



THE HERON

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2011

Newsletter of the York-Simcoe Naturalists
a member of Ontario Nature



Club News

Club Meetings

Date:	Tues. Mar. 8 , 7:30 p.m.
Speaker:	Greg Mitchell, University of Guelph
Topic:	Savannah Sparrows

Date: **Tues. Apr. 12**, 7:30 p.m.
Bring-a-Friend Night
Speaker: Hazel Wheeler, Trent University
Topic: Chimney Swifts

Date: **Tues. May 10**, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Kathy Boles, Lotek Wireless
Topic: Brown Hyena Research in South Africa

Date: **Tues. June 14**, 7:30 p.m.
Bring-a-Family Night
Topic: Special outdoor meeting and hike
Place: TBA

Club meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month. All are welcome to attend, and admission is free. Join us at the River Drive Park Community Centre, 20 Oak Avenue, off Queensville Sideroad.

YSN Executive Committee 2010/2011

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|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Paul Barker | President |
| • Lori McLean | Past President |
| • Julie and Ross Riley | Vice-Presidents/Website |
| • Catherine Preston | Recording Secretary |
| • Sharon Hamilton | Membership Secretary |
| • Linda Gilkes | Treasurer/Archivist |
| • Sylvia Bowman | Conservation Director |
| • Mike van den Tillaart | Speakers/Stewardship |
| • Valerie Liney | Publicity |
| • Jeanne Beneteau | Social Convenor |
| • Janet Thompson | Newsletter |

Presidential Address

By Paul Barker

Boing boing boing. That's right! Spring is bouncing its way closer. Get it? Spring? I've noticed that the birds are starting to make their way back here in the north, some continuing on I'm sure. Just the other day, I witnessed a Bald Eagle flying around the ice huts on Lake Simcoe, disputing with the Herring Gulls that have also returned. And I'm pretty sure I've heard the song of the robin too. I would like to propose an informal organized **bird walk** to celebrate the return of spring. If there are any bird enthusiasts interested, please contact myself for more details and discussion of what we can do. Nothing has been determined just yet and spring is quickly coming.

On that note, with spring around the corner, the Executive Committee is looking for ideas and participants for our **spring fundraiser**. There are a number of expenses that arise each year, such the purchase of a new projector this year and now the need for a laptop to go with it. We would like to hear back from you with your suggestions. Last year there was great success with the garage sale, most of the money being raised through the sale of plants rescued from various locations. We would like to raise more money than last year, so hopefully we can come up with one really great idea or more awesome plants. At this time, no known plant rescue opportunities exist so we **NEED** help.

Also in upcoming events, the April meeting is **Bring-a-Friend Night** and in June, we will be having **Bring-a-Family Night**. This is a chance to share with the people in your lives who the York-Simcoe Naturalists are and what it is that we enjoy doing. Now I just have to go find myself a friend . . .

Birding

Birding the Holland Marsh, Jan. 9, 2011

Story and photos by Kevin Shackleton



Mike van den Tillaart, Jane Kirkpatrick, John Watson, Bob Noble and Bruce Brydon

As the West Humber Naturalists' field trip leader, I thought I had better come up with one early in the new year. Having had some success on the Christmas Bird Count, I thought we should visit the areas that comprise the Holland Marsh. Six of us met at the gas station at Leslie Street and Ravenshoe Road at 9:00 a.m. and then descended to the Ravenshoe Flats.

We diverted briefly north on Bruce Street, a little dead end that leads to an Osprey nesting platform. We hoped to find winter finches and the accipiters which prey on them in the bushes on the west side of the road. It was a quiet morning, bird-wise, as the temperature was about -8C and there was a strong north wind. A few **American Tree Sparrows** flitted in the bushes. We didn't tarry long, but returned to our cars and drove the few hundred metres back to Ravenshoe Road.

I hoped to locate a Snowy Owl or two as one had been seen during the York-Simcoe Naturalists' Christmas Bird Count on January 2. Despite six keen pairs of eyes, made teary by the cold blast of the north wind, scanning the utility poles, barn roofs, antennae and irrigation equipment along the way, we had no success. We did find a flock of about 50 **Snow Buntings** as we retraced our route back to Leslie Street.

Our next stop was at the north end of Main Street or Second Concession, East Gwillimbury. In spring, one could expect American Woodcock, Northern

Waterthrush and any number of other species. Of course this wasn't the time of year for them and we only found a solitary **Northern Shrike** on a treetop beyond the end of the road.

By the time we left the area we had seen a total of five healthy-looking coyotes, a record for any field trip I have been on with the West Humber Naturalists, but birds were hard to come by on this cold morning. A stop near the entrance to Silver Lakes Golf Course turned up a second porcupine and some **Black-capped Chickadees**.



