Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

The Esquesing

May - June 2020 Newsletter
Volume 54, Number 5

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Acting President's Message

What an unprecedented time! I hope all of you are well and finding ways to manage this new reality. I'm shocked at how fast events unfolded. In mid-March I was still entertaining hope that scientist and author Bridget Stutchbury would speak to us in April. I had my fingers crossed that Ray Blower's annual trips to Beamer Conservation Area and Thickson Wood in April and May respectively, would be a go. Alas I was naïve. Day by day, more and more of our world shut down.

The dramatic response to Covid 19, on behalf of our various governments, was prudent of course. We all have a responsibility to keep ourselves and others safe.

As naturalists we are fortunate. Though businesses and institutions shut down, nature didn't. Birds are singing, wildflowers are in glorious bloom, and fresh new leaves are greening our world. Those of us with yards can simply step outside and revel in the delights of spring. For condominium or apartment dwellers this isn't as easy, especially with the widespread closure of trail systems. That different jurisdictions have different rules about trail use, speaks to the uncertainty of deciding what the proper level of caution should be. We need to avoid catching and transmitting Covid, but we also need exercise, fresh air and communion with nature, for our physical and emotional wellbeing. To open or not to open is a tough call for government authorities.

There is a glimmer of hope. It appears that the reopening of at least some trails and parks will be included in the first stage of Ontario's "restart". This will be welcome news.

If trails and parks reopen soon, and this is a lighter note, our club will stand a better chance of reaching the lofty goal, set by your executive, of recording 200 species of birds (both resident and migrant) in Peel and Halton by springtime's end. I'll be watching for migrating warblers in my yard during May, but needless to say, I'd find more at Hilton Falls or Forks of the Credit Provincial Park. Please have a look at our ongoing spring bird list on the club website. As of April 30, we had 71 species. (A mere 129 to go!) We need your help. Please send records of new species to Vice President Ian Jarvie at auldscot1@cogeco.ca


Blackburnian Warbler
Photo credit: Ian Jarvie

Another club birding initiative, and one that has received much positive feedback, is our regular bird quiz. Ian Jarvie can take a bow for coming up with this idea. I hope you've had some fun identifying the birds! (By the way all the photos are Ian's. Impressive eh?)

If you have bird photos or any other nature oriented images or stories to share, please consider sending them to our intrepid webmaster John Beaudette at info@hnpnc.com . John will post them under the heading "Sightings During Isolation."

This is the first newsletter we've ever published without any walks scheduled, because of the current park and trail closures and, of course, the permitted size of gatherings. Bill McIlveen's popular summer evening walks have been suspended, at least temporarily. We hope we can resume outings soon.

As for indoor meetings, we'll respond to the evolving situation as necessary. Our scheduled September speaker demonstrated a great sense of humour when he was featured on CBC's Quirks and Quarks in 2019. That levity will be a welcome balm for our spirits should we be able to meet in September.

I hope you and your loved ones are safe and healthy. I look forward to the time that we can share the wonders of nature together, once again.

Don Scallen

Talks and Walks

Indoor Events: Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. 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 8, 2020
Jonathan Pruit: Adventures in field research in the Southeastern U.S. (provisional title)
Jonathan Pruit is a professor at the University of Guelph. He travelled throughout the Southeastern United States to study how storm events affect spider populations. He'll tell us about that research but also about some of the unexpected adventures he had along the way.

October 13, 2020
Debra Spilar: Wildlife Rescue.
Debra Spilar is the director of Procyon Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Centre in Beeton Ontario.

Outdoor Events

Outdoor Events: temporarily cancelled.
Watch your inbox for news that outings will resume.

Butterfly Blitz

Join us for our annual Butterfly Blitz. This citizen science program is creating a watershed-wide inventory of butterflies. The data you collect will give insights to protect and restore wildlife habitat in the Credit River Watershed.

Butterfly Blitz is a great way to connect with nature and spend time outdoors. You'll learn how to identify butterfly species in your backyard. We're planning to provide our training by webinar this year instead of in person at a kick-off event. The first webinars are on May 23rd.

Participants should only make observations from their own property and where it is safe and reasonable to do so during social distancing.

DETAILS at https://cvc.ca/learn-and-get-involved/volunteer/butterfly-blitz/
or contact Lindsey Jennings at **lindsey.jennings@cvc.ca**

From the Web

Courtesy of our illustrious VP, Ian Jarvie comes this nugget about white throated sparrows and their four distinct forms, each displaying different colouration and behaviour. The author claims that the white-throated sparrow "really does operate as a bird with four sexes." Read on.

