



THE HERON

JUNE 2011

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



Club News

Club Meetings

Date: **Tues. June 14**, 7:30 p.m.
Bring-a-Family Night
Topic: Special outdoor meeting and hike
Place: Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve
Bathurst St. entrance (north of Green Lane)

Enjoy your summer outdoors

Date: **Tues. Sept. 13**, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Ryan Redvers, Certified Arborist
Topic: Selecting and Caring for Your Trees

Date: **Tues. Oct. 11**, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Antonia Guidotti, Royal Ontario Museum
Topic: Domestic Arthropods
(insects, spiders, crustaceans ... oh my!)

New members are welcome! Club meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month. Admission is free. Please join us at the River Drive Park Community Centre, 20 Oak Avenue, off Queensville Sideroad.

YSN Executive Committee 2011/2012

• President	OPEN
• Past President	Paul Barker
• Vice-President	OPEN
• Recording Secretary	OPEN
• Membership Secretary	Sharon Hamilton
• Treasurer/Archivist	Linda Gilkes
• Conservation Director	Sylvia Bowman
• Stewardship	Mike van den Tillaart
• Speakers	OPEN
• Publicity	Valerie Liney
• Social Convenor	Jeanne Beneteau
• Website	OPEN
• Newsletter	Janet Thompson

Annual Fundraiser Plant Sale Saturday, June 18



Photo from 2010 sale by Julie Riley

We will be selling plants donated by members at the East Gwillimbury Farmers Market in the Civic Square, 19000 Leslie Street, Sharon, from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Sat. June 18.

Come out and browse from our selection of perennials and raise money for the club.

If you would like to donate plants from your garden, please speak to one of the executive at the hike on June 14, or e-mail us at the address below.

Stewardship at Cawthra Mulock

On Tues. June 14, a group of volunteers will begin this year's wetland monitoring project.

Those going on the hike that evening will have a chance to meet Heather Lotimer of the environmental organization Ontario Streams and learn about this Adopt-A-Stream project.

For more details, please see p. 6.

Birding

Baillie Birdathon 2011

by Ron Fleming and Kevin Shackleton

During the week leading up to May 21, 2011, an American preacher began proclaiming that “The End Was Nigh”. According to him, the Judgment Day was imminent. May 21 would be mankind’s last day on Earth. The Apocalypse, it seemed, was going to coincide with our annual Baillie Birdathon.

What would you do with your last 24 hours on Earth? For “The Warbler Hunters” --- a four-man birding team consisting of Kevin Shackleton, John Watson, Art Needles, and me --- you bird like there is no tomorrow!

We left Newmarket in the late afternoon of May 20, stopping to savour views of a rare **American Avocet*** that had shown up north of Beeton before continuing on to dinner at Art’s place in Alliston. (*Ironically this rare bird would not appear on our official Birdathon list as it had flown the coop by May 21.)

We ate a wonderful meal that night, drank a variety of uncommon tipple, and had some good laughs before heading to bed early, well aware that we would be up at 3:00 in the morning to begin our “Big Day”.

In contrast to 2010, we hadn’t spent much time scouting for birds this time around. Kevin had knocked himself out finding uncommon species prior to last year’s Birdathon, but when we looked for them on the official Birdathon day those target birds were often absent.

With scouting scuttled, we prepared ourselves by birding in various places (Point Pelee for me, Thickson’s Wood for Kevin, the local eco-park for John), sharpening our identification skills for the annual epic. We trusted that Kevin’s itinerary would produce a decent amount of birds when we got to each location in Simcoe County ... providing that the sun rose at all on May 21!

At 3:19 a.m., we were away from Art’s, driving north across a planet that still appeared to be blessedly intact. We drove to the northwest corner of Simcoe County (Hwy 400 and Quarry Road) and, with flashlights guiding the way, ventured out into the pre-dawn gloom.

Two hours later we had circumnavigated the dike trail surrounding Matchedash Bay and had recorded 54 species, including the increasingly uncommon **Common Nighthawk**, a “qwooking” **Black-crowned Night Heron** [*our club logo! – ed.*], and -- in the slowly lightening morning sky --- a **Broad-winged Hawk** (alertly spotted by John Watson).

We drove to the Cowan Nature Trail on Kinnear Road next and penetrated the property more deeply than last year when we’d been concerned about the threat of rogue bears (a man, had, in fact, been attacked there two days prior to our 2010 Birdathon). Here we heard and saw several **Brewster’s Warblers**, the hybrid of the Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warbler, singing the Golden-wing song. We also heard **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, a bird Kevin had seen and heard there previously.

