



The Quinte Naturalist

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

MARCH



MOIRA RIVER OSPREY (See page 4)

QFN March Meeting

SAVING OUR LIVING DINOSAURS

Lindsay Maxim

Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, 60 Bridge Street East.

7:00 Everyone Welcome – See Page 7

A Living Dynamo

By George Thomson & Elizabeth Churcher

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Sketch by George Thomson

Peering out the kitchen window while sipping our morning coffee often is the beginning of a new adventure. While watching birds at our feeders, we suddenly became aware of a small, furry creature running around on the icy surface right beneath the hungry birds. At first, we thought the little fellow was a Meadow Vole, the common mouse of the fields and meadows, who makes tunnels under the snow. As springtime approaches and the snow begins to melt, these tunnels appear as little tubes or roadways. --- But NO! On closer inspection, the little guy turned out to be a shrew, and more precisely, a Northern Short-tailed Shrew.

Shrews are in the Insectivore Order of Mammals while Voles are in the Rodent Order of Mammals. Shrews are as distantly related to Voles and Mice as they are to elephants or to humans. There are seven species of Shrews in Ontario: Masked, Water, Smoky, Arctic, Pygmy, Least and Northern Short-tailed. Shrews are in a separate family from Moles, of which Ontario has three species.

The Northern Short-tailed Shrew is the only Shrew species that we have seen on our one hundred acres over the past forty-two years. This Shrew is quite distinctive, as it is the largest Shrew and it has the shortest tail. The Masked, Water, Smoky and Pygmy Shrews also occur in our area, but they have longer tails. The Arctic Shrew is found in Northern Ontario and the Least Shrew's range in our province is limited to one locale on Lake Erie. The range of our little fellow, or gal, includes the Atlantic Coast from the Maritimes to south Carolina, up into Northern Quebec & Ontario, South to Georgia & Alabama and West to Nebraska & Saskatchewan.

Why is our tiny visitor a DYNAMO? Shrews have an extremely high metabolic rate --- they must eat up to twice their body weight (16 -28 g) each day to stay alive. Just imagine a person doing this! These little creatures do not hibernate. Throughout harsh winter storms or in the hot summer sun, they must keep going many hours each day, sleeping only briefly. Like all small mammals and birds, they lose heat very rapidly. Their little hearts race at the pace of 900 – 1400 beats per minute and they have the highest blood oxygen content of any mammal measured. They boast a red cell count three times that of human blood!

Throughout most of spring and fall and all of summer, the Shrew feasts on earthworms, slugs, spiders, centipedes, sow bugs and soil insects. They use a much simpler system of echolocation than bats, dolphins and whales to locate their prey. In cold weather, mice become an important part of their diet and they will enter buildings in search of their dinner. As we observed our little

visitor fill his cheeks with the seeds dropping from the bird feeders, we learned that they will even turn to food from plants in harsh conditions.

Just to add another marvelous fact about the Short-tailed Shrew --- they are among the world's few poisonous mammals! Don't worry: they are not dangerous to humans! The only other poisonous mammals are the Solenodon, another Insectivore which lives in Haiti, and the Platypus of Australia. Short-tailed Shrews have toxic saliva which help them overpower mice and large earthworms.

This account would not be complete without giving you a little insight into the sex life of the DYNAMO. As you might expect, it is frenetic. They live solitary lives, except when they mate and when the female is caring for her young. Mating may occur throughout the year, but the peak period is in spring. The gestation period is from 17 to 21 days after which the mother will care for her litter of 4 to 8 babies.

While watching over her young, the mother has some coping strategies. If she is alarmed and fears that her family is in danger, she moves her babies one at a time, with the baby clinging to her rump fur or tail. Some other Shrew species move their entire litter all at once in a chain formation. At 21 days, the mother weans her family and they go off to fend for themselves. If they survive the transition, they will be nearly mature by 50 days.

--- So, when you see a little furry critter with a short tail, a long snout and fur as sleek as velvet, please pause and say "Hello" to DYNAMO", the Short-tailed Shrew.



