The Esquesing

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

www.hnpnc.com

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Red-breasted Merganser pair *(Mergus serrator)*
Photo Credit: Dave Welfare

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President's Message

As winter gives way to spring, we all look forward to longer, sunnier, warmer days ahead, and of course, the emergence and return of all the wonderful critters, fungi and plants that we so love to experience and appreciate. It's simply amazing to think about all the life forms that have adapted to manage and capitalize on the seemingly marginal conditions at this season. Many birds do not wait for warmer temperatures but chase the retreating snow northward as early migrants make their way towards their breeding grounds. Salamanders don't even wait for the ice and snow to disappear before they make their annual migration to their ponds. (Indeed, many may have already done so with the mild spells we have had this winter!) And while the Maples and other early-flowering trees are showing their buds, the earliest spring ephemerals have also started to pop their buds up between cold snaps. We have so much more of the same to look forward to in the coming weeks!

For most of us, the pleasantness of warm(er) spring days, sunshine and emerging critters is enough to anticipate, but for some, there are important additional benefits that make living so much more manageable. Our speaker this month, Bob Bell, has recently written a book on the health effects of getting out in nature for birding, and the important benefits we derive from such activities. This promises to be a fascinating talk on this aspect of some of our favorite activities, and I hope you will come out to join us for it at next week's meeting.

Next month, our own Past-President, Fiona Reid will be talking to us about Bats, and the citizen science bat survey project we participated in last year. Bats, of course, are interesting enough on their own, of course, and Fiona's expertise and global experience with bats promise to make it another fascinating talk not to be missed!

The Saturday Adventure Walk is also coming up, as we go looking for some of those early Spring migrants I mentioned above. Some of the FOY's ("First-of-the-Years") species have already made appearances – Red-winged Blackbirds, Grackles and Killdeer among others have been seen and heard in our region. Our Saturday Adventure Outings have been a hit, and we are looking forward to getting out there to see more of the returning flocks. The February outing was a great success, with attendees finding five Snowy Owls and many of the usual winter species, such as Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, and Rough-legged Hawks.

Check out the Newsletter for more information on these events, as well as the great photography and articles by club members on Opossums, introduced species, Urban biodiversity, and more, wrapping up with a photo quiz featuring the gorgeous photography of our fellow club member, Dave Welfare. Thank you, Dave, and all the other authors and photographers for your truly excellent contributions – and especially thank you to Laura, who always does such a fantastic job bringing the newsletter together!

Wishing you all a happy, healthy (& birdy!) Spring!

See you at the meeting,
Yves Scholten

Talks and Walks

Indoor Events - Talks

Time/Date: 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of the month
Location: **Hillsview Active Living Centre**, 318 Guelph Street - Unit #9, Georgetown (entrance at the back of the building) Map on last page of the newsletter.

Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at 7:30 pm
Out of the Lyme Light and into the Sunlight: Birding as Therapy for the Chronically Ill

As a result of contracting Lyme disease, Bob Bell had to retire prematurely in 2015. After relocating to Ancaster he subsequently discovered that birding was a fantastic coping mechanism for dealing with his chronic pain. His journey is chronicled in his book titled "*Out of the Lyme Light and into the Sunlight: Birding as Therapy for the Chronically Ill*" which was published in December, 2022.

Bob's talk will describe his onset of a bizarre set of symptoms, followed by his frustrating experience dealing with the conventional medical system, eventual diagnosis, treatment, and then subsequent discovery of the wonderful, therapeutic benefits of birds and birding.

Out of the Lyme Light is currently available at Wild Birds Unlimited, A Different Drummer Books (Burlington), King W. Books (Hamilton), the bookstore at Algonquin Park, the gift shops in Science North in Sudbury and at Point Pelee, and online (Indigo and Amazon) or directly from the publisher. Here is a link to the publisher's website, where a number of blurbs are available:
Out of the Lyme Light and Into the Sunlight- Hancock House – Hancock House Publishers .

The reviews are also on a Facebook page that Bob set up dedicated to the book and his birding activity, which he invites you to join at:
https://www.facebook.com/TheBirderBob/

For those on Twitter you can follow him @ThebirderBob.

Tuesday, April 11, 2023 at 7:30 pm
Bats – Fiona Reid
Fiona will talk about bats worldwide, followed by a more detailed discussion of bats in Ontario and the results of our citizen bat project in Halton.

Outdoor Events

Please Note: More details will follow closer to the event date. Please confirm your participation for each outing so that we can be sure to adhere to the ever changing Covid safety protocols.