Wily Coyote at Ravenshoe and Yonge Streets in the Ravenshoe Flats

We stopped for coffee in Holland Landing and probably could have spent the rest of the morning in the shop's cozy environs, but I got us back on track for the last half of the morning. We visited the end of Bathurst Street and again the pickings were slim.

The last spot I wanted to visit was one of Ron Fleming's favourites. Ron wasn't with us, but Mike van den Tillaart guided me to Devald and Day streets south of Canal Road North. Initially, we only had American Tree Sparrows lurking in the bushes, but as we were about to leave, John Watson and Bob Noble identified a juvenile **White-crowned Sparrow**. Before we knew it, we had two adults and possibly three juveniles, 300 Snow Buntings whirling up and away in the fields to the south and 100 **Common Redpolls** coming to the feeders of a house on the south side of the road. Jane Kirkpatrick photographed the redpolls in hopes that one was a Hoary, but the light was so bad she found she only had them as dark silhouettes. While we would have liked a Snowy Owl or a Lapland Longspur, finding five White-crowned Sparrows in York Region in January made the morning's effort seem worthwhile.

Redpoll Irruption in My Backyard

By Janet Thompson



First redpoll sighting Feb. 2



By Feb. 27, the redpolls had taken over.



As of Feb. 21, the goldfinches ruled, as they had all winter.



By Mar. 6, the initial dozen had attracted several dozen more.

Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve

Located at Bathurst Street and Miller's Sideroad, the reserve has been under the stewardship of YSN since February 2007.

Cawthra Mulock Stream and Wetland Restoration Initiative

By Heather Lorimer, Ontario Streams



Excerpt from the Ontario Streams application for funds from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources:

The Cawthra Mulock Stream and Wetland Restoration Initiative aims to restore and enhance the health of aquatic ecosystems throughout the Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve (CMNR) in King Township . . . CMNR is located just north of the Oak Ridges Moraine in the West Holland River watershed and is a valuable greenspace in a highly developed area in Ontario. It is identified as a key natural area in the York Region Greening Strategy and hosts many small wetland areas that are a part of the larger Ansnorveldt wetland complex.

CMNR is owned by Ontario Nature (ON) and the York-Simcoe Naturalists (YSN) have been active stewards of the reserve since 2007. YSN continuously assist in monitoring, restoration initiatives and naturalization improvement projects on the property. YSN and OS became partners in the protection and restoration of CMNR in 2009 through OS' Adopt-A-Stream program, which guides groups through stream and wetland restoration projects. Through the Adopt-A-Stream program, OS provides technical expertise and assistance in planning, implementing and monitoring rehabilitation activities to help establish

self-sufficient stewardship groups generate multi-year sustainable restoration projects.

Together the YSN and OS began assessments of stream and wetland conditions on the reserve in 2009. The main stream channel flowing through the reserve was mapped with important details recorded including channel width and depth, substrate type, aquatic habitat available, in-stream cover, and potential problem factors in and around the stream. Additionally in 2010, YSN, OS and supplementary volunteers conducted monitoring of fish and macroinvertebrate communities, debris removal, erosion maintenance and planting as part of riparian regeneration and wetland restoration.



In spite of rehabilitation efforts in past field seasons, to a large extent, the degrading effects of historically cleared agricultural wetland areas have yet to be fully addressed. As such, a wetland study will be conducted in 2011 field season to assess the condition of the historical wetland area in preparation of further regeneration of the wetland. ON, OS and YSN will work together in studying, enhancing and protecting this valuable greenspace and wildlife refuge through wetland evaluation. The wetland study will include the installation of four piezometers to assess soil characteristics and wetness and a wetland vegetation inventory to determine the wettest soil locations in preparation for potential future rehabilitation efforts.

Conservation News

By Sylvia Bowman

Scanlon Creek Revitalization Committee

We met on Jan. 26. The plans for the adventure playground are well underway and construction will start this spring. Fundraising is also underway as \$100K is needed to complete the project.

The environmental assessment of the plans to drain the pond and return it to a wetland has been completed. The plan is on the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority website. They will be taking a series of time-lapse photos of the pond as it is slowly drained over the three-year period.

The idea to restore the farmhouse has gained support from Baywood Homes. They plan to give the work and materials and the project could be done by the end of the year. It could then be used for offices for the bird banding project and as the future home for Friends of Scanlon Creek when that group is formed.

When the revitalization projects are completed, the park may again charge an admittance fee as the goal is to make it financially self-sufficient. There will be a park user survey conducted this year to see how people feel about fees.

