



# The Quinte Naturalist

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is affiliated with Ontario Nature, a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research.

February 2016 Issue

## *The Return? of the Whooping Crane*

In last month's *The Quinte Naturalist* I discussed the reintroduction of peregrine falcons at Bon Echo Park which Denice Wilkins promoted when she worked at the park in the 1990s. The program was very successful. For proof see the note in the *Club News* section of this newsletter on page 3. Unfortunately even devoting significant funds and effort to the recovery programs for endangered species does not always guarantee such spectacular success. Witness the work on behalf of the whooping crane.

At first glance the various programs aimed at the whooping crane look as though they have produced good results. From a population of only 22 wild birds in 1941 conservationists have increased species numbers to 614 wild and captive birds. There have been ups and downs but the numbers represent an average annual increase in the number of cranes of 4.5%. The problem is that the only naturally occurring and self-sustaining population of wild birds is that which nests in the area of Wood Buffalo National Park in western Canada and spends the winter near Port Aransas, Texas on the Gulf of Mexico. Currently it consists of 304 birds.

We have all of our eggs in one basket (pun intended). A series of events or even one significant event could seriously deplete this population and put the species at risk. Threats are many. A hurricane on the gulf coast could kill many birds. This is exactly what happened in the 1940s when a hurricane sealed the fate of cranes breeding in Louisiana. The migration route of the Wood Buffalo cranes takes them over the tar sands where a storm could force them to land in the tailing ponds. In their Texas wintering



**Photo By Sasata – from**  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=114772>  
**59**

*At 152 cm. (5 ft.) the whooping crane is North America's tallest flying bird.*



Don't forget that the February meeting is our Treasure Table meeting. Bring pre-enjoyed treasures to the meeting. These could include books, pictures, crafts, etc. Edible treasures are always a hit. Please mark bargain basement prices on all items. No garage sale rejects please.

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**Please renew your QFN membership if you haven't already done so.**

grounds lower water in one area caused by excess water taking for agricultural, industrial and residential use seriously reduced habitat. On the other hand rising sea levels caused by climate change threaten other gulf coast wintering habitat. A drought in the nesting habitat in Wood Buffalo leaves nests more vulnerable to predators and forces young birds to travel further for water. Disease, power lines and predators are also hazards.

Realizing the risks in having the species so concentrated in one area biologists began efforts to reintroduce wild cranes to other areas in 1975. Such reintroduction can only be considered a success when the species reproduces naturally and is able to sustain itself.

The first attempt in the Rocky Mountains used wild sandhill cranes to foster the eggs and young of whoopers. It soon became obvious that the whooping cranes were not reproducing naturally so the project was abandoned in 1989. The last member of this flock disappeared in 2002.

Beginning in 1993 a second program attempted to establish a non-migratory flock in Florida using captive-raised birds. Again the flock did not produce enough offspring to sustain itself naturally. Releases were terminated after 2004. The flock contained 18 birds in 2012 but it has dwindled to 8 individuals now.

An attempt to establish a non-migratory flock in Louisiana begun in 2011 is still in progress. This January 11 juveniles were released. Currently this flock contains 46 birds.



Even many non-birders know the captivating story of the fourth program. In Wisconsin biologists costumed as adult cranes raise young birds. When the birds are ready a pilot in an ultralight leads them to their wintering area in Florida. Despite an annual recruitment of hand-raised birds that flock has declined from 118 birds in 2013 to 99 this January. Again the problem is the poor breeding success in the wild. Ultralight flights were discontinued last month.

Why are captive-raised birds so unsuccessful at raising young? One problem is their negligence as parents. Many simply abandon their nests. Perhaps some element of whooping crane parenting education is missed when the birds are raised by costumed biologists rather than adult cranes. Another factor may be genetic. When several generations are raised in captivity they are spared the stresses of life in the wild which weed out less well-adapted individuals. They are treated for disease, protected from predators and required to fly far less when young.

Biologists continue to search for solutions. In the meantime they keep their fingers crossed that disaster does not strike the self-sustaining wild Wood Buffalo population. The future of the species is still in doubt.

## CLUB AND LOCAL NEWS

**Annual Dinner** Tickets are available at the meeting for \$28 for the dinner on April 25. Award-winning mystery novelist Steve Burrows is our speaker. Steve has birded over five continents. He is also contributing field editor of *Asian Geographic*, a magazine with more than 300,000 readers in 44 countries. We will soon be promoting the dinner among other groups so be sure to get your tickets while they are still available.

