



The Quinte Naturalist

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

NOVEMBER



Paul O'Toole of Kingston found this magnificent snowy owl during the "snowy owl winter" of 2013-14. More information on page 2.

NOVEMBER 24. SPEAKER – ROBERT FERGUSON CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH DAMSELS AND DARNERS

Hastings County has a diverse dragonfly community comprising over 100 different species. Few of us have witnessed firsthand the amazing diversity of colours and patterns that our dragonfly neighbours exhibit. Robert Ferguson, a retired Wildlife Biologist, uses digital photography to capture the intriguing beauty of these fascinating, predatory insects. His detailed photographs provide an intimate look inside the colourful world of dragonflies.

OUR “SNOWY OWL WINTER”

Remember last winter? Ice storms, raging snowstorms, miserable days. There was another storm that went on for several weeks and didn't involve snow or ice or wind. It was an irruption of snowy owls. Eastern North America was invaded by hundreds of these ghostly figures. They perched on poles and posts, road signs, boats at sea and even on the ledge of The Washington Post's building in downtown Washington, D.C.

Of course the birds were here looking for the voles and other small mammals which make up their diet but the cause of their appearance originated in a surplus of food. During the summer of 2013 there was a tremendous population boom of lemmings. There were so many lemmings that the owls were actually stockpiling them around their nests. More food meant more owlets. More owlets meant more adult birds later in the year. Now there was not enough hunting territory to go around. The southward movement began.

Christmas bird counts (CBCs) documented the invasion. On 399 different counts volunteers tallied a record number of 1117 snowy owls, almost exactly double the previous high of 563 birds. Even this number did not come close to representing the numbers of owls present. Severe storms in the east during the CBC period closed roads, limited participation in counts and forced the cancellation of others. For instance birders in Cape Race, Newfoundland, scouting for their count, found over 200 snowy owls visible from the road. For the entire count period snow accumulation kept the same road closed and not one of those owls was included in the CBC numbers.

Will we have another snowy owl winter this year? Last winter was actually the third year in a row of unusually high numbers. Parts of the Canadian Arctic had another record nesting season in 2014 and owls are already appearing locally, witness the two we found at Presqu'île on the recent QFN outing and others reported on Amherst and Wolfe Islands.

Many years the Kingston and Amherst Island CBCs record the most owls. Last year 22 were found in the Kingston circle and 27 in the Amherst Island circle. Unfortunately we have never recorded a snowy owl on any of our twelve CBCs to date. Maybe this year?



All life truly is interconnected.



PROJECT SNOWSTORM

The irruption of snowy owls inspired a group of biologists to initiate Project Snowstorm to track their movements. They tagged 22 birds from Minnesota to Massachusetts with solar-powered transmitters which record the bird's location in 3 dimensions (latitude, longitude, altitude). Only the healthiest birds were tagged.

Unlike other transmitters which report via Argos satellites these transmitters use the cellular phone network. Of course this means that when the birds are out of cellphone range their data is not transmitted. Since the purpose of the project was to track the birds' movements while they are in the south this is not usually a problem.

An interactive map on the website <http://www.projectsnowstorm.org/> allows you to follow the tagged owls' movements last winter. The trail disappears when the bird heads north out of cellphone range. One of the birds tagged directly across Lake Ontario from us, for instance, disappeared from the system after it lit near Queensborough northeast of Madoc. If you visit the website to follow some of the birds yourself note that I found one which appeared to wind up in central Asia. What really happened is that it travelled to northern Quebec and the transmitter confused east and west longitude.

Researchers are hoping that some of the tagged birds will be picked up by the system if they return. Even if they don't return for several years the data will still be useful because the transmitter can record up to 100,000 locations for as long as twelve years. The data will be transmitted as soon as the bird returns to an area with cellphone coverage.



Photo by Barry Kant

One interesting thing researchers discovered is that some owls spend weeks or even months out on one of the Great Lakes hunting for waterfowl and roosting on the ice. Other owls roam over hundreds of kilometers on land while some spend the winter in areas only a couple of kilometers across. Necropsies on owls found dead showed that these birds are exposed to rodent poisons, mercury, pesticide breakdown products and other environmental contaminants which can affect behavior and reproduction. Not good.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



***It's Christmas Bird Count Time.
Please join us. We need counters.***

***Photo from the North Carolina Wildlife
Resources Commission website. I do not
know how they got the catbird to wear the
Santa hat.***

When working on local Christmas Bird Counts it's easy to forget just how big a deal CBCs actually are. Last year 71,659 observers recorded 66,243,371 individual birds of 2403 species in the Americas. The 2408 count circles could be found from Pacific to Atlantic and from Rankin Inlet, Nunavut to Ecuador. Counters were in the field in every Canadian province and territory and every American state including Hawaii. Every year Edmonton has the most counters with the total last year being 506 counters.

Numbers of species found on individual counts range from 531 species found on a count in Ecuador to a total of one species, common raven, found on the Rankin Inlet count. In Canada the Victoria, B.C. circle produced the most species, 146. No count in Ontario had over 100 species although Hamilton and Blenheim in southwestern Ontario came close at 98.

Last year on the Belleville count we found 7602 birds of 52 species plus 3 more species during count week, the period 3 days before and 3 days after the actual count day. These figures are not record-breaking but they are better than average for us. With the number of counters we had and the nature of our count circle these numbers are quite respectable.