Several events are planned this year. The first one was the Family Fun Day event on Feb. 21. There are plans for an outdoor art show and photography workshop in March. There will also be events on Earth Day, Apr. 23. Watch for upcoming details in future newsletters.

Ontario Nature

I attended a board meeting on Feb. 26 as the Huronia Regional Director. One issue that has come to our attention is that despite the fact that the **Snapping Turtle** is now listed as a species in decline, it is still listed by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) as a game species. It was supposed to be removed as a game species. When questioned, the Minister has no idea why!

Another issue that has gone out as an Action Alert to everyone is that the **conservation regulations for the Woodland Caribou** plan to exempt the mining, forestry and hydro industries

from the very regulations designed to govern these activities in caribou habitat! The deadline for comment on this travesty is Mar. 10. Please see the Action Alert.

Another concern, particularly on the Oak Ridges Moraine, is that of **fill in old gravel pits**. Ontario Nature has started a project, working initially with the town of Uxbridge, to develop a voluntary regulatory group similar to the Forestry Council certification program to develop best practices for the aggregate industry for both quarrying and fill operations. Earthroots and the Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition are also working on this issue. In particular they have been working with the Lakeridge citizens group in Scugog Township on a gravel pit receiving contaminated fill. The company filling the pit is using a recent Supreme Court decision saying that if a site is going to be made into an aerodrome, then no municipal or provincial regulations and laws apply. So they say the site will be used as a helicopter pad. The issue of towns unwittingly being recipients of contaminated fill has also arisen closer to us. For those of you who don't know, there is an abandoned aluminum smelter in Georgina located on Warden Ave. just north of the Ravenshoe Rd. There has been a public committee for several years called the Thane Smelter Committee trying to find the best way to clean up this contaminated site. Mt Albert Pit Inc. has proposed to the committee that this site be used as a soil reclamation site. Soil from what are called brownfield lands around the GTA would be treated with a bacterial process that partially decontaminates it. Mt Albert Pit Inc. is proposing that this soil would then be used to fill the Mt Albert Pit in Holt in East Gwillimbury. This problem has recently been brought to the attention of the East Gwillimbury council. They are also aware of the Lakeridge issue through a recent meeting of the Greater Toronto Area Countryside Mayors Alliance.

Maskinonge River Revitalization Project (MRRP)

The Christmas trees sold out very quickly and raised \$2,000 for projects around the Keswick high school.

The Lower Maskinonge River shoreline project heavy work has been completed. Six more landowners along the river are interested in participating as well. There will be planting projects in the spring along the river.

Excerpts from the March 2011 MRRP report, "Lower Maskinonge Naturalization Project, Part Two":



"Of the many landowners wanting work done on their shorelines, these particular three properties presented the best ecological rationale for having [shoreline stabilization] works completed."



This property "has an existing man-made wooden shorewall which is eroding underneath and behind it. There is little to no habitat for fish and wildlife in its current form. This property also is directly beside three properties that were naturalized in December."

Hiking

Town of East Gwillimbury Trails Committee

Walks held second Saturday of every month

Date: **Sat. Mar. 12**, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Place: Brown Hill Regional Tract
Meet: Parking lot on the south side of Ravenshoe Rd. between Kennedy Rd. and McCowan Rd.

Date: **Sat. Apr. 9**, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Place: Simcoe Trail South
Meet: Parking lot at Anchor Park, Doane Rd. east of Yonge St. in Holland Landing

Date: **Sat. Apr. 23**, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Place: **Easter Egg Hunt** – Nokiidaa Trail
Meet: Green Lane parking lot
Admission is free for this event, but registration is a must. To register, visit www.eastgwillimbury.ca.

York Regional Forest

Walks held monthly

Date: **Sat. Mar. 26**, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Place: Bendor & Graves Tract, 17689 Kennedy north of Davis Dr., park at end of road

Theme: **"Learn About Our Lands & Forests"**
"Hike with our Ecologist to learn about York Region Land Securement, how we protect land and grow new forests."

Date: **Sat. Apr. 30**, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Place: North Tract, 17054 Hwy 48
Theme: **"Spring Forest Festival"**

"Celebrate spring by planting trees. Learn how members of the York Regional Forest Advisory Team help us manage the forest. Identify tree species or understand how to manage your own woodlot. Hike with an expert Birder at 11 a.m. or 1 p.m. to learn about our feathered friends in the forest. Watch a horse logging demo and enjoy a horse-drawn wagon ride through the forest. Take home a tree seedling to plant. Don't forget to bring your work gloves and shovel!"