HNPNC SATURDAY ADVENTURE WALKS

DATE	EVENT	LEADER
18 Mar 23	Early Migrant Birds	Yves Scholten
Early April 23	Salamander Walk	Don Scallen
15 Apr 23	Winter Ducks on Lake Ontario	TBA
TBA May 23	Snakes	Yves Scholten
13 May 23	Migrating Songbirds	Ian Jarvie
17 Jun 23	Bat Night	Fiona Reid
TBA Jun 23	Scotsdale Bird Boxes	Bill McIlveen

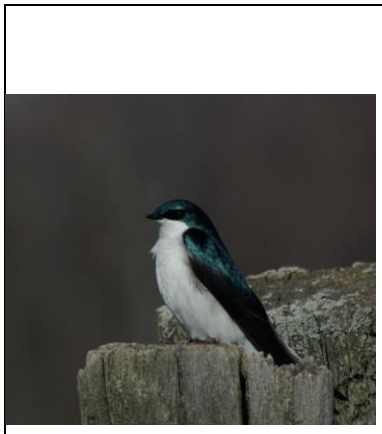
HNP Recognizes Kim Dobson

As most HNP members will know, the club supports two bird box trails in the area. One is at Scotsdale Farm and the other is at The Forks-of-the-Credit Provincial Park. Those were installed in 2014-2015 and 2017-2018 respectively. Although a lengthy list of people have contributed to those projects, there is one person more than any other that has made the two projects a great success. That person is Kim Dobson. Not only was he the builder of all of the boxes, he helped install the boxes. He was a mainstay in the efforts to move the boxes from the fencerows originally used to new steel poles at the edges of the fields. He was there to do monitoring in the breeding season and to help with the clean-out in the fall. More recently, he has been adding camouflage to the baffles.

Bird Boxes Scotsdale Farm 2014 05 19

Kim Dobson Scotsdale Farm 2018 05 01

On February 14, the HNPNC recognized all of Kim's efforts by presenting him with a certificate to show the club's appreciation for all of his efforts that have made the bird box program a great success. Well Done and congratulations, Kim!



The

HALTON/NORTH PEEL NATURALIST CLUB

recognizes and thanks

KIM DOBSON

for all of his efforts that led to the success of the bird box program at Scotsdale Farm and The Forks-of-the- Credit Provincial Park
Specifically, Kim's contribution included building the nest boxes, installation of the boxes, repair and relocation of the boxes, and monitoring the use of the boxes

Thank You, Kim!

January 10, 2023

Notes on Opossum Sightings

Article and Photos by W.D. McIlveen

During 2021, it seemed like I was seeing more dead Opossums on the roadside as I travelled around. This was the trigger for me to check my database which includes records of all kinds. The present account is a summary of the available records relating to Opossums.

The Virginia Opossum is a rather unusual mammal species for Ontario. It is the only marsupial in North America. Its physical structure is designed for warmer climates that occur in the southern part of the continent, not for the winter cold of more northerly areas. As a consequence, the animals often suffer from frostbite to ears and tail. The range expansion though, has been made possible by the nature of development of agricultural land but is limited by Opossum's inability to forage in snow [Walsh]. The species is omnivorous which is to their benefit as they can take advantage of human waste mishandling, bird feeders and the like, during the winter (Fig. 1).

Opossums were reported in Ontario as early as 1858 in Toronto [Petersen]. Subsequent reports for the province were very sporadic but a small population was apparently present on the north shore of Lake Erie for short periods. It was not even mentioned as being in Ontario by MacCrimmon [1977]. Generally, recent records have shown the species to be expanding its range northward from its original range to places such as Michigan and into Ontario despite the barrier presented by the Great Lakes. It is not possible to pinpoint any particular date when the species made its significant incursion into Ontario but the general pattern suggests that it may have happened in the 1980s.

Fig. 1. Opossum under bird feeder Acton, 2019

The recent distribution of Opossums in Ontario has been reported by Dobbyn [1994]. The main distribution on Dobbyn's map includes an area generally defined by London, Guelph, Toronto and the Niagara Peninsula (Fig. 2). There are records of encounters beyond this general area. The more distant locations are considered to be due to accidental transport of the animals rather than by movement by the animals themselves. Closer examination of the map shows a cluster of sites near Windsor, Sarnia, and Niagara and to a lesser extent at the east end of Lake Ontario. This would be consistent with animals making their way into Ontario at border crossing from the United States whether on their own or by trucks. The main distribution noted above generally follows the axis of Highway 401 and this would also be consistent with trucking movements along that route. The main distribution is consistent with milder parts of Ontario, that being southwestern Ontario.