The Christmas Bird Count is far more than just a social event or an excuse to get out of other responsibilities and spend the day birding. It's the largest and longest-running citizen science project in the world. In 2003 a group of independent scientists conducted a review of the CBC and its value. Their endorsement added extra credibility to the CBC data which was already being used in research studies.

The bibliography of studies using CBC data is several pages long. It includes papers on the effects of climate change and other factors on the ranges of many species. Would you believe that mourning doves were once a rare species in southern Ontario? Because many land birds nest in nearly inaccessible regions of the boreal forest it is difficult to get an accurate understanding of their population. Using CBC data ornithologists have been able to determine that Evening Grosbeaks are in serious decline in the east while numbers are stable in the west. CBC-based studies of multiple species show that nearly 60% of 305 relatively widely distributed species have shifted their ranges northward by

an average of 35 miles (a little over 55 kilometres). This is not insignificant as in some cases the new ranges contain less suitable habitat and can thus support fewer birds. Fortunately there is some good news found in the data. Bald eagles are definitely back and peregrine falcons are no longer considered endangered.

The point is the Christmas Bird Count is an important project. Join us on December 27. Inexperienced birders will go with more experienced birders. You will probably need to walk a bit so dress warmly. Even if you can identify only two species (robin and not-a-robin?) you can still point out birds for others to identify. It's a chance to increase your skills. Contact John Blaney at the meeting or phone 613-962-9337 for more information.



Photo by Keith Gregoire

Earlier this month QFN member Keith Gregoire found this glaucous gull along the Bayshore Trail. Its size and colour are the features to look for when identifying it. Note how much larger it is than the herring gull behind it. It has not been found again since Keith saw it but we have recorded single individuals on 3 CBCs so it is a species to watch for.

WHETHER WE AND POLITICIANS KNOW IT NATURE IS PARTY TO ALL OUR DEALS AND DECISIONS AND SHE HAS MORE VOTES, A LONGER MEMORY AND A STERNER SENSE OF JUSTICE THAN WE DO.

WENDELL BERRY, AMERICAN NOVELIST, POET, FARMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OSTRANDER POINT CASE

By Cheryl Anderson

“The PECFN’s appeal to the Appeal Court of Ontario is a precedent setting case...”

On Dec 8-9, PECFN will be defending the Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT) ruling that overturned the Ministry of the Environment’s approval of the Gilead wind turbine project. We are appealing to the Appeal Court of Ontario because, subsequently, the Divisional Court overturned the

ERT ruling. The Divisional Court ruling became environmental law which rendered the ERT system powerless. Therefore PECFN’s appeal to the Appeal Court of Ontario is a precedent setting case that impacts the validity of the ERT, the Endangered Species Act (because the ERT ruled that development must not take place at Ostrander Point because it is the breeding habitat of the Blanding’s Turtle which is an endangered species) and the Environmental Protection Act (because it negates the power of the ERT to act to protect important habitat from degradation). As such it will affect environmental law across Ontario.

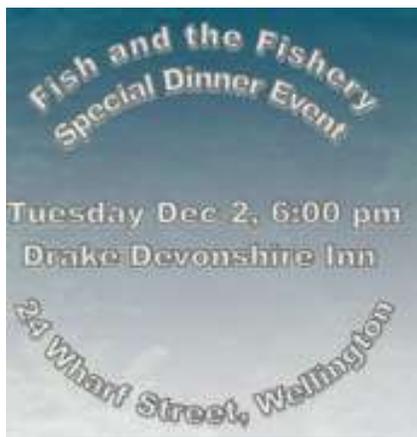
“...the issues raised...are issues of broad public implication in...environmental law.”

Justice Blair, who granted a stay against any construction on the site until the matter is finally decided said, “the issues raised on the proposed appeal are issues of broad public implication in the field of environmental law”.

As usual, PECFN will be represented by Eric Gillespie assisted by Erin Wallace. South Shore Conservancy and Nature Canada have received permission to intervene on our behalf. On the other side Gilead and the Ministry of the Environment will be joined by Canadian Wind Energy Association.



FUND-RAISING DINNER



Enjoy a delicious dinner of Dewey Fisheries fish (vegetarian option available). Learn about the fish on your plate from local fishers Joanne and Kendell Dewey. Dinner is followed by Suzanne Pasternak’s film *Vanishing Legacy: The History of Lakefaring Families of Prince Edward County*.

3-Course Dinner
Wine Included
\$75.00

Phone Sheena Kennedy for reservations
613-399-1461

Vanishing Legacies: A Celebration in Film of the County's South Shore

7:00 pm

Thursday November 27

The Regent Theatre

Fundraiser for Ostrander Point
Admission \$15.00 online and at door

For more information and to order
online click on Eventbrite button below



Vanishing Legacy: The History of the Lakefaring Families of Prince Edward County—A Film by Suzanne Pasternak, with discussion by Suzanne.

Lighthouses of the South Shore—A presentation by Marc Seguin of Save Our Lighthouses.

History Moments produced by Peter Lockyer of History Lives Here Inc.

Musical performance by Suzanne Pasternak and Tom Leighton.



The wealth of the nation is in its air, water, soil, forests, minerals, rivers, lakes, oceans, scenic beauty, wildlife habitats and biodiversity... that's all there is. That's the whole economy. That's where all the economic activity and jobs come from. These biological systems are the sustaining wealth of the world.

Gaylord Nelson, American