



THE HERON

NOVEMBER 2011

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



Club News

Club Meetings

Date: **Tues. Nov. 8**, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Gloria Marsh, York Region Env. Alliance
Topic: Shop Like the Planet Is Watching

Date: **Tues. Dec. 13**, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Kevin Shackleton
Topic: Tiskita Jungle Lodge, Costa Rica:
A Cure for Nature Deficit Disorder

Date: **Tues. Jan. 10, 2012**, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Carolyn Schultz, Ontario Nature
Topic: Preserving Wild Species and Wild Spaces

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.



Photo by Mark Carabetta

Why is this man smiling?
See story on p. 5

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	Ross Riley
• Newsletter	Janet Thompson

Club Outings

Date: **Sun. Nov. 13**, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Event: Hike with Mike
Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve
Meet: Bathurst Street entrance, just north of Green Lane, second driveway on your left, look for "Ontario Nature" sign

Date: **Sat. Dec. 31**
Event: Christmas Bird Count, Bradford Area
Meet: Contact Ron or Mike for details

YSN Sponsorship

By Sharon Hamilton

For the past several years York-Simcoe Naturalists have collected your donations to sponsor a young owl. The money collected was sent to The Owl Foundation to aid in their efforts to rear young owls and release them into the wild. Through our little collection can we have helped to feed and release 5 young owls in the past four years. I know that I have enjoyed this wonderful experience and the executive members and I hope that you have as well.



This year it came to our attention that the Turtle Trauma Centre located in the Peterborough area is in danger due to lack of funds. This was upsetting news! Some of you will remember that the veterinarian from this establishment spoke to YSN a few years ago about the plight of turtles in our area and about the work they do at the centre to help save turtles. After a short discussion the executive concluded that we wished to do something for the Turtle Trauma Centre. Turtles are not such high-profile creatures as owls or some other creatures but they have an important role in the ecosystem. Thus as we feel that the Turtle Trauma Centre does an worthy job and because turtle survival is precarious at this time, this year we would use our can to collect money for the Turtle Trauma Centre rather than the Owl Foundation. Let's do something positive for the unsung turtle!

Membership Report

By Sharon Hamilton

Last year 2010/11 was a good membership year for YSN --- in fact, by the end of April we had 34 memberships paid, which is the highest our membership has been for some five years. Unfortunately for this year 2011/12, our memberships are coming in very slowly and as of the beginning of November we have only 17 memberships paid. Please remember that our year runs from May 1 to April 30.

Wouldn't it be great to have a huge club? As in past years we continue to seek out new members. Please help us by introducing your friends, neighbours, family, and acquaintances to your club. Low membership results in many difficulties, not the least of which is our present stumbling block of not enough people willing to stand for our executive committee. If you have ideas for ways to increase our membership please speak to me. Thank you.

In order to aid new members and guests we request that each member wear a name tag. These are in alphabetical order in the box on the membership table. We ask that you obtain your tag from the box before the meeting, wear it during the meeting, and you are requested to tuck the string into the plastic holder on returning the tag after the meeting. Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

How Well Do You Know Your Grasses? Biofuels Study at University of Guelph



Photo by Janet Thompson

Reed canary grass

Cawthra Mullock reserve

Are you a gardener, a naturalist or someone with botanical training? If so, the University of Guelph needs your help. YSN has been contacted by Heather Hager, a postdoctoral researcher who is studying the ecology of some of the grass species under discussion/development for biofuels crops.

As she says on her website, some of these species are "large ornamental grasses commonly planted in gardens and used in landscaping. Unfortunately, many varieties of *Miscanthus* have the capacity to produce copious viable seeds which can establish in 'natural' areas (e.g., roadsides, pastures, forest openings) to become invasive ... Introduction of these species may have deleterious effects on native biodiversity, if viable pollen, seeds, or vegetative fragments are allowed to escape from [biofuel] production fields."

She is looking for "any *Miscanthus* [Japanese silvergrass], *Panicum* [switchgrass] and *Phalaris*

[reed canary grass] individuals in ‘natural’ areas. That is, plants that have established independently away from intentional cultivation. ‘Natural areas’ can be roadsides, forest openings, pastures, etc. I am not as interested in instances of ‘volunteer’ plants growing in the same yard where they were planted in the first place. Ideally, I’m looking for plants that have moved themselves (via seed dispersal or rarely rhizome dispersal) some substantial distance away from plantings (perhaps across some natural boundary) to establish healthy self-sustaining populations.” For identification tips and information required, please visit www.uoguelph.ca/~biofuels.

Hiking

YSN Club Outing

Hike with Mike!