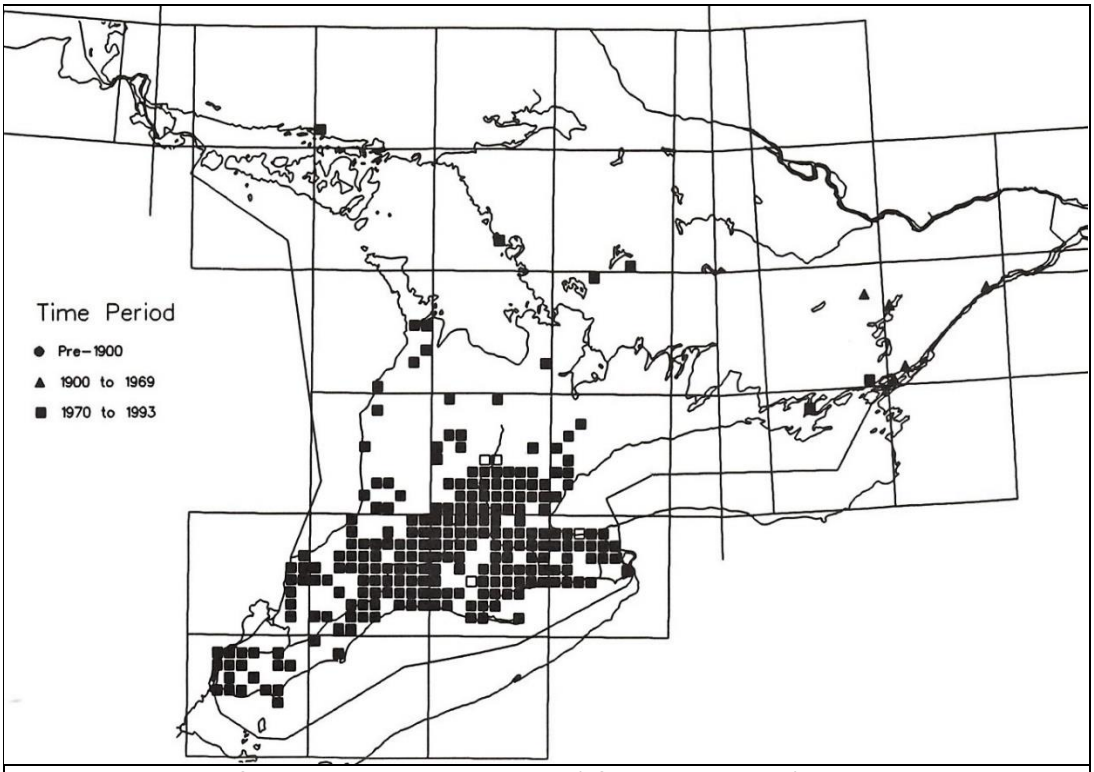


Fig. 2. Distribution of Opossum sightings in Ontario (after Dobbyn, 1994)

My database includes 254 records of Opossum sightings since 1990. One of these was from Georgia while all of the rest were observations in Ontario. The distribution of records includes a total of 16 different counties or regional municipalities. All of these records fall within the geographic range described by Dobbyn. The records are very heavily biased by my travel which is to be expected. The vast majority of records were from Halton. The distribution of sightings in the Halton area included 99 sightings in Esquesing, 42 in Nassagaweya, 40 in Trafalgar, and 20 in Nelson. By comparison, the whole of Peel Region contributed 23 records.

A breakdown of sightings by year indicated an uneven pattern in annual encounters (Fig. 3). The first half of the study period showed notably more encounters than did the second half. There was only a single record for the five-year period ahead of 2021. This pattern was likely the basis for the perceived increase in sightings in 2021 that led to this account.

The records do not all indicate whether the observed animals were dead or alive. For those records that did make specific note of their condition, there were just 14 live animals compared to 184 road kills. The vast majority of the records almost certainly referred to dead animals. This is partially explained by the nocturnal nature of Opossums. In the dark, they are more difficult to see, at least until the last moment when a driver has too little time to alter their course. The slow-moving animal does not fare well in such encounters! A dead animal is liable to remain in place for an extended period and is therefore more likely to be discovered in such a condition. Regardless, we can easily conclude that Opossums are highly vulnerable to road traffic.