Back in the team vehicle we made our way down old country lanes, watching and listening for birds as we drove. Art’s van has rear windows that open (not every van does!) and that feature came in very handy when Kevin heard an anomalous song outside his window on Lawson Line. He quickly asked Art to pull over.

After a flurry of tree-scanning, we located a nondescript bird that appeared to be a Tennessee Warbler, but when the bird sang again we agreed that this was not the distinct three-part song used by that species. We raised our sensory antennae to greater lengths and relocated the elusive bird, noting its field marks more carefully and giving our own impressions of its song (“kind of a varied trill, eh?”). The process of comparing notes helped us reach a happy conclusion: it was an **Orange-crowned Warbler**, a species we don’t usually get on our Birdathons. Back in the car, Kevin’s CD of bird songs confirmed the auditory aspect of this bird’s identity.

Entering the town of Coldwater soon after that, we managed to hear and see a pair of **Chimney Swifts** flying overhead. It was time for coffee and a pit stop so we pulled into the local Country Style Donuts and grabbed some java. Art produced a container of mouth-watering prawns (with seafood

dip) for each of us to snack on, so we munched on jumbo shrimp beside the local gas station in front of some rather bemused locals.

Dabbing our mouths with fine linen (okay, Country Style Donuts' serviettes), we were soon moving westward to Tiny Marsh near Elmvale, a bird-rich wetland that is bordered by some excellent forested areas to the north. We had very good luck here, adding 23 species and breaking the 100-species mark before 11:00 a.m. Highlights included **Least Bittern**, **American Bittern**, **Black Tern**, and **Sandhill Crane**.

Our determination to improve on the 2010 count (we'd found "only" 121 species on that Birdathon) hardened as we drove to Wasaga Beach to see the endangered **Piping Plover** on Beach 1. Despite a fog bank that was hovering low over Georgian Bay, we saw the bird sitting tight on its nest under anti-predator mesh.

We chatted with two volunteer birders that were monitoring the rare plover before proceeding to Scott Martin's home for a few tips on local birds. We added **Blackburnian Warbler** to our list while eating a delicious lunch in Scott's driveway then bade him adieu and drove west to Collingwood. The harbour there helped us regain momentum as we added 11 species, including a few pleasant surprises: both **Northern Parula** and **Palm Warbler** singing from a small cluster of ornamental trees in the parkette.

Although we struck out on Upland Sandpiper at the Collingwood Airport, the Stayner sewage lagoons were quite productive, giving us a dozen new species including a female **Northern Pintail**, a **Ruddy Duck**, a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, and a rare **Western Sandpiper** in the company of several "peeps". These additions brought the day's total to 131 species.

We were well ahead of last year's pace and knew that we could count on several more species as we continued to work our way southward. The birding gods --- likely aided and abetted by the late, great Keith Dunn --- seemed to be smiling on us as we enjoyed continuing good fortune at each subsequent stop. We added **Pileated Woodpecker** in Angus, **Dunlin**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, and a "whinnying"

Sora on MacKinnon Road, then a **Black-bellied Plover** on 15th Sideroad in New Tecumseth, bringing our total to 140, one species shy of our team record from 2009.

Fatigue fell away when we saw how close we were to setting a new high-water mark. Art, however, had to get back to Alliston. Since he had fed us, served as our team driver, and put up with our ornithologically driven madness for the past 16 hours, we released him from his duties and bade him adieu at the parking lot of the Cookstown Outlet Mall. Then, with continued obsessiveness, we got into Kevin's car and headed back up Hwy 400, making for the Sparrow Lake area above Orillia!

Because Kevin knows this area well, he made for Brennan Line, arriving there as the sun prepared to touch the treetops. In the fading light of the not-so-last-day-of-all-time, we added two crepuscular species --- **Common Snipe** and **Whippoorwill** --- to the day's list, thus setting our new record of **142 species**.

In the process of chasing all these birds, we had also set a record of 19.5 hours in the field and 547 km travelled. We had avoided the Apocalypse and enjoyed our best day ever. The success of the 2011 Baillie Birdathon was the result of a great team effort.

Again this year the funds I raise are going to be shared between Bird Studies Canada and Ontario Nature.