(By the way: in the article the author also claims that a white-throated male says "Oh Sweet Kimberly, Kimberly, Kimberly". We know, of course, that the male actually says "Oh Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada"!)
https://www.audubon.org/news/the-fascinating-and-complicated-sex-lives-white-throated-sparrows

And now for your listening pleasure: a bird song opera. Please note the homegrown talent. Several of the singers are Ontario species.
http://volkerpannes.de/portfolio/bird-song-opera/

Native Tree Workshop

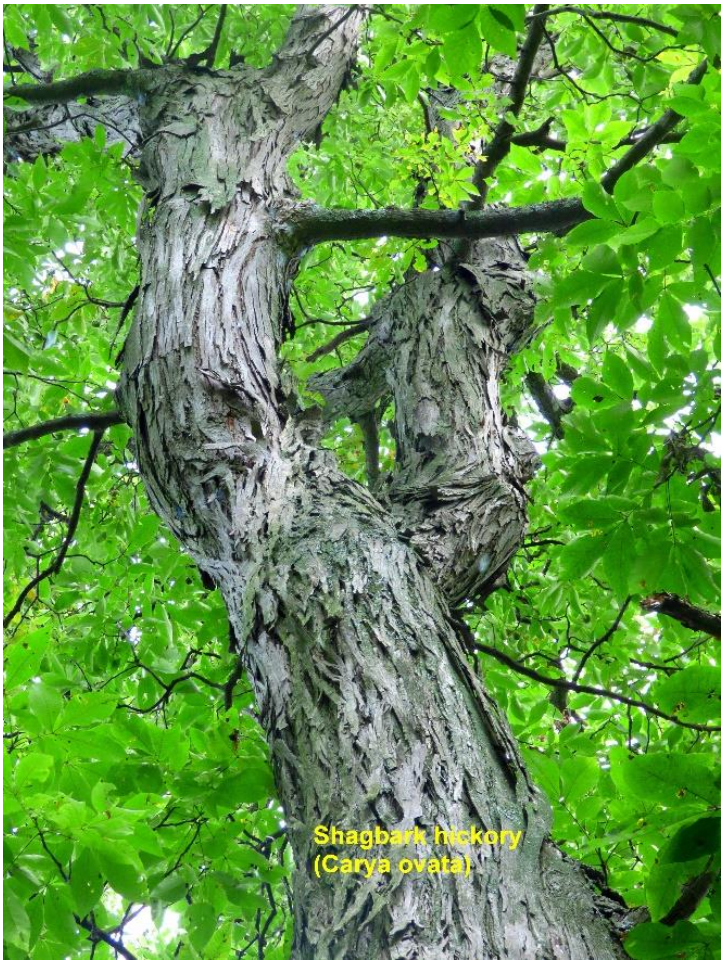
Your club hopes to present another community workshop with support from the Halton Hill's Community Sustainability Investment Fund. If we are granted funding, and if the trajectory of Covid 19 allows us to proceed, this workshop will likely take place in the fall of this year.

Thus far we've conducted two very successful community workshops. The first, in May of 2019 was "Bees and Beyond, a Pollinator Workshop". Forty participants attended and each walked away with a basket of native flowering plants. Then in October of 2019 we presented Strategies on Recycling and Waste Reduction in Halton Hills to a packed house at the Mold Masters SportsPlex in Georgetown.

Our proposed native tree workshop will celebrate the beauty and the ecological value of our native trees. Attendees will be given three or four native tree seedlings to plant in their yards.

Stay tuned for status updates.

Below, is Shagbark Hickory, a fine tree native to Peel, Halton and other parts of southern Ontario.



Lyme Disease in Halton and Peel Regions

Article by Don Scallen

In 2019 seven black-legged ticks (the vector for Lyme Disease in Canada) tested positive for Lyme Disease. Four were found by "tick dragging" carried out by the Region. This out of a total of 85 black-legged ticks captured. Refer to the chart on the Halton Region website below. One of ticks captured with the dragging method and found to be carrying the bacteria that transmits Lyme disease was from Limehouse Conservation Area in North Halton.

Another three Lyme disease positive black ticks were discovered through Halton Region's "Submit a Tick" program. Of 450 Halton Region ticks submitted to the Health Department in Oakville in 2019, 67 were identified as black-legged ticks and of those, three tested positive for Lyme Disease. This Submit a Tick program is temporarily suspended because of the current focus on managing Covid 19.

As of March of 2020, no Lyme disease carrying ticks had been reported in Peel Region. In fact, a report from 2018 stated that no black-legged ticks had been found in Peel at all. Refer to the Peel Region website below. This is curious indeed considering that 34 black-legged ticks were found next door in Halton in 2018 and 85 in 2019.
Please refer to the websites below for much more information about ticks and Lyme Disease, including how to protect yourself from the disease.