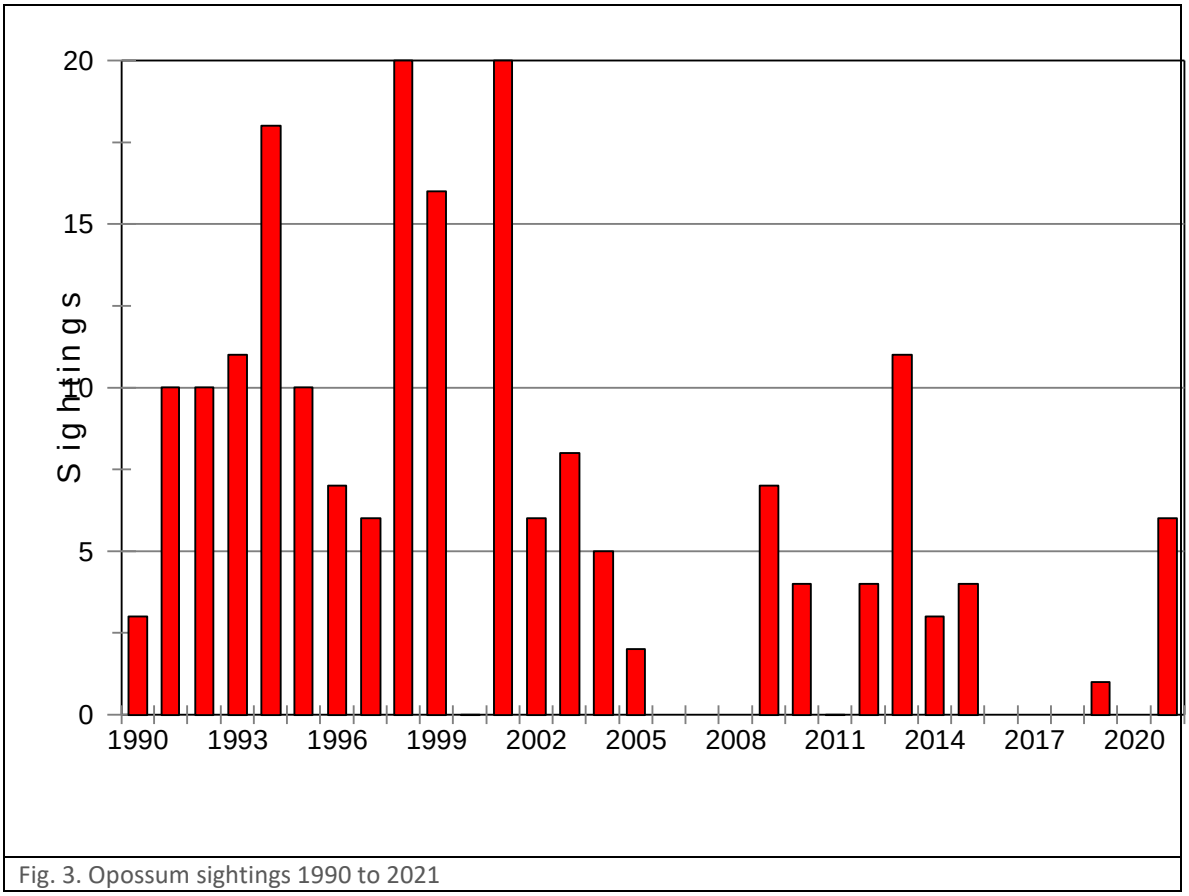


Fig. 3. Opossum sightings 1990 to 2021

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Dobbyn, J. 1994. Atlas of the Mammals of Ontario. Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Don Mills. ON 120 pp.

MacCrimmon, H.R. 1977. Animals, man and change: Alien and Extinct Wildlife of Ontario. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 160 pp.

Peterson, R. L., & Downing, S. C. 1956. Distributional Records of the Opossum in Ontario. J. Mammal. 37(3), 431–435.

Walsh, L.L. and P.K. Tucker. 2017. Contemporary range expansion of the Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) impacted by humans and snow cover. Can. J. Zool. 96: 107 - 115

Complex Nature Series, Opinion
Introduced fauna

Article and Photos by Don Scallen

I travelled to Florida recently and spent time photographing reptiles in Miami parks. I was, unabashedly, a kid in a candy store. There were iguanas of course, evoking the dinosaurs that thrilled me when I was ten. But also, a pot pourri of other lizards including anoles, geckos, agamas, and basilisks.

Male Green Iguana

Almost all the lizards I saw are non-natives. Bad news, right? We've been conditioned to view any introduced plant or animal as "invasive" – harmful to the local ecology.

It is true that many introduced plants and animals cause great damage – the pathogens that destroy our elm, ash, and beech trees for example. Or the phragmites reeds that choke our waterways and the starlings that usurp the nesting cavities of native birds.

So please don't call me an apologist for invasive species. I reiterate that many are harmful. If I could wave a wand and wish them out of existence I would.

But nuance is called for. Introduced species exist along a continuum. Some are dangerously invasive, but others bring a mix of negative and positive traits to their new homes. And, I would argue, a few end up being welcome additions.

The introduced lizards of Florida illustrate this. One, the Cuban brown anole, bullies the native green anole, taking over prime habitat throughout the state. But many other introduced lizards are primarily city dwellers that seem only to enhance urban ecology. Our modern cities are novel habitats that are unsuitable for many native species. That some introduced species can survive and even thrive in such heavily modified environments should be perceived as an ecological win.

Do we have any introduced city dwellers here in southern Ontario that merit our acceptance? House finches, native to western North America, would qualify. The males are pretty, and their melodic voices buoy human spirits.

Another positive "newcomer" in my view is the red-eared slider, the common pet store turtle of yesteryear. This lovely reptile lives in wetlands in Toronto and other urban areas. It inhabits places long vacated by native turtles unable to endure life with us.

Miami's growth has chased many native reptiles away from the city including many species of the jaw-dropping diversity of snakes that inhabit south Florida. The fascinating lizards that have moved in will inspire young Floridian naturalists and visitors like me from colder climes. That's not a bad thing.

Male Brown Basilisk

Male Peter's Agama above and Female below

Urban biodiversity

Article and Photos by Don Scallen

Biodiversity is vitally important to me. One of the noblest goals we can aspire to is maintaining and, where possible, enhancing biodiversity. If human life has value, then it follows that the plants and animals that we have genetic kinship with, have value as well. We are, of course, simply one expression of the mind-boggling diversity of life that inhabits our planet. And of course, wild things are intrinsically fascinating. For the curious among us they feed our souls.