If you have already pledged online, thanks sincerely for your support. If you have *not* but would like to pledge *now* (*hint, hint*), simply submit a cheque payable to the **Baillie Birdathon** or donate online by clicking this link:

www.birdscanada.org/support/birdathon/index.jsp?targetpg=donate&number=8534

Hiking

Town of East Gwillimbury Trails Committee

Walks held second Saturday of every month

Date: **Sat. July 9**, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Place: Boag Road Trail
Meet: Boag Rd. and Leslie St., west side

Date: **Sat. Aug. 13**, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Place: Simcoe Trail North
Meet: Anchor Park parking lot, Doane Rd.
east of Yonge St. in Holland Landing

York Regional Forest

Walks held monthly

Date: **Sat. July 9**, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Place: Hollidge Tract, 16389 Hwy 48
Theme: **Capture the Forest through Photography**

“Bring your camera and learn how to take compelling photographs while walking in the York Regional Forest with a nature photographer. Explore how to use the light streaming through the forest canopy to add drama to your photographs.”

Date: **Sat. Aug. 20**, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Place: Bendor & Graves Tract, 17689 Kennedy
(north of Davis Dr., park at end of road)
Theme: **Butterflies and Forest Friends**

“Look for butterflies, cicadas, salamanders and snakes on a hike through the forest with a Naturalist. Learn about Monarch Butterflies, Dragonflies, Asian Long Horned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer and forest wildlife.”

Koffler Scientific Reserve at Joker’s Hill

Please register online at <http://ksr.utoronto.ca>

Date: **Sat. July 9**, 11:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.
Place: 17000 Dufferin St., south of Hwy 9
Theme: **Bugs, Bees and Butterflies
Nature Walk**

“With 10 million species, insects are the most diverse of all organisms. Get the scoop on their secret lives and cunning ways with Dr. Maydianne Andrade and Dr. Andrew Mason, spider specialists and professors of biology at UTSC. For kids only, The Great Bug Hunt! 12:45. Prizes for the largest, smallest and strangest insect found!”

Free. Registration opens June 15, 2011.

Date: **Sat. July 16**, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Place: 17000 Dufferin St., south of Hwy 9
Instructor: Richard Aaron
Theme: **Secret Lives of Summer Wildflowers
Workshop**

“Explore summer's vast botanical richness with naturalist Richard Aaron. The focus will be on wildflower identification and discussions on their natural history, ecology, and lore. Suitable for everyone else who loves nature. Bring your favourite wildflower field guide(s).”

Cost: \$60. Registration opens June 15.

Book Review

**Rainer Foelix, *Biology of Spiders*, 3rd ed.
(Oxford University Press, 2011)**

Reviewed by Mike van den Tillaart



Cover image from chapters.indigo.ca

This is one amazing book. I would call this the ultimate book when it comes to spiders. It is not an ID book, but it covers every other aspect of spiders in great detail. There is an endless amount of fascinating information for both the amateur naturalist like me and the professional arachnologist. I commend the author and publisher for a book that is of value to both groups.

The first edition was written in 1979, but no need to worry about obsolescence: 500 new references have been added since the second edition.

The only downside of the book is a complete absence of colour photos. As the amazingly coloured cover photo of an Australian Peacock Spider shows, spiders can be colourful. The peacock spider is white, red, yellow, orange, blue and green. However, there are black-and-white photos on nearly every page.

Maybe the best way to convey how interesting this book is would be to list just a small sampling of facts from the book. One could use this list in a “Did you know” sort of conversation and hold just about anyone’s full attention. [See column at right.]

They say to know something is to love it. Read this book and you’ll love spiders.

Did you know:

- there are over 40,000 species of spiders in over 100 families
- midget spiders have their eight eyes on top of a turret (think periscope)
- spiders can walk up glass or upside down due to 160,000 points of contact on their finely branched foot tips
- spitting spiders spit their mix of venom and gluey silk at 30 metres per second; the silk contracts instantly by 50% on contact with prey
- male desert spiders can zigzag in the dark up to hundreds of metres from their home in search of females, yet travel a straight line home
- there are eight kinds of spider silk, with the thickness of each controlled by muscles
- spider silk is mostly protein and may be exuded through 40,000 silk spigots (exit ports)
- one group of spiders hangs lines of silk like fishing lines to catch insects on the surface of water
- an empty web of a mature female elicits male courtship response
- dune spiders can curl up their legs and cartwheel downhill at 20 revolutions per second
- bolas spiders swing a sticky silk ball on end of a silk line to capture flying moths
- the ogre-faced spider throws its web to capture insects (just like Spider-Man)
- some spiders make courtship sounds audible to humans
- some spiders lay just 1 egg; others 2,500 in 8 minutes
- mother wolf spiders may have more than 100 spiderlings on their back for a week
- crab spiders change their colour (yellow or white) to match the flower they are on
- female tarantulas can live over 20 years