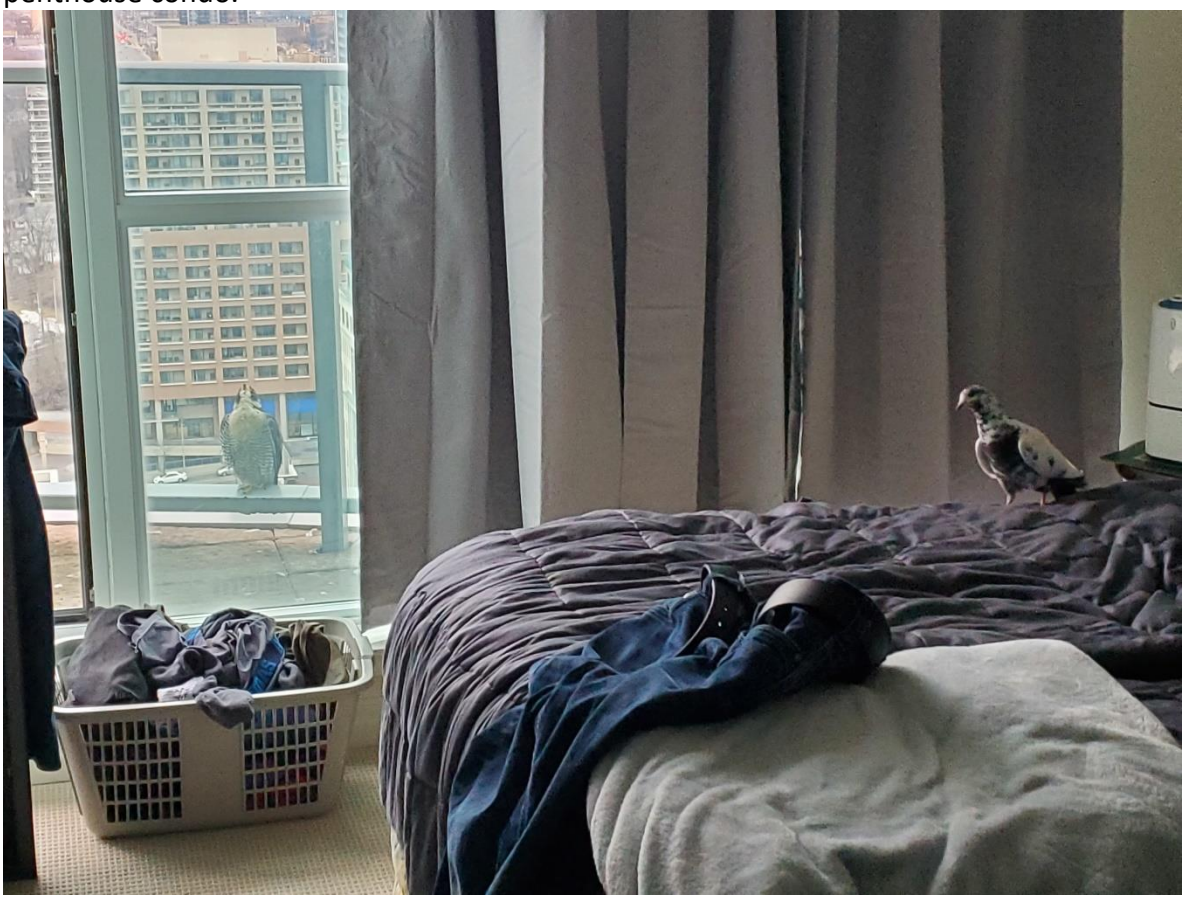
https://www.halton.ca/For-Residents/Immunizations-Preventable-Disease/Diseases-Infections/Lyme-Disease#10

https://www.peelregion.ca/health/vbd/lyme/prevention.htm

Typhoon Missed Lunch

Article by Laura Weihs and Photo by Nick Richardson

Peter Bailey and Rose O'Reilly's neighbour heard a commotion coming from his bedroom and when he went to check it out, he saw the scene below. Apparently the pigeon escaped ending up as dinner for the peregrine by slipping through the open door on the terrace. This male falcon is named Typhoon. He and his mate, Falco nest directly above their neighbour's penthouse condo.



Typhoon's story:

Typhoon is the offspring of a pair of peregrines who nested high on top of the bank towers in downtown Toronto in 2015. He was one of two young produced by Haven, an unbanded female, and her mate Malik. By late summer that year, Typhoon began to explore the area beyond the nest site which landed him in a serious situation. He had landed on a rooftop chimney at Yonge and St. Clair Ave. and having momentum behind him, he fell in. Luckily his scratching drew the attention of a maintenance worker who was able to rescue Typhoon and call the Canadian Peregrine Foundation for assistance. He was taken to rehab for a brief stay and released a few days later healthy, happy and definietly the wiser for his experiences. Today Typhoon has matured and found a nesting territory of his own in downtown Brampton along with a beautiful unbanded female named Falco. He was even officially adopted by their neighbour through the Canadian Peregrine Foundation on December 25, 2019 and has a certificate to that effect!

No Pigeons on this Balcony!

Article by Don Scallen and photo by Steve Nagy

Club member Peter Bailey sent us this amazing photo taken by Steve Nagy on a condominium railing in Downtown Brampton on April 20th. Peter Bailey and partner Rose O'Reilly have entertained club members in recent years with stories about the peregrine family that nests on their condominium. One story involved a strafing incident with Peter as the victim. Peter's caption for this photo? "No pigeons on this balcony" I think not!

Further Information on Halton's Unusual Cactus

Article and photos by W.D. McIlveen

Background

In 2017, Fiona Reid discovered a new cactus species for Ontario just south of the Scotch Block Reservoir on the Third Line, Esquesing [Reid]. The species was determined to be *Opuntia polyacantha*, a species that occurs in Western Canada (Fig. 1). The origin of the

Fig. 1 Opuntia polyacantha Plains Prickly Pear Cactus Scotch Block Railroad June 5, 2017

cactus colony could not be determined. Three possible sources of the plant were considered but ruled out for lack of evidence. There was no evidence of a past residence nearby from which the species could escape. While there is some evidence for disposal of other garden waste near the site, the position of the cactus on the east side of the track seems highly unusual place for any disposal waste, let alone such an unusual species. Any association of the cactus plants with rail traffic from Western Canada also seems highly improbable. Though it may not solve the mystery of the origin of the cactus, we have found some additional information relating to the site.