I believe it important that we take actions, small and large, to enhance the prospects of these fellow travelers.

Most of us live in towns and cities. There has been a flourishing in recent years about how we can improve the prospects of urban wildlife, and this is a good thing. But important is to better understand what is possible – and what is not.

The possible includes providing habitat and sustenance for invertebrates. This is a highly achievable goal for anyone with a yard or anyone with a planter box on a balcony. Julie Power's front yard in Georgetown is a vibrant oasis of life. Among other things, her wildflower plantings have attracted an astonishing 39 species of butterflies and a majority of the bumblebee species that live in Ontario. What a joy it would be to walk through our towns and repeatedly encounter iterations of her garden with habitats full of bees, butterflies, crickets and spiders instead of an endless succession of sterile, cookie-cutter, soul sapping lawns.

Julie's garden works. It's pictured above and is a clear demonstration that we can greatly enhance invertebrate diversity in suburbia.

Suburbia: a forbidding landscape for wild vertebrates

Darker are the prospects for vertebrate diversity. A great way to crash vertebrate diversity is to build towns. I've spent most of my life in an area of low-density housing in Georgetown and have been a keen observer of urban wildlife during that time. My naturalized backyard is only a soccer field away from Silver Creek valley. Despite that, the diversity of wild vertebrates is profoundly limited. There are no reptiles – not even gartersnakes. There are no salamanders. A very occasional frog – American toad, green frog, gray treefrog – will appear, but their residence is fleeting, and their breeding is thwarted by the absence of ponds.

Only about a dozen species of songbirds nest in my suburban neighborhood out of a total approaching 100 in the natural areas nearby. These include the introduced starlings and house sparrows and natives like house wrens, chickadees, grackles and, of course, robins. Mammals fare somewhat better. Raccoons, skunks, squirrels, chipmunks and deer mice are resident in my yard or frequent visitors. Less frequently, opossums wander through.

There is little we can do to enhance the prospects of urban vertebrate diversity. I wish this wasn't so.

The recent designation of Halton Hills as a bird friendly city is a positive step. But can we realistically enhance bird diversity and numbers in an urban setting?

Much has been made of planting native trees to support birds. This because native trees generally do a better job than non-natives in feeding caterpillars and other insects, which in turn feed birds. I'm a native tree proponent, but I think we've overplayed the difference we can make by planting native trees in towns.

Adequate food is only one essential requirement for nesting birds. Safety is also crucial and for most bird species suburban living is simply too dangerous. An analogy might be helpful. Imagine you're looking at a neighbourhood to raise your family. You find it offers several

grocery stores and a selection of reasonably priced restaurants. You know feeding your family won't be a problem. Then, however, you discover that crime in the neighbourhood is off the charts – vandalism, home invasions, even homicides. Trembling, you look elsewhere.

If you think I'm overstating the danger, consider that we have no ground-nesting birds in suburbia. In the rural areas Peel and Halton – the farms, the fields, the wetlands and woodlands – there are over 40 species that nest on or very close to the ground. These include about 15 species of warblers and five species of sparrows. Glance out your window to find why our towns frighten ground nesting birds: roads, lawns, parking lots, cats, dogs – and us.

We can still take positive actions in our yards and communities to support birds. Those native trees will help the small number of species that have adapted to urban life, and they will also feed other species that pause to forage during migration. We can plant conifers in our yards to provide the dense nesting habitat that some urban birds require to protect them from cats. And speaking of cats, we can keep them indoors for their safety and the safety of urban wildlife. We can advocate for the re-wilding of portions of our urban parks – replacing some of the turf with meadows, shrubs, and trees. We can put up bird boxes for chickadees and house wrens.

As for other taxa of vertebrates, there is little we can do, especially as we pack more homes on smaller parcels of land. Though I reluctantly acknowledge the necessity of "gentle density", the ability of any one homeowner to make a difference will decrease as density increases.

Those on the periphery of towns – along Hungry Hollow in Georgetown for example – have greater options. Backyard ponds in those settings could be installed to provide breeding sites for amphibians.

But our towns will only ever support a shadow of the vertebrate diversity that exists beyond their boundaries. A sad inescapable fact is that the growth of our urban areas is likely to continue unabated in the years and decades to come. Our society appears unable to imagine any alternative future. Caledon currently has about 80,000 people with a projected population of 300,000 by 2051. Georgetown and other Halton/Peel communities will also experience explosive growth. Vertebrate biodiversity will decline in-step. I fervently wish it were otherwise.

This emphasizes the necessity of doing what we can to preserve and enhance natural habitat in Halton and north Peel and above all protecting the Green Belt including the existing conservation lands currently owned by Credit Valley Conservation and Halton Conservation. There will likely be further attempts to erode the protections currently in place. We need to make it clear that this can't happen.