Chimera



When you first saw this photograph you probably thought the same thing I did, "Fake." It turns out that both the bird and the photograph are legitimate. This cardinal is a chimera, originating from two fertilized eggs. The phenomenon may be the result of heredity or of the embryos being exposed to certain drugs or chemicals at key stages in their development.

Geneticists claim that the phenomenon occurs in many species in addition to birds. Cases have been documented among crabs, lobsters, butterflies and mammals, even humans. The condition is usually only this obvious when the embryos are of different sexes and the sexes of the species affected have markedly different appearances.

Among humans chimerism has resulted in confusion and embarrassment. For instance, DNA testing appeared to show that an American woman, Lydia Fairchild, was not the mother of her own children. Her body contained two sets of DNA and the set tested did not match the DNA of her children. Fortunately an alert lawyer solved the puzzle before she lost custody.



GILLES BISSON

Gilles Bisson is another QFN member with a talent for photography. If you were lucky enough to see the Photo-Nat exhibit in the Quinte Mall earlier this year you will already have seen the picture on page one but it's certainly worth a second look. Gilles had his camera ready while kayaking in the Moira River last June. Undoubtedly with a hungry family to feed the ambitious osprey decided to try for a good sized largemouth bass. Unfortunately the osprey was unable to land his catch and he dropped it but Gilles had secured his catch.

Gilles' photographic repertoire extends to macrophotography as shown by the image of the praying mantis peering out at you above.

Gilles moved to Belleville from Kapuskasing in 2010 after retiring. The organizational and time management skills he developed as a Chartered Accountant must have come to the fore even in retirement because he has been able to integrate three hobbies, photography, kayaking and birding.

You can find other examples of Gilles' work on his website, www.gbissonphotography.com, on the Photo-Nat website, www.photo-nat.com and also on Terry Sprague's website, www.naturestuff.net.

Birding Ethics

In 1934 Roger Tory Peterson published *A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America* in which he introduced what has become known as the Peterson Identification System. This system relied on pointing out relevant field marks. Combined with Peterson's artistic portraits of each species his system made his book so popular that the first printing of 2,000 sold out in just one week.

Peterson's field guide, the availability of relatively inexpensive binoculars after the Second World War and the growing environmental movement established birding as a popular hobby. By the new millennium birders generated millions of dollars for the North American economy.

After the turn of the twenty-first century new technology attracted thousands more to birding. The internet with services such as Ontbirds and ebird encouraged birders to visit areas where rare or nesting birds could be found. Digital photography made it possible for amateur photographers to take satisfying photos of birds. Birding of one kind or another is probably the most popular hobby in North America. Unfortunately the numbers of birders and nature photographers and the behaviour of some now create problems for both the birds and the environment in general.

Wildflowers and ground-nesting birds suffer when dozens of us wander randomly through a favourite birding site. Some photographers clear protective foliage from around a nest to get a picture. Unthinking birders walk into residential yards to get a glimpse of a rare bird. Birders climb over fences and damage them causing inconvenience and expense for farmers and other rural land owners.

Most of us who have birded for some time, myself included, can probably remember things we've done which we later realized we should not have. We may not have been as rude as the birder who walked uninvited into a rural resident's unlocked house so he could get a better picture of a rare bird through the kitchen window but we may have walked into someone's backyard in our excitement over a rare bird. We may have disturbed a nest simply because we weren't paying attention as we walked through the woods. Such transgressions were rare and inconsequential when there were few of us but the cumulative effect of even minor sins has become a problem.

To address these problems many organizations have developed a Code of Behaviour for birders. As far as I know no members of the Quinte Field Naturalists are guilty of major birding crimes. However we have probably all caused some problems out of ignorance or inattention. The Ontario Field Ornithologists' Code of Ethics is an excellent guide for behaviour.

1. The welfare of birds must come first. Always consider the impact of your activity on the bird.

2. Protect habitat. Particularly in groups stay on trails to avoid trampling vegetation or nests on the ground. When you feel that you must leave a trail watch where you are putting your feet.
3. Keep disturbance to a minimum. A bird's tolerance for human activity varies with both species and season. Migrants or sick birds may appear "tame." They are not. They must be given space to rest or feed. If a bird you are studying or photographing becomes agitated back off. Don't use flash photography with owls. It blinds and confuses them. The playing of audio recording must be used sparingly and avoided completely in heavily birded areas or in very cold weather.
4. Respect the rights of landowners. Do not enter posted property without permission. Do not block access to fields. If asked to leave do so immediately.
5. Have consideration for other birders. Be polite to other birders and helpful to beginners. If you see someone disturbing birds or significantly damaging habitat politely explain the effects of their actions. They may not be aware of the effect they are having.
6. Record your observations and submit them to a relevant authority.