Native Plants and Gardens

The Red Oak's New Neighbourhood

By Mike van den Tillaart

It was my first night in the new neighbourhood. At last I was free from the crowded confines of the nursery. I'd been looking forward to this since my birth a few years ago. Best of all, I could finally spread my roots. That old pot was giving me cramps! The new neighbourhood looked nice; some of the plants told me it was a park, some said it was a backyard, whatever that means. Lots of other plants, but none too close. And I received a load of fresh soil just for me!

I have to admit, I was a little wary of the rabbit I could see. She looked happy enough eating grass, but I'd heard the horror stories about young limbs being severed by those butchers in disguise.

Darkness fell for the first time in my new home. Very tranquil. Not long after sunset a skunk appeared . . . or was it a raccoon? It headed straight for me. It reached me and stretched its front paws my way. It took a scoop of soil, then another and another. Next thing I knew there was a big hole, my roots were exposed and I lost my balance. My one and only arm snapped off in the scuffle. At last the beast trundled away.

After a painful and sleepless night, some kind human set me straight and recovered my thirsty roots. I determined to grow bigger and tougher so that no animal could ever lay such a beating on me again.

Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve

Located on the northwest corner of Bathurst Street and Miller's Sideroad, the reserve has been under the stewardship of YSN since February 2007 through an agreement with our parent federation, Ontario Nature. It is open to the public.

Call for Volunteers – Adopt-A-Stream Project

This year's stewardship project on the reserve, as described in the February/March and April 2011 issues of *The Heron*, will proceed with the installation of four piezometers.

The piezometer data will help to assess soil characteristics and wetness and form a basis for wetland regeneration in upcoming field seasons.

YSN is a partner in the Adopt-A-Stream program with the environmental organization Ontario Streams, which provides technical expertise and advice in return for our volunteer labour. Club member Mike van den Tillaart is our stewardship liaison and is the lead planner and volunteer on this project.

The installation is planned for Tues. June 14 and another date to follow. Ontario Streams project coordinator Heather Lotimer will be onsite.

If you would like to join our volunteer group, please contact one of the executive either in person or through our club e-mail address.

For more information on Ontario Streams, please visit www.ontariostreams.on.ca.

Photo Contest Winner – New Website Masthead



Photo by Julie Riley

After a slide presentation of contest entries at the May general meeting, this photo by Julie Riley, taken at the Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve, was voted the winner. It now appears as the masthead of our club website. Congratulations Julie!

Conservation News

By Sylvia Bowman

Maskinonge River Recovery Project (MRRP)

After a windy, cold time pulling plants on the Thursday evening, the planting for the Lower Maskinonge project took place on Sat. Apr. 30. About 20 landowners received plants for the shorelines of their properties, including those who received stones to help with shoreline erosion.

Be sure to come out to the third Up the Maskinonge with a Paddle event this fall on Sat. Sept. 17 where the work along the river will be highlighted.

Lake Simcoe Stewardship Network

I attended the third meeting of the Lake Simcoe Stewardship Network on May 6.

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) will be conducting outreach with people in the Lake Simcoe watershed during the summer to educate them about proper fertilizer use and the benefits of a naturalized shoreline.

They will be at the Windfall Ecology Festival in Newmarket on Sat. June 11. They will be talking to people and handing out pamphlets and a wildflower mix.

They also plan outreach with garden centres and landscape businesses to encourage them to stock and promote Ontario native species for planting.

Another initiative to come out of the meeting was a plan to tour projects in the Lake Simcoe watershed that have helped improve the streams around Lake Simcoe or the lake itself. I have suggested one of the stops be the Cawthra Mulock nature reserve.

For more information on this network, see the September and December 2010 issues of The Heron.

York Region Environmental Alliance(YREA)

YREA is working on a project to promote the farming of hemp in the region as an alternative crop for farmers. Hemp has many uses and is a great fibre for building materials and cloth. It is much easier on the environment than growing cotton, for example.

Areas YREA is currently conducting research into include toxins in children's toys, heavy

metals getting into soils from lumber treated with preservatives, and the environmental impact of alternative cleaning products such as vinegar and borax. See also their spring newsletter for other interesting articles.