Smoke On The Water

Article and Photos (except where indicated otherwise) by W.D. McIlveen

Introduction

Most people will have heard the Deep Purple song "Smoke On The Water", probably without recognizing the words and knowing even less about the story behind the song. Many fewer people will have heard about fire on the Cuyahoga River, Cleveland. Obviously, the two stories have a common thread related to the burning of combustible materials and the smoky product of that process. As well, another general feature is the low level of intelligence that was involved in both problems. The Deep Purple song resulted from someone firing two flare guns into the ceiling of the Montreux Casino, Switzerland filled with 2000 people. This occurred on December 4, 1971. Smoke from the fire that destroyed the building then moved out over the water of Lake Geneva. The precise cause of the most famous fire on the Cuyahoga is uncertain but it involved an abundance of combustible contaminants in the water. The incident is far from novel. The following account is a brief review of an environmental concern that still persists though perhaps at a reduced level compared to former times.

The Cuyahoga River Fire

The most famous Cuyahoga River fire occurred in 1969. That was not even the largest of at least 13 fires there that date back to 1868. The largest fire happened in 1952 and burned boats, a bridge and an office building. The 1969 fire was sustained by an oil slick. It destroyed some railroad bridges but it received enough attention that it caused extensive efforts to clean up the river. Details regarding the other fires are not immediately available.

Cuyahoga River Fire, 1969 (Photo taken from internet)

Derbyshire, England

One of the earliest instances of rivers on fire occurred in Derbyshire, England. At that location, the Old Deeps coal mine owned by James Oakes & Co. included the Pinxton Warf and Colliery. It was first operated in 1847. When the coal mine was deepened, salt water burst in. The salt water was removed but the flow was replaced by a small flow of

petroleum. All of the water that was removed was required to be disposed of in the nearby Cromford Canal. Naturally, the water contained some small amounts of petroleum that made its way to the surface. In time, local children learned to set the canal on fire with hot coals. We have no record of the number of times the canal was set on fire but that seemed to happen on a frequent basis.

Paterson, New Jersey

Besides the Cuyahoga, at least four other rivers in the United States experienced fire. One of the earliest of these occurred at Paterson, New Jersey. Paterson is the site of the first planned industrial city in the United States. It was established to take advantage of the energy available from the Great Falls on the Passaic River a few miles upstream from the Atlantic Ocean. Some 350 various kinds of mills and machine works were built there. Collectively, they were dumping 70 million gallons of sewage of all types into the river by 1897. Downstream of the Falls, the water was lethal to every form of life. The waste included oil, creosote and acids that floated along with other materials at the surface of the water. By June 1918, the situation reached the stage where the river caught fire in an explosive way. Even though the fire burned for hours, it received only limited attention amidst the numerous severe fires that consumed buildings in the area for decades. The river fire of 1918 threated some buildings but by good fortune, the materials in the river were carried away before much damage to structures could happen.

Buffalo River, Buffalo

Buffalo River is a holding basin for industrial and municipal waste in Buffalo, N.Y. For years, the steel and grain industries along the Buffalo River dumped toxic chemicals into the river. Due to the contaminants present, the river caught fire in 1968 when a workman's torch ignited the fire. Although the fire was contained, there was a threat of the river catching fire again. The river was closed for several days after the fire incident to allow for cleanup.

Rouge River, Detroit

The River Rouge runs though the heavily industrialized portion of the City of Detroit before it flows into the Detroit River. At one time the river was one of the most polluted in the United States. The river is bordered by a huge petroleum refinery, waste treatment plants, and other important industries that all added to pollution of River. It was reported that shortly before the blaze started on October 9, 1969, a gasket on an oil pipe broke, allowing furnace oil to escape from the Shell depot. Some of it was recovered by a pumper truck before the fire broke out. It is uncertain whether the new spill was the main source of oil in the river for the history of the site led to an accumulation of floating oil, oil-soaked debris, and other chemicals. It is believed that the fire in question was caused by sparks from an acetylene torch that ignited the floating debris. The fire released large clouds of smoke, produced tall flames, and caused the explosion of a nearby oil storage tank

Schuylkill River, Philadelphia

The Schuylkill River runs through Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where it ends at the Delaware River. At that location, a number of oil refineries that have operated for well over a century. Over the years, a number of significant fires have occurred causing extensive property

damage and costing human lives including those of fire fighters. Leaks of petroleum materials into the River have taken place and those materials have caught on fire more than once. One of those occasions was in 1892 when oil leaked into the river from the facility at Point Breeze. The oil caught fire from a match that was carelessly tossed into the river. As well, the river was heavily silted with coal dust and silt from the upstream industries and this frequently caused fire on different sections of the river. In 1977, a barge sunk releasing oil which caught fire in the river. In recent times, the refining industry at Philadelphia has declined considerably.

