

Appointments

Membership: Valerie Dobson
Newsletter: Ramona Dobson
Ontario Nature Representative: Johanna Perz
Public Relations: Johanna Perz
Webmaster: John Beaudette
Crozier Property Steward
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

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**