They also continue to present their "Shop Like the Planet Is Watching" workshops, which I hope to have as one of our presentations in the 2011-2012 year.

Town of East Gwillimbury

The town had a public meeting on amending their zoning bylaw on fill. They have proposed a category called "pit restoration" which amounts to commercial fill operations under another name. Pits are already required to have a pit rehabilitation plan at the end of the life of the pit. This usually involves grading of the site, but not adding fill to it. I made a presentation to the meeting. I said as this activity is not something that is necessary so why do it. Commercial fill operations at present are often fraught with the danger of contaminated materials ending up used as fill due to the lack of regulation by the province and the naïveté of towns.

I have also obtained from the town, under the Access to Information Act, three reports, one for each year the pit was being filled, on what actually was put into the Mount Albert pit. However I need some help in interpreting the information. More on that at a later date.

LSRCA Mother's Day Planting

The Mother's Day event by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) was held in Holland Landing on Sun. May 8 at the site of the newly built stormwater pond wetland complex that is taking the stormwater from the Gwillimbury Hills subdivision and preventing it from going directly into the East Holland River. A large number of trees and shrubs were planted around the site. We had our YSN display at the event and handed out our club information. Lunch was also served. After the planting, the town Trails Committee took interested folks on a hike along the Holland River. It was a great day.

Hurononia Regional Meeting

The Ontario Nature regional meeting for Huronia was held in Bancroft on Sat. May 14 in the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery just north of Bancroft. This private not-for-profit fish hatchery was the lifelong dream of Mary Lefeuve and her husband and is located on their property. He unfortunately passed away shortly before his dream became a reality. He initially wanted to have a hatchery for pickerel, but after negotiations with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) it was decided to have one for lake trout. There are lake trout in the area with unique genetic makeup that seem to thrive better locally than ones imported from outside the area. The hatchery takes these particular fish and has a stocking program to restore them to six lakes in the area where they used to be but are no longer. The operation is run entirely by volunteers.

Other news from the meeting was that Mountain Equipment Co-op has given Ontario Nature a grant to work on capacity building for member clubs of Ontario Nature. This will involve running workshops to share ideas among clubs and help them pool resources. I am sure this will be a great help to small clubs like ours.

Mountain Equipment Co-op has also given Ontario Nature \$100,000 towards the purchase of the last parcel of the Malcolm Bluff Shores reserve.

Ontario Nature

Ontario Nature has agreed with the government on the three-year exemption for farmers from new regulations for bobolink habitat protection. This will give time to develop strategies with farmers to preserve bobolink habitat in a co-operative way and gain farmers' trust. The fear was that if there was an early deadline on preserving bobolink habitat, farmers would have an incentive to destroy habitat before the deadline.

The Ontario Nature AGM will be held this year on the weekend of June 11-12 at the Ganaraska Forest Centre near Peterborough. For more information please visit the Ontario Nature website.

It was decided to delay the presentation of the Biodiversity Charter until September. Hopefully it will have more impact and press coverage if done

during the provincial election. This means if you have not already signed the charter either online or at one of our meetings there is still time to do so.

The second annual Youth Summit will be held on Sept. 23-24 with a theme of biodiversity and sustainable living. If you know of interested youth please contact Sarah Hedges at Ontario Nature for more information.

Anniversary Events

Two clubs in the Huronia region celebrated important milestones recently and I had the opportunity to attend both.

The Midland-Pentang Field Naturalists celebrated their 50th anniversary on May 15 with a dinner at Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons restaurant. This is just beside the Wye Marsh. This group was instrumental in helping preserve the Wye Marsh. Their guest speaker was astronomer and author Terence Dickinson, who had fabulous photos taken from his own private observatory near Kingston.

The Brereton Field Naturalists of Barrie celebrated their 60th anniversary on May 26 with a dinner at the Georgian College dining room. They also ran special nature events during the entire week highlighting the many projects they are involved with, including monitoring Chimney Swifts. Their guest speaker was Michael Runtz, naturalist, author and photographer, who is very insightful, knowledgeable and terrifically funny!

Both events highlighted just how well such clubs can grow and thrive and accomplish great things with the help and hard work of many of their members. Wouldn't it be nice to be celebrating such a milestone ourselves one day!

Scanlon Creek Revitalization Committee

The plan for restoration of the farmhouse is almost complete thanks to Baywood Homes who are providing the materials and the labour for this project.

The opening of the Discovery Play Garden is slated for Sun. June 26. If you have children or grandchildren this should be a great event.