Don River, Toronto

More locally, the Don River caught fire on at least two occasions. In the 1880s, the City of Toronto wanted to develop the area near the lake shore for industrial purposes. Through resistance from the British American Oil, the result was that the Don River could not be straightened to move unwanted materials out into the Lake. In the early 1900s, there were two oil refineries, the McColl-Frontenac and BAO, located in the Don River valley close to Lake Ontario. They were responsible for the release of oil products that floated on the river water surface. Inevitably, the oily waste caught fire. The fire of 1931 destroyed the bridge across the river at Keating Street. The subsequent fire in 1943 destroyed several properties. Neither fire raised much public alarm at the time. Considering the nature of their operations, it is surprising that the refineries were willing to tolerate a fire hazard in close proximity to their operations.

Ottawa Sewer Explosions

Ottawa, Ontario saw not so much of in the way of a fire over water but a series of explosions within the sewer system. Parts of the city were rocked by the explosions in the sewers on May 29, 1929 and January 28, 1931. The explosions led to various forms of damage to buildings through fires, to flying manhole covers, and even some human death. Damage was caused to the sewer system itself. Fire might have emanated from various outlets but any gases might also have been ignited immediately after they blasted into buildings. No definite conclusions were made but leaking illuminating gas is a reasonable assumption as the causal agent. In the end, attempts to place blame were not resolved through different hearings and the City of Ottawa had to absorb the costs of remediation. Overall, whatever actions were taken resulted in the elimination of the problem as no more explosions happened in the years since those two instances happened.

River Fire in China

One of the most-recent river fires occurred in China. On the morning of March 5, 2014. the Meiyu River in Wenzhou in Eastern China erupted into flames. The river had been badly contaminated by oil, chemicals, and untreated sewage. A carelessly-discarded cigarette is blamed for igniting the contaminants in the water. The reported damage included nearby wooden structures and several vehicles. The flames, described as 16 feet high, were brought under control before more-extensive damage could be done to buildings and other structures.

Bellandur Lake, Bangalore, India

Nearby industry is well-known as a source of toxic pollutants that spill into Bellandur Lake in Bangalore, India. Toxic chemicals and garbage are frequently dumped into the lake and are at risk of catching fire. Indeed, the lake has become a site for lake fires. In recent times, a part of the lake caught fire in 2015. That fire spread to the nearby Sun City Apartments. The fire may have started from the garbage fires around the lake

Purposeful Lake Fires

All of the fires mentioned above have been caused by some sort of accident, from lightning, or unintentional causes. Probably the fires at Derbyshire should be excluded from that assessment because those fires were set as an act of mischief. We have a couple of Ontario instances where oil was purposely set alight. The first of those involved an oil transport truck accident south of Sudbury in the winter of 1974. The accident caused a spill that threatened a small frozen lake. In order to eliminate the threat, it was decided the most efficient method to deal with the problem was to burn off the spilled oil. That measure was an apparent success.

The second incident also happened in Sudbury in May, 1984. In this case, a disgruntled former employee at an oil storage facility smashed the valves on two large tanks. Normally, a spill of this type can be contained within the standard spill-containment berm around oil tanks but because two tanks were damaged in this instance, the volume of oil was too great to be held back. The result was the oil overflowed into the adjacent Junction Creek. Some oil was confined within the banks of Junction Creek and pumped out. Before the containment structures could be installed though, a considerable amount of oil had already moved down the Creek and into nearby Kelly Lake. By good fortune, the ice had not yet left the lake though there was a large area of open water that was surrounded by ice. The oil that reached the lake was confined by that ice. Had the ice not been there, the oil could have moved for a long distance and contaminated extensive areas of downstream river banks and lake shores. It was an easy decision to ignite the oil to eliminate it. A few days later would have seen the ice gone from the lake so, by great good fortune, great environmental damage was avoided.

Oil tanks at spill source. Sudbury, May, 1984

Worker cleaning up oil spill Sudbury, 1984

Concluding Comments

Most of the fires described were due to the accumulation of oil or some similar kind of material that floated on the surface of the receiving water. If the substance involved was not oil, it was at least some sort of highly-flammable material. Obviously, the presence of such materials on rivers and other bodies is totally undesirable. While accidental spills are not wanted and generally unpredictable, they are quite different from the more-common, slower-accumulating materials that lead to significant pollution of the waterbody. These latter situations are due to neglect, a disregard for the pollution of the environment, and a considerable risk to life and properties in the area. Such disregard can be considered as a form of stupidity equivalent to the mishandling of equipment capable of igniting the contaminants in the water. At least, the fire-on-the-water-incidents have contributed to the creation of protective legislation and, with that, a major reduction in pollution and fires. So, as prospects for fires on rivers are likely to be fewer and farther between, the kinds of stupidity that led to the fire at the Montreux Casino will never disappear. Such is nature of the human mind!

From the Web

TV wildlife expert Mike Dilger says he was "blown away" by video footage showing a fox with only two legs. Mr Dilger, who has appeared on BBC's Springwatch and The One Show, described the footage as "nature conquering all" and "an amazing survivalist story".