This is a summary. The full OFO code can be found on their website www.ofo.ca. Click on "About Us."



Photo by Gilles Bisson

The palm warbler is one of the first warblers to appear in spring. Watch for the wagging tail.

The Naturalist's Calendar

Monday, March 23

QFN's regular meeting. Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church. 7:p.m.

Turtles are among the oldest living creatures on Earth but today 7 of Ontario's 8 turtle species are considered "Species at Risk." Lindsay Maxim, Executive Co-ordinator of the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre will explain how the Centre works to heal and protect these living dinosaurs. She'll also bring along some of our local inhabitants for everyone to meet.

Wednesday, March 25

Preparing for the Emerald Ash Borer

7:30 at Bloomfield Town Hall

Martin Streit and Patrick Hodge from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry will explain how to manage the ash trees in your woodlot or city yard in light of the invasion of this destructive insect. A Prince Edward County Stewardship Council presentation. Admission free but donations are appreciated.

Wednesday, April 1

Registration for Quinte Conservation's summer day camp begins. Week-long camps in Picton and Belleville during July and August. Contact Quinte Conservation for details. 613-968-3434 for more information.

Thursday, April 2

Local Geology

Hastings Stewardship Council Winter Speaker Series, Huntingdon Veterans Memorial Hall, 11379 Hwy 62, Ivanhoe. \$5

Regional resident geologist for southern Ontario with the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Pam Sangster will talk about the geology of this area and the history of mining. Dr. Daniel Tubb will talk about the two years he spent as an anthropologist working with artisan gold miners in the Choco region of Colombia.

Saturday, April 11

Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory opens for the spring banding season.

Saturday, April 25

Ground Awakening! Join Ewa, LTCA's Ecology and Stewardship Specialist on a 2 hour outdoor adventure. Witness ephemeral spring wildflowers carpeting the woods and learn about their fascinating, intricate ecology.

10 a.m. Goodrich Loomis Conservation Area. 10 km north of Brighton off County Road 30. 1331 Pinewood School Rd. Meet at the parking lot.

April 18

An Evening for Terry Sprague

Join in for an evening of great food and camaraderie celebrating Terry's career as "The County Naturalist". We have all read his books and newspaper columns, attended his workshops, listened to his presentations and hiked alongside him on many a trail. This night has been organized to thank Terry for all he has contributed to our lives and to the natural elements of The County.

Sales end April 8.

Saturday, April 25

Ostrander Point Fund Raising Dinner

Monday, April 27 – QFN Dinner

Reflections on a Career in "Nature Stuff", Monday April 27 at St. Mark's United Church in Belleville;

Terry Sprague, pied piper of nature from Kingston to Cobourg, has enjoyed almost 40 years as a naturalist. Over his long career he has introduced scores of people to the joys and mysteries of the natural world through weekly newspaper articles, presentations, tours and hikes. In 2011, Watershed Magazine selected Terry as one of only ten "Home Town Heroes," for his passion and dedication to "Nature stuff". Now entertaining thoughts of retirement, Terry will look back on his career and share some of the stories and misadventures he has collected during his years on the trail. For more information or to buy tickets, call 613-477-3066.

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an incorporated 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

George Thomson
613-478-3205

Past President

Wendy Turner

Vice-President

Phil Martin
613-395-3246

Recording Sect'y

Bernadette Hymus
613-962-7926

Corresponding Sect'y

Elizabeth Churcher
613-478-3205

Treasurer

Doug Newfield
613-477-3066

Environmental Officer

Denice Wilkins
613-478-5070

Membership/Mailing

Marjorie Fisher
613-968-3277

Outings/Newsletter

John Blaney
613-962-9337

Refreshments

Sharron Blaney
613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – April 10, 2015

Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com