**Bon Echo Peregrine Update** After our January meeting QFN member Bill Campbell contacted the Bon Echo staff for recent information about peregrines. Lisa Roach, the Natural Heritage Education Coordinator at the park sent the following:

*I came to the park in 2007 & an adult pair built a scrape on the cliff that year & successfully raised 2 chicks. Since then, there has been a pair of Peregrine Falcons at the park each year who have successfully raised 2-3 chicks each season. The adults arrive in April or early May then they, & the chicks, usually leave in September or October, depending on the weather. We do a lot of monitoring on the birds.*

*In 2015 there was some excitement regarding the Peregrines as one chick (there were 3 chicks in 2015) fell out of the scrape in early June, was rescued by some kayakers, taken to park staff, who in turn, took the chick to a falcon rehab centre near Madoc. The chick was later returned to the cliff & released.*

**Christmas Bird Count** There was an error in the January newsletter's CBC data. See page 9 in this newsletter for the correct information.

### **Presqu'île Waterfowl Weekend March 19 and 20:**

World-class waterfowl viewing during the spring migration. Volunteer naturalists will help you view and identify over 25 different species of ducks, geese, and swans. Also check out displays and children's activities in the Nature Centre. Join The Friends for BBQ lunch fund-raiser at the Lighthouse, on Saturday and Sunday, from 11:00 am. The Lighthouse Interpretive Centre and The Friends' Gift Shop will be open.

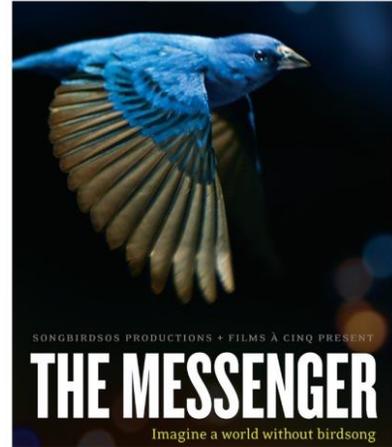


*White-winged Scoter Photo by Ian Dickinson,  
submitted by Terry Sprague*

**Doc Fest** Once again this year QFN is sponsoring a film at Belleville's documentary film festival. The festival runs on March 4,5 and 6 with films shown at multiple venues. Our choice is *The Messenger* showing at 12:30 pm on Friday March 4 at the Pinnacle Playhouse.

It's a beautiful film with an important message. The trailer alone is worth watching for its slow motion images of birds in flight. You can see it on YouTube at this address:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjQtRr4CKcc>

When the film was shown last summer on *The Nature of Things* the CBC website contained the following comment:



*Over the course of a year, following the seasons and the birds, Director Su Rynard and the team set out on a journey of discovery.*

*"We discovered that the causes of songbird declines are many, and the solutions are few," states Rynard. "Yet everywhere we went, we met passionate people who are concerned and are working for change – as this is not just about the future of birds, it's about the health of the planet too."*

A pass for all films except the Friday night gala is \$50. Rush tickets costing \$10 are available 15 minutes before the film starts if seats are available. Full information about Doc Fest, including a 32-page program can be found on the website.  
<http://downtowndocfest.ca/festival/2016-films/>.

**Thursday, Feb. 25** There are 2 events on this night so you'll have to make a choice.

Invasive Species Night Quinte Conservation Office, Corner of Wallbridge-Loyalist Road and Old Highway 2. 7 p.m. Quinte Conservation Presentation.

Emily Johnston from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters will talk about invasive species on our land and in our water. Participants will also learn about OFAH's new invasive species mapping program.

Digging up the Past, Huntington Veterans Community Hall, 11379 Hwy. 62, Ivanhoe, just north of the cheese factory. 7 p.m. Hasting Stewardship Council Winter Speaker Series. A donation of \$5 helps to cover expenses.

Tom Mohr, President, of the Peterborough Chapter, Ontario Archaeological Society will give a presentation about Ontario archaeology in general, with an overview of the archaeological resources of the South Hastings area, both before and since European contact.

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## A STALWART SUPPORTER

By George Thomson and Elizabeth Churcher

First published in Tweed News, Feb. 17, 2016. Reprinted with permission.



We are sitting peering out a west-facing window this overcast morning. The sky is gray, the woods are dark and the snow-covered fields look like white blankets quilted with golden brown threads. All is quiet and peaceful. The living world around us seems to be at its lowest ebb. In his book, "Nature's Year, Changing Seasons in Central and Eastern Ontario", Peterborough author, Drew Monkman, calls January the month of silence and

survival. As we write, our calendar is telling us that there is only one day left in January! Soon we should be experiencing longer and brighter days that announce new beginnings to many of our animal friends.