Introduced Species

The site opposite (e.g. west side) the place where the cactus is to be found is a dry, gravelly deposit. It is a level site above the bed of the railroad. It offers train-spotters a good vantage point to view trains and such people and naturalists use the location since it keeps vehicles safely off the main road. It was noted that many of the plant species growing there are not native. Many of the non-native species are common weeds and are not considered to be too unusual. One visit tallied 26 non-native species compared to only 4 native species.

Travelling a little further in any direction would easily produce additional native species but the numbers quoted do suggest that the site has seen considerable disturbance. A number of the non-native species do suggest that disposal of garden waste has occurred, Species such as Yellow Camomile (*Cota tinctoria*), Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*), Meadow Sage (*Salvia pratensis*), *Yucca* sp., Ragged-robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), and Common Wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) suggest unusual disposal of species. These are nearly all on the west side of the railroad as carrying such source materials to the east side of the tracks is not really to be expected. The cactus plants are all on the east side of the tracks, not on the west side where quick disposal of waste would be more expected.

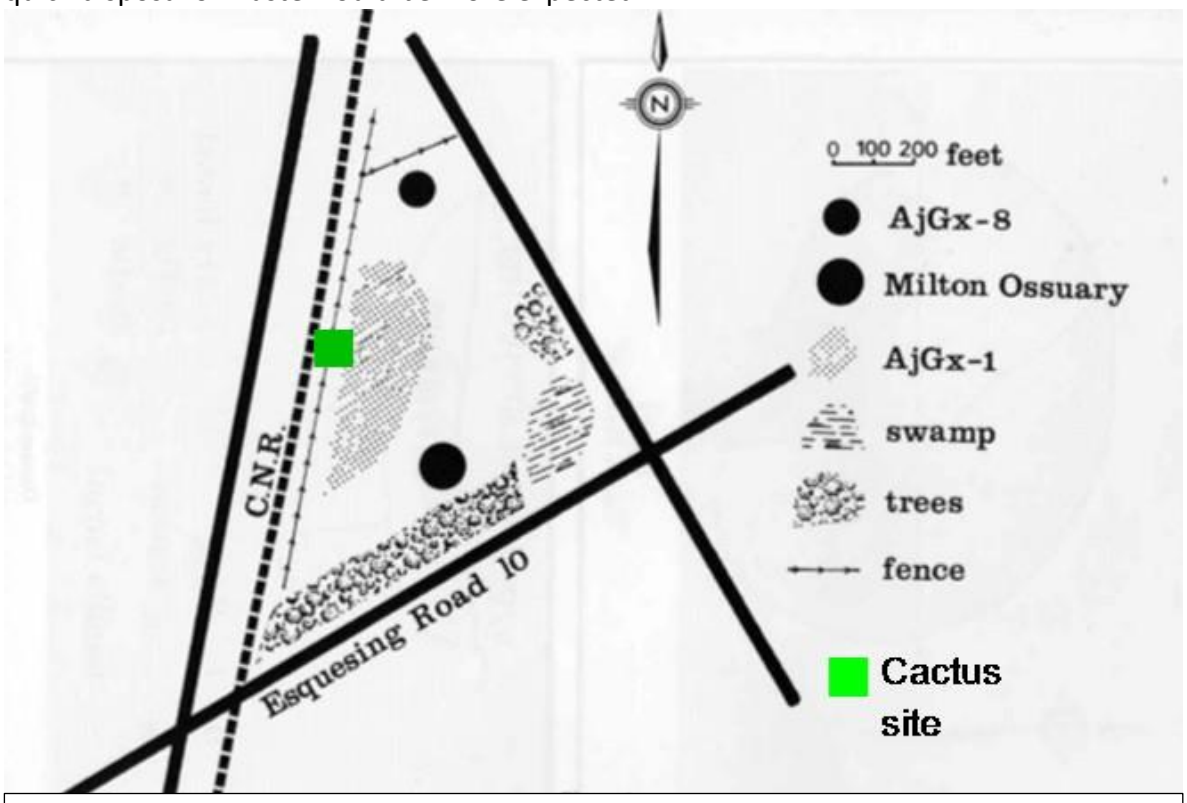


Fig. 2 Map showing relative locations of ossuary sites, native village and Cactus plants.
Reid, C.S. and **T.A. Conway**. 1976

Fig. 3 Location of cactus plants beside railroad bed

First Nations Connections

While searching for information related to the many cemeteries in Halton. I came upon reference to the McClellahan Ossuary Site, a name I had not encountered before. A quick search soon revealed that the site location is situated on Lot 11, Concession 3 of Esquesing which is located on the north side of Sideroad 10 and west of the 3rd Line. In fact, it is located on the triangle of land created by those two roads and the C.N.R. that cuts diagonally across those roads. As shown on the map provided by Reid and Conway [1976] (Fig. 2), there were actually two known ossuaries on the property. The more northerly one was studied in 1971. By that time, it had been badly damaged by looters. Their work indicated that the bones from 11 to 18 persons had been placed in the burial site. Despite the damage, they authors were able to conclude that the site involved Wendat people. A glass bead and some other materials indicated that they had traded for European goods at some point in time. The Wendat traded furs with the French and since Quebec City was only founded in 1608, we can approximate the early limits of the trade to about this period though some earlier trading had taken place. The Haudenosaunee drove most of the Wendat out of southern Ontario by about 1650 in wars over the fur trade. We can use this as an approximate late date for the bones in the ossuary.