The article is at: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-64172621
and actual video of the fox foraging in a yard is at:
https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-derbyshire-64165953

Photo Quiz

Photos by Dave Welfare

Answers on page 22

1

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Answers to the Photo Quiz on page 21

1. American Bittern
2. Barred Owl
3. Bonaparte's Gull
4. Caspian Tern
5. Chipping Sparrow
6. Greater Yellowlegs
7. White-winged Scoter
8. Ruby-crowned Kinglet
9. Snow Buntings

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Application Type: New_____ Renewal_____

Membership Type: Single ($30)____ Family ($40)____

If "Family Membership", please list additional names:

_____

The membership year is September 1 to August 31. Renewals are due in September. For new members who join after April 1, the fees are applied to the following year's membership.

****

Participation in our outings involves walking or hiking on various trails. By voluntarily participating, you assume full responsibility for all risks of personal injury. Make sure that any outing you choose to participate in is within your fitness level. Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear.

****

Please fill out this form and bring it to our next indoor meeting, or mail it along with a cheque payable to Halton/North Peel Naturalist club to:

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club,
P.O. Box 115,
Georgetown, Ontario,
L7G 4T1

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

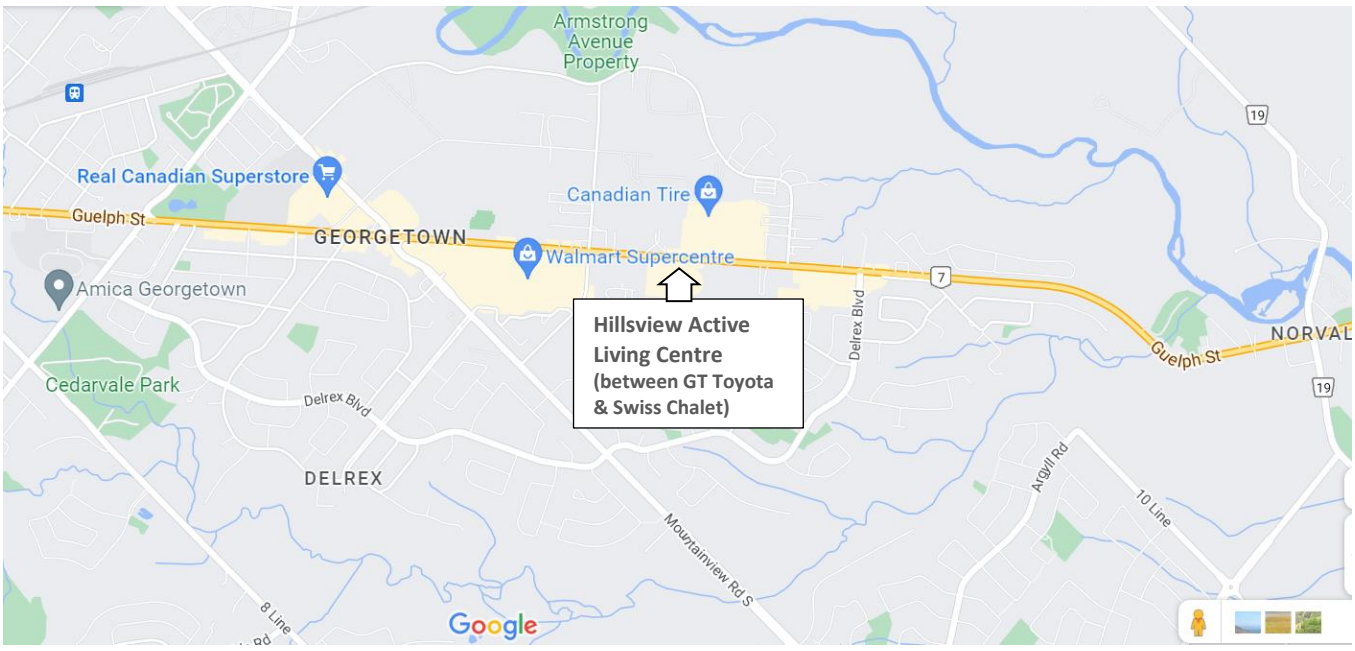
Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1
Charity Registration number 869778761RR0001
www.hnpnc.com

Board of Directors

President: Yves Scholten yvesjs9@gmail.com
Past President: Don Scallen (905) 876-6180
Vice President: Ian Jarvie (905) 877-1441
Secretary: Helen Pinchen (519) 766-8876
Treasurer: David Williams (905) 877-1539

Appointments

Membership: Leslie Bissegger
Newsletter: Laura Weihs
Webmaster Communications Director: John Beaudette
Member at Large: Fiona Reid
Ontario Nature Rep: Don Scallen
Roving: William McIlveen
Hardy Property Steward: TBD
Crozier Property Steward: Pedro Pereyra

We have returned to **in person meetings** at a **NEW venue**

Time/Date: 7:30 pm on **the second Tuesday of the month**
at
Hillsview Active Living Centre
318 Guelph Street - Unit #9, Georgetown
Note: the entrance is at the back of the building