Date: **Sun. Nov. 13**, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
 Place: Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve
 Meet: Bathurst Street entrance, just north of Green Lane, second driveway on your left, look for “Ontario Nature” sign

Town of East Gwillimbury Trails Committee

Walks held second Saturday of every month

Date: **Sat. Nov. 12**, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
 Place: Vivian Creek Trail
 Meet: Vivian Creek Park, east side of Centre Street, Mount Albert

Date: **Sat. Dec. 10**, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
 Place: Sutton-Zephyr Rail Trail
 Meet: Parking lot on north side of Holborn Rd., east of Hwy 48

York Regional Forest

Walks held monthly

Date: **Sat. Dec. 17**, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
 Place: Hollidge Tract, 16389 Hwy 48
 Theme: Forest Jingle Bell Walk
 “Join other merry walkers along a 2 km forest path. Learn about the holiday tradition of bells, Christmas tree traditions and the benefits of natural Christmas trees. Jingle bells will be provided. A donation of non-perishable food for the local food bank is appreciated.”

Birding



Photo by Marion McLeod

A diversity of species at Bogart Pond, Newmarket in early November. This is the first time Marion has seen a cormorant in this location.

Project FeederWatch Season Begins

Sat. Nov. 12

“Project FeederWatch is a joint program of Bird Studies Canada and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. At regular intervals from November to April, thousands of FeederWatchers count the kinds and numbers of birds at their feeders, then submit their observations to us. This information helps scientists study winter bird populations.”

This season’s program starts on Sat. Nov. 12. For more information, visit Bird Studies Canada at <http://bsc-eoc.org> and click on “Volunteer Programs”.

Christmas Bird Count, Bradford Area

Sat. Dec. 31

The Christmas Bird Count is a continent-wide one-day count run annually by Bird Studies Canada and the Audubon Society.

YSN members Ron Fleming and Mike van den Tillaart have set Sat. Dec. 31 as the date for the Bradford Area count. Please contact them for more details about timing and teams.

Even if you’re a novice birder, it’s a great experience to “ride along” with these experts and see where and how birds flock and feed in winter.

Native Plants and Gardens

The Beauty of Milkweed

Photos and text by Janet Thompson

Many herbaceous plants go to seed at this time of year. Milkweed is one of the most interesting.

The follicles of the garden variety are longer and narrower. Below, the hairs on the seeds shine in the early November sun. They catch on other plants, giving the flowerbed an ethereal look.



In the wild: Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)



In the garden: Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)



The fruit of the plant is a curved follicle 8-12 cm long, each containing many seeds with tufts of long, fluffy, white hairs.

By the afternoon of this day, all the seeds were gone, dispersed by the wind.



Butterfly milkweed has vibrant orange flowers that bloom in early July and last for weeks.



All milkweeds are not only a source of nectar for adult butterflies, but also, more importantly, a host for butterfly larvae, including those of the Monarch.

Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve

Located north of Green Lane/Miller's Sideroad between Bathurst and Dufferin streets, this 108-hectare hidden gem was donated to Ontario Nature in 2003 and has been under the stewardship of YSN since 2007. It is open to the public.

Ontario Nature Fall Tree Planting Sat. Oct. 15, 2011

By Mark Carabetta



Photo by Linda Gilkes

On Sat. Oct. 15, Ontario Nature staff, a board member, members of the York-Simcoe Naturalists and other volunteers planted 40 trees and shrubs at our Cawthra Mulock reserve near Newmarket.

People who registered for Ontario Nature's AGM in June were given the option of offsetting their personal carbon footprint by contributing towards a tree-planting project. Those funds were used towards Saturday's initiative.

The day was a big success and we managed to finish before the rains came. We planted a mix of native trees and shrubs including red oaks, white pines, nannyberries, red-osier dogwoods and serviceberries.

Carbon Offset Calculations

For those nerdy folks interested in seeing my (admittedly very rough) calculations for carbon offset:

... continued on next page



Photo by Lori McLean

L to R: Don Gilkes, Mike van den Tillaart, Mark Carabetta, Linda Gilkes. YSN volunteers not pictured: Lori McLean, Bruce Chambers. Mike used the scythe to clear a small area for each tree, which made planting much easier.



Photo by Mark Carabetta

Sylvia Bowman in her natural habitat.



Photo by Mark Carabetta

Doug Finley and son Owen combine forces.

Carbon Offset Calculations [continued]

Step one was calculating the amount of carbon being emitted by people attending our AGM. There are many online carbon footprint calculators, including calculators for an individual person's carbon emissions over the course of a year, and for specific trips and events. I tried several different approaches, assuming 180 attendees coming to the AGM in 80 cars (each a 2005 Toyota Matrix, like mine) each travelling 250 km round trip, nobody flying in, everybody eating meals with some meat, and 40 budget hotel rooms booked for one night. The various approaches gave me a range of 0.03 and 0.07 tonnes of carbon per person for the event. So, let's say 0.05 tonnes (or 50 kg) per person, or 9 tonnes for the entire event.