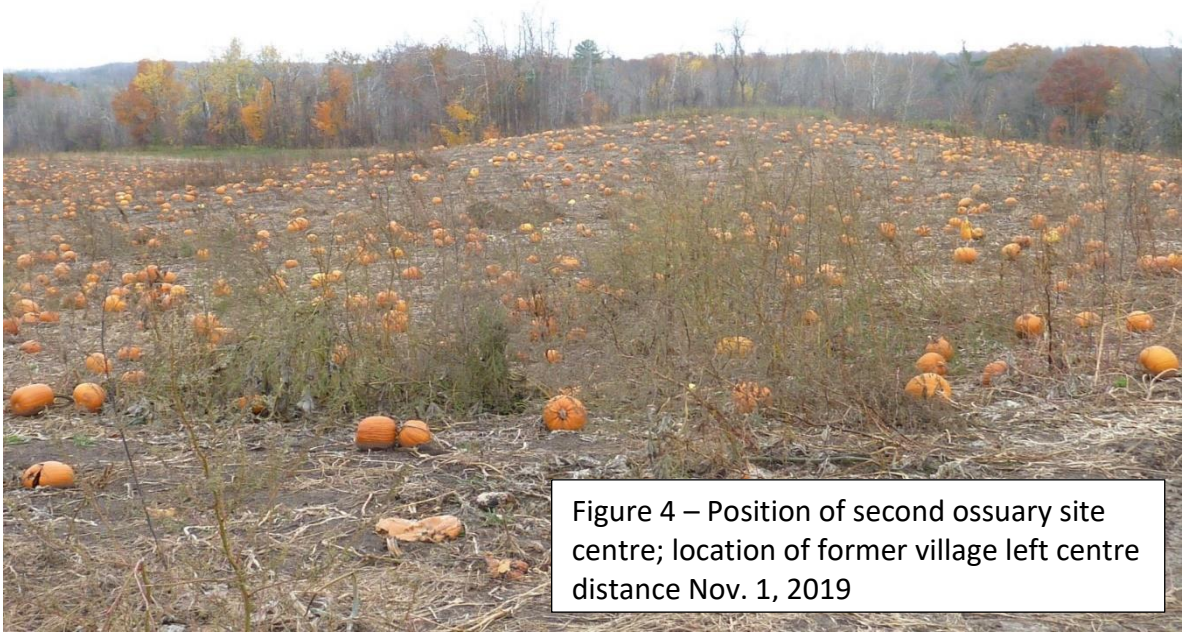


Figure 4 – Position of second ossuary site centre; location of former village left centre distance Nov. 1, 2019

The original railway that passed through the site was the Hamilton & North Western Railway which opened the line from Hamilton to Georgetown in 1876. This was merged with the Grand Trunk Railway in 1888 then taken over by the Canadian National Railway in the early 1920s. At least we know the timing that the cut made to accommodate the tracks dates to 1876 or over 140 years ago (Fig. 3).

The report by Reid and Conway [1976] indicates that a prehistoric village site was located west of and in between the two ossuaries was investigated. This village was investigated under the direction of Dr. A. Mohr from Erindale College, University of Toronto. That village appears to be immediately adjacent to the railroad cut. At this point, we have no specific

evidence that indicates that this happened but it appears quite possible that at least part of the village site was removed during the construction of the railroad. When the railroad was constructed in 1876, there would be little regard for archaeological sites unless they were major and conspicuous. It would appear that the site of the cactus of concern in the report occupies a site that was once a part of the Wendat village.

First Nations Land Use

It has been well established that First Nations people that occupied Southern Ontario cultivated corn and other crops. Sites were occupied for about 15 years before the nutrient pool in the soil was exhausted and nearby fuelwood had been used up. At such junctures, the people would move to a new location. The nature of the soil in the general vicinity of the village noted here near the Scotch Block Reservoir appears particularly suited to growing corn and other crops. At present, such land is being used for fruit and other horticultural crops by Andrew's Farm Market, the Williams Orchard and Wheelbarrow Orchards. When corn fields were abandoned by the First Nations groups, the sites were particularly favoured by White Pine which took over the sites. We therefore have sites that were dominated by White Pine. When the Europeans arrived, they found large groves of large White Pine trees where the former corn field had been. In the present case, the pines would have been roughly 200 years old when the settlers arrived. While cutting down the pines was easy enough, the stumps were a significant problem since they resisted decay. The settlers did utilize this characteristic and turned the stumps into fences along the roads and edges of the fields [McIlveen, and Boman, 2017]. Although they are slowly disappearing as decay advances, we still have evidence in 2019 that such stump fences were created along Sideroad 10 (Fig. 5). Such fences could be 100 to 150 years.