For us, January has been a time to appreciate the loyal birds and animals that stay close by in those darker days. The smaller number of species is compensated for by the wonderful behaviours they exhibit. Their many interactions and playful gestures fill our days with enjoyment and interest. Looking beyond the bird feeders, we catch the occasional glimpse of mammals as they hunt for food in our fields and woodlands, trying to take in enough energy to sustain life. We may be lucky enough to observe such mammals as Red Foxes, Coyotes, Skunks, Deer and Raccoons. Venturing beyond our own property, we sometimes add Otters, Minks and Weasels to this list. Those that we are most likely to encounter on a daily basis are Gray and Red Squirrels. Some, such as the Black Bear and Chipmunks find comfortable beds and sleep throughout the winter, avoiding the need to plow through the snow in search of a very limited food supply. Only two, the Woodchuck and the Jumping Mouse, are true hibernators. Whatever the kind of bird or mammal, his focus is survival!

Some mammals are active all winter under the white mantle of snow, feeding continually to stoke their body fires. These are the shrews, moles and mice. The mouse tribe includes the Deer Mouse and the Vole, the little brown creature which we are going to tell you more about.

We sometimes wonder what it would be like to live the life of another animal, to see and experience the World through other than Human eyes. Very likely most of us would not opt for the life of the Meadow Vole ---- hers is a very short and frantic life.

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The Eastern Meadow Vole belongs to the huge family, Muridae, which consists of about 1300 species of rats and mice. If you think that is a very large number, you are correct! This family actually accounts for 26 % of the 5000 species of mammals on our planet! The Eastern Meadow Vole is in the subfamily that contains about 140 species of Voles and Lemmings. While rats and mice are often viewed in a disdainful manner, it is important to realize the ecologically significant role they play as they give up their lives to sustain others. They are near the base of the food chain and serve as a food source for a multitude of other animals. Our little Meadow Vole is exemplary in sacrificing himself so that those around him may live!

Perhaps the most distinguishing physical feature of our Eastern Meadow Vole is his small, protruding, black eyes that stand out against his dark brown coat. In contrast to the prominence of his eyes, his tiny, rounded ears are partly hidden in fur. His little tail, 3 to 5 cm in length, is about 2 times as long as his hind foot. Overall, the Vole is 13 to 19 cm long and weighs only 18 to 64 g. Imagine this wee fellow surviving ice storms, blizzards and chilling temperatures! Those females who manage to make it to spring may have a litter of 4-8 young and, should they be fortunate enough to avoid being eaten during the summer months, they may have another family of similar size in the fall.

One factor the Vole has in its favour is its ability to live in a diverse range of habitats. You can find him residing in grasslands, pastures, open woodlands, meadows and marshy areas. During the winter, he remains active, dwelling in the subnivean space, a narrow area beneath the snow but above the ground. When the snow layer retreats in spring, an elaborate network of runways, chambers and nests is revealed but the growth of grass soon conceals these structures. In summer, when we're mowing the lawn, we watch carefully for Voles scurrying along runways through the grass, so we don't run over them.

Throughout the year, the Vole sustains herself on bulbs and roots, large amounts of seeds, insects and some bark, consuming whatever is in good supply in her environs. Because of their vulnerability, most will not survive to see all four seasons of one year. They are preyed upon by a large number of animals: Snakes, Hawks, Falcons, Owls, Skunks, Weasels, Foxes, Coyotes and Raccoons. George was once lucky enough to watch a Great Gray Owl and a Red Fox, both hunting Meadow Voles simultaneously in a snowy field outside of our kitchen window. The vivid predator-prey scene filled him with both excitement and sadness as he acknowledged the victor's need for food while wondering if the tiny victims had lived more than a few weeks --- a reality for many of their kind!

The Meadow Vole is one of the stalwart supporters of life on Earth. She plays a vital role in the base of the food chain, converting the substance and energy of plants into food for other animals. A seemingly humble creature, she deserves our respect and praise.

Bay of Quinte Remedial Action Plan  
**Volunteer to be a Citizen Scientist**

**Birds and Frogs tell us a lot about the health  
of the wetlands around the Bay of Quinte.**

**Monday, March 7, 2016 - 7:00 p.m.**  
Quinte Conservation, 2061 Highway #2



Black Crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Learn how you can be a citizen scientist for the Bay of Quinte by volunteering as a Marsh Monitor. Marsh Monitors help us learn about the health of our wetlands by observing for birds and frogs.

Quinte area naturalist, Terry Sprague will explain: **FrogWatch Ontario**, which is great for the kids due to its simplicity and the more extensive **Marsh Monitoring Program** that includes both birds and frogs. You can monitor for one program or do both.

For more information contact Terry Sprague at  
613-848-4549 or email [naturestuff.tours@gmail.com](mailto:naturestuff.tours@gmail.com)  
[www.naturestuff.net](http://www.naturestuff.net) or [www.bqrap.ca](http://www.bqrap.ca)



In partnership locally with Lower Trent Conservation and Quinte Conservation



## This Month's Program

**Monday, February 22, 7 pm**

Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, Belleville

**Go West, and North, Young Man – Kyle Blaney.** QFN member Kyle Blaney is a photographer and birder. He will illustrate some of his favourite places in western and northern Canada with his breathtaking photography and talk about some of his more interesting and unusual experiences.