Step two was figuring out how best to offset those 9 tonnes of carbon. The numbers on the amount of carbon absorbed per tree vary greatly depending on the type of tree planted, its longevity, and where in the world it is planted -- I found that many of the online calculators use figures from the tropics, where the amount of carbon sequestered per tree is much greater than in Canada. The numbers I did find for Canada put us in the range of 45 trees being planted to offset carbon emissions for the AGM, or 1/4 of a tree for each person attending. Keep in mind that once the 45 trees are planted, it takes approximately 80 years for them to absorb the 9 tonnes of carbon. One site recommended using a x4 factor, given the uncertainty of any tree that we plant surviving for 80 years. In other words, one tree per person attending.

Conservation News

By Sylvia Bowman

Ontario Nature

Board Retreat

I attended the board retreat at Killbear Provincial Park near Parry Sound on the first weekend of October. We stayed at the staff area which was very nice. It had a lovely kitchen-dining area and several nice sitting areas, one with a gas fireplace. Nearly everyone had a room to themselves.

On the last day Sunday we took a hike through the day use area and then along the shore of Georgian Bay. Killbear Provincial Park is a sanctuary for the endangered Massasauga rattlesnake. The hike goes through the hibernaculum area but we did not encounter any snakes at this time of year. Although cool on Sunday it was nice and sunny, compared to the rain there was on the Friday afternoon. We also encountered many very tame deer. One doe and her faun grazed just outside the window of our meeting room on the Sunday morning. There was also a bear active in the area but we did not see any. Always great to go to Killbear.

Ontario Nature is moving their office at the end of November. They will still be in the same neighbourhood in downtown Toronto but in a smaller space that will give substantial savings from their previous office.

We have just had news that Mark Carabetta, the Conservation and Science Officer, is leaving to take a position as Executive Director of the Georgian Bay Land Trust. I will miss working with Mark on reserve issues and on the reserves committee of the board.

Huron Regional Meeting

At the meeting on Oct. 29, a resolution was proposed to deal with so-called SLAPP suits (strategic lawsuits against public participation). Ontario has no legislation controlling these types of lawsuits. They are suits brought by large corporations or agencies against grassroots organizations with the intent of inhibiting and discouraging the rights of ordinary citizens to participate in public discussion or protest of important infrastructure projects. These suits can cause small groups prohibitive legal costs, as the group suing usually asks for costs to be

charged against the citizens' group. This has a very chilling effect to any group trying to take on big organizations.

The Six Mile Lake conservation club has started a petition to have snapping turtles removed from the game species list of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Two years ago the snapping turtle was designated a species at risk as its numbers are rapidly declining for a variety of reasons. It is the only species of turtle regarded as at risk or endangered that can still be hunted.

You may have had an opportunity to sign the petition at the November meeting of YSN. If not, the petition can be downloaded at www.frostpetition.webs.com. The petition must be printed off, filled in, and signed by hand, because this is a petition being presented by the local MPP in the area to the Ontario legislature and these petitions cannot be done electronically. I will also be bringing it again to the December meeting. The petition is to be presented in the legislature on Jan. 10, 2012.

Local Groups

SM4RT Living Stakeholders Meeting

The first meeting of this group was on Oct. 25 to look at how York Region will handle its waste in coming years. I am representing the York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA) on this committee. The emphasis is to be on the reduction side of the 4Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle and repair). To this end there are several large corporations at the table such as Walmart, Tim Hortons and others. Also included were large recyclers such as Habitat for Humanity and Goodwill. It will be interesting to see what commitments come out of the process.

Upper York Sewage Solutions Public Information Meeting

"The Regional Municipality of York invites you to attend a Public Information Meeting on November 16, 2011 at the Stephen Leacock Theatre in Keswick to discuss how York Region is planning to manage wastewater from approved growth in Aurora, East Gwillimbury, and Newmarket.

"The preferred alternative includes an innovative Water Reclamation Centre located in East Gwillimbury to treat wastewater for discharge to the Lake Simcoe watershed using environmentally sustainable wastewater purification and water recycling technologies, and modifications to the existing York-Durham Sewage System in Aurora and Newmarket."

Stephen Leacock Theatre
130 Gwendolyn Blvd., Keswick
Wed. Nov. 16
Open House: 6:00-7:00 p.m.
Presentation: 7:00 p.m., discussion to follow
For more information: www.uysolutions.ca



Photo by Janet Thompson

Bush Honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*), a native shrub, a highlight of my garden in autumn (photo taken Nov. 9).