Final Comments

The site of the northern ossuary is presently a cultivated field. It was used for growing pumpkins in 2019 (Fig. 4). The site where the village was reported to be is also part of the same field. It is not obvious where the larger southern ossuary was located. The map provided by Reid and Conway [1976], shows only a narrow band of trees adjacent to Sideroad 10 and a small swampy area. That vegetation has changed a great deal in the nearly 50 years since the field study was carried out. The swamp area has expanded, shrubby vegetation has encroached in all perimeter areas, a fence row that crosses the cultivated area at present was barely discernable in 1971, and a residential lot has been developed.

The newly-acquired information does not explain how the cactus arrives on the railroad embankment. The position of the cactus could only have developed after the rail cut was developed. It seems highly improbable that the cactus was in the area prior to the rail was put in place. Also, it appears that the cactus has been present for a number of years but not likely for more than a decade or two. The site is a favoured place for train spotters. If they had planted the cactus to change the appearance of the site for photography, they could have selected a better species. The cactus is very hard to spot. Slightly more conspicuous are the Yuccas that are also at the site. Overall, there is still no good explanation as to why such a species would be at the site.

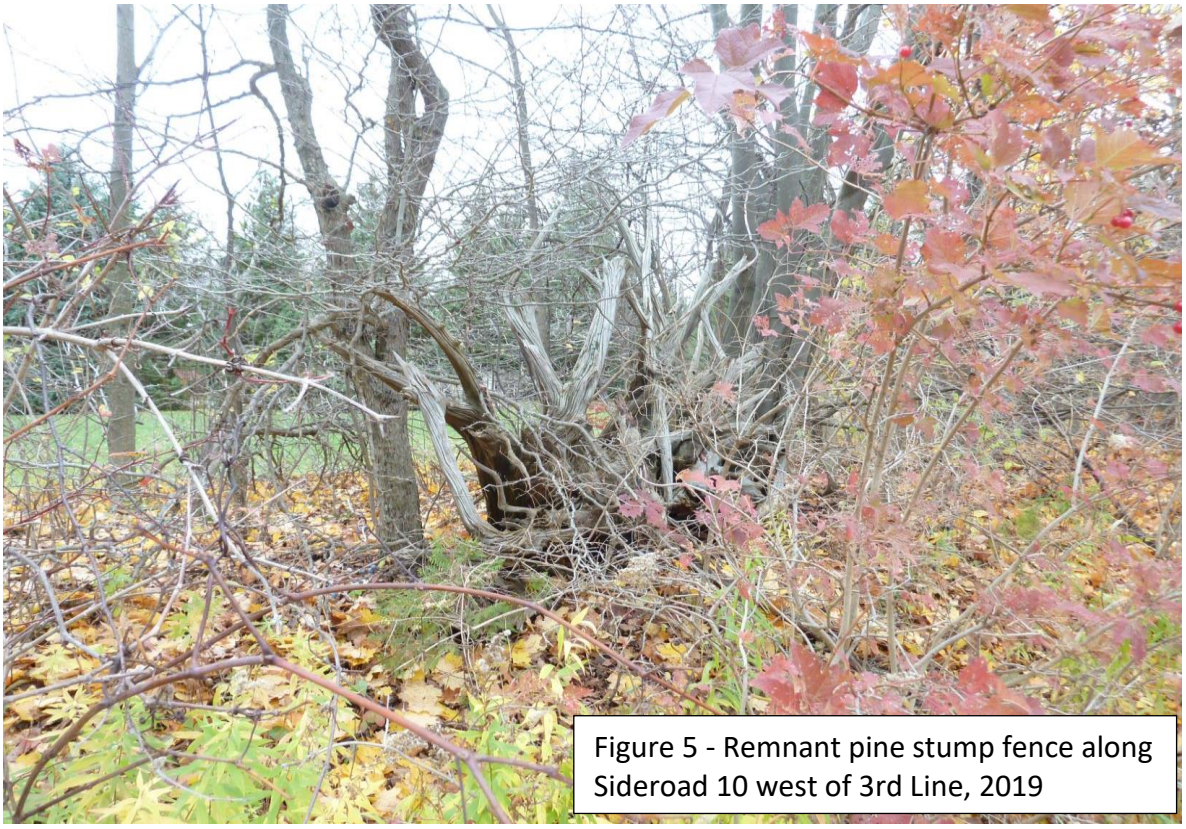


Figure 5 - Remnant pine stump fence along Sideroad 10 west of 3rd Line, 2019

References:

McIlveen, W.D., and **D. Bowman**. 2017. Distribution of pine stump fences in relation to original pine forests in Halton. Field Botanists of Ontario Newsletter. Volume 29 (1) 6 - 12.

Reid, C.S. and **T.A. Conway**. 1976. The McClellahan Ossuary: A Study in Data Retrieval from a Looted, Early Historic Site. Ontario Archaeology No. 26: 31-45.

Reid, F. 2017. Unexpected Encounters. The Esquesing. Newsletter of the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club. Vol 52 (1): 11.