**Outings** – Several factors, primarily the weather conspired against an owl prowl in February. To avoid stressing the owls (and the owlers) too much the temperature should be no colder than -10 C. Winds should be no more than 10 km/hr and there should be no precipitation. There will be an outing of some kind in March so watch your emails.

**Thanks** to everyone who volunteered to lead an outing. Several people suggested spring for their outing so I may be contacting some of you to see if we can make alternate arrangements. We all have our favourite places. Why not volunteer to show them to the rest of the club? You don't have to be an expert. You just have to enjoy nature.

**March Meeting** – Avian biologist Allie Anderson will speak on *The American Kestrel-North America's Smallest Falcon*.

*The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an affiliate of Ontario Nature, is a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research. It was founded in 1949 and incorporated in 1990, and encompasses the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward. The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is legally entitled to hold real estate and accept benefits.*

*Quinte Field Naturalists meet on the fourth Monday of every month from September to March (except December), 7:00, Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, 60 Bridge Street East, Belleville. In April we hold our annual dinner at an alternate time and location. New members and guests are always welcome. Bring a friend.*

**President**

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**Past President**

Wendy Turner

**Vice-President**

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613-922-1174

**Recording Secretaries**

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613-966-7460

Nancy Stevenson  
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Denice Wilkins  
613-478-5070

**Membership/Mailing**

Karina Spence  
Unlisted

**Outings/Newsletter**

John Blaney  
613-962-9337

**Social Convener**

Sharron Blaney  
613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – March 10, 2016

Please send submissions to [sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com](mailto:sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com)

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## CORRECTED CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

\* A species occurring in record numbers

\* A species new to the count

cw – count week, the period 3 days before and after the actual count day

SPECIES	No.	SPECIES	No.
*Snow Goose	cw	Red-bellied Woodpecker	3
Canada Goose	2998	Downy Woodpecker	32
*Mute Swan	75	Hairy Woodpecker	11
*American Black Duck	41	Northern Flicker	3
*Mallard	854	Pileated Woodpecker	4
*Redhead	2	American Kestrel	4
Ring-necked Duck	1	*Peregrine Falcon	3
Greater Scaup	16	Blue Jay	100
*Lesser Scaup	23	American Crow	271
*Bufflehead	9	Common Raven	6
Common Goldeneye	130	Black-capped Chickadee	403
duck species	6	Red-breasted Nuthatch	3
Hooded Merganser	6	White-breasted Nuthatch	54
Common Merganser	53	Brown Creeper	1
*Red-breasted Merganser	8	Golden-crowned Kinglet	4
Great Blue Heron	1	American Robin	141
*American White Pelican	1	European Starling	514
Common Loon	1	Cedar Waxwing	70
Double-crested Cormorant	1	Snow Bunting	35
Bald Eagle	2	American Tree Sparrow	108
*Northern Harrier	6	Song Sparrow	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Swamp Sparrow	1
Cooper's Hawk	1	White-throated Sparrow	2
Red-tailed Hawk	21	*Dark-eyed Junco	358
Ring-billed Gull	253	Northern Cardinal	25
dark-backed gull species	1	Red-winged Blackbird	1
gull species	92	House Finch	35
Rock Pigeon	628	American Goldfinch	136
Mourning Dove	169	House Sparrow	94
*Snowy Owl	2	Total Birds	7860
Belted Kingfisher	1	Total Species Including 1 cw	59

Herring Gull (23 found) and Northern Shrike (1 found) were omitted from the original table in error. They were included in the number of species (59) and number of birds (7860)

On CBC day counters found 58 species. The snow geese seen during count week bring the total to 59 species for this year's Christmas Bird Count



Whenever possible QFN member Tom Wheatley spends the winter birding in southeast Asia. On his trips he has found over 1,000 species including this Gould's Sunbird.



**Don't Despair** – Spring is on the way. The days are noticeably longer. Certainly the birds are noticing. House finches are singing from tall spruces in the neighbourhood. The chickadee's *fee-bee* may sound plaintive but it's their way of announcing spring. Early one morning this week when I went out to get the paper a cardinal called from a neighbour's yard. Soon male red-winged blackbirds will fill local marshes challenging all comers with loud *konk-a-rees*.

Other sounds of spring will fill the night air. Spring peepers, so small that they can sit comfortable on a loonie, will call in a chorus which can be heard a kilometre away. The quacking in the local woodlot will be wood frogs, not ducks.

A good way to celebrate spring would be to take part in Marsh Monitoring or Frogwatch. They are easy citizen science projects which take little time. Terry Sprague will tell you all about them on March 7. See page 7.