More from the Web

Our treasurer David Williams alerted me to this story about feral hippos in Columbia. I had no idea that hippos were running amok in that part of the world! The researcher contends that these hippos are not the invasive disaster they have thus far been made out to be. In fact, he believes that the African hippos have restored the ecological services of extinct megafauna. https://earther.gizmodo.com/pablo-escobars-cocaine-hippos-are-filling-ecosystem-rol-1842460794

Another fun test of your bird ID skills can be found at https://www.birdday.ca/discover a site sponsored by Nature Canada and other environmental organizations.

And finally, to keep all those singers singing, here are ten things you can do for birds. https://www.audubon.org/magazine/march-april-2013/10-things-you-can-do-birds

Flying Squirrels, Beautiful *and* Brainy

Don Scallen (first published in https://www.inthehills.ca/2020/04/flying-squirrels/)

The large round eyes of flying squirrels, essential for their nocturnal lifestyle, grace them with cuteness factor that is off the charts.

Southern flying squirrel, Fiona Reid

Populations of these beguiling rodents are thought to approximate those of red squirrels, their common diurnal relatives. But because they only come out at night, flying squirrels are seldom seen.

That is, unless you have a bird feeder and live in, or near, the woods like Kim van Oosterom, a Dufferin County resident.

Kim reports that a flying squirrel has divined how to open her squirrel "proof" feeder to pilfer seed. "The feeder is one of those squirrel busters with a weight-sensitive ring; the red squirrels can't figure it out (that's the point!) but the flying squirrel knows to "bounce" the ring and grab seeds on the upswing."

Flying squirrels don't actually "fly". They do glide superbly however, by spreading furry membranes between their legs to achieve lift. By tweaking the angle of these parachute-like membranes they can twist and turn through their forest habitats.

Remarkably, they can glide up to 90 metres, though most of their aerial journeys are much shorter.

A recent discovery found that flying squirrels fluoresce pink under ultraviolet light. This suggests that flying squirrels can use their soulful black eyes to see in the ultraviolet. If so, they may be able to watch flickering pink trajectories of their fellow squirrels as they glide between trees in the dark. This would be useful to track rivals and potential mates.

Perhaps flying squirrels also use ultraviolet vision to find food. Many species of fungi glow in the UV and flying squirrels eat a lot of mushrooms.

So, there you have it. Flying squirrels: brainy rodents, masterful gliders, and, of course, pretty… in pink.

Photo from the web

May June Quiz

Photos by: Don Scallen

Answers on page 18

Nature in the Past

Article by Don Scallen

I've often thought of how extraordinary it would be to travel back a hundred years, or two hundred years, or five hundred years… or more to explore the places we know today like the Niagara Escarpment or the Credit River. How wondrous it would be to stand where our cities do now and see the nature that once prevailed!

In the absence of a time machine the best we can do is glean information from historical documents. Bill McIlveen did this for his February talk on the physical, cultural and biological interactions that have shaped the history of Halton Region, and for his fascinating article on timber rattlesnakes for our January/February newsletter.

I tapped into historical accounts as well, to write a recent article called "Where the Moose and the Elk used to Roam" for In The Hills magazine.
https://www.inthehills.ca/2020/03/where-the-moose-and-the-elk-used-to-roam/

I enjoyed writing this article and finding out more about the trajectory of nature in our area over the past 300 years or so. In 1720, prior to European settlement in this part of Canada, there were passenger pigeons of course. There may even have been occasional stray parrots (Carolina parakeets) from their range south of the Great Lakes. But beyond these extinct creatures there was a cast of vertebrates that evoke thoughts of wilder haunts: wolverines, moose, elk, cougars, martens, spruce grouse and the timber rattlesnakes that Bill wrote about.

Rivers like the Credit and the Humber were filled in the fall with tens of thousands of Atlantic salmon, a freshwater race that is now extinct. American eels also coursed through our local streams, likely in large numbers.

We've lost species, both to extinction and to range contraction since European settlement. And we've lost a shear abundance of vertebrates at a scale we can scarcely imagine.

It is interesting to ponder though, that the natural world hasn't been trending uniformly downward since European's first settled here. In fact, travel to the late 19th century would reveal a world impoverished of much of the wildlife we take for granted today. White tailed deer were scarce, beaver had just about been eliminated. All manner of raptors were in sharp decline. What gives? There were a lot fewer people living in Ontario then.

For starters, virtually all the forest was gone. There is more woodland now, (at least beyond our towns and cities), than there was in the late 19th century or early 20th century. So the loss of forested habitat drove down the numbers of some birds, mammals, and other vertebrates but there were other factors involved. In the early days of settlement there were no quotas on trapping. Beaver were in great demand. Hunting was unregulated as well and in the days before all the varied distractions that we have today, it was extremely popular. And it seems that without regulations anything that moved appeared to be fair

game. A communal pastime was heading out into the wood and fields and shooting everything. That included all manner of songbirds and small mammals.

Hawks were considered vermin and relentlessly killed, especially on migration. Scores would be displayed on fence rows as evidence, perhaps, of the prowess of the hunters.

Since those early years, most of us have embraced a conservation ethic and hunting and trapping have been regulated. Songbirds are protected. Conservation authorities have emerged as custodians for some of our most precious natural spaces. Many of us engage in non-consumptive nature pursuits like birding.

The takeaway? Though we exist in an ecology much diminished from the years prior to European settlement, there is some hope for the future. We've rebounded from the bleak years of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Wise decision making as we move forward, may help us recoup more of our past losses and prevent future losses.

Quiz Answers:

1. Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)
2. Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*)
3. Heart-leaved Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)
4. Fringed Milkwort (*Polygaloides paucifolia*)
5. Sharp-lobed Hepatica (*Anemone acutiloba*)
6. Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)
7. Yellow Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
8. Yellow Trout-lily (*Erythronium americanum*)
9. Canada Wild-ginger (*Asarum canadense*)

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

Executive

Past President: Don Scallen	(905) 876-6180
Vice President: Ian Jarvie	(905) 877-1441
Secretary: Helen Ross	(519) 766-8876
Treasurer: David Williams	(905) 877-1539

Appointments

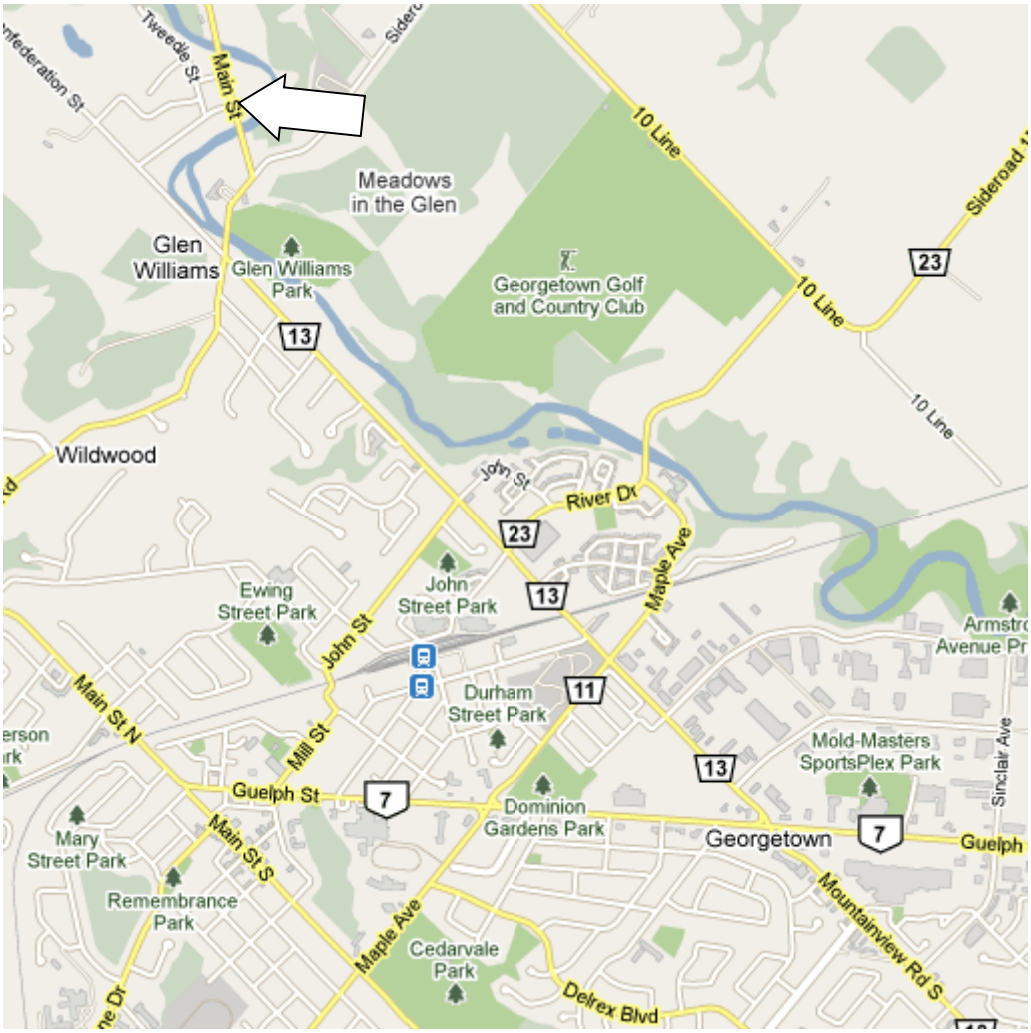
Membership:	Lorysa Cornish
Newsletter:	Laura Weihs
Ontario Nature Rep:	Don Scallen
Webmaster:	John Beaudette
Crozier Property Steward	
Hardy Property Steward	Ray Blower

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

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



Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

_____ Renewal or _____ New Member(s) Date_____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership Renewal: _____ Single ($30.00) _____ Family ($40.00)
New members only for the period:
from December through to August _____ Single ($22.50) _____ Family ($30.00)
from March through to August _____ Single ($15.00) _____ Family ($20.00)
from June through to August _____ Single ($ 7.50) _____ Family ($10.00)

Would you like to make a donation to help send a youth to the **Ontario Nature Youth Summit for Biodiversity and Environmental Leadership**? If yes, amount of donation: $_____

Do you have any suggestions for programs or field trips?

_____

_____

_____

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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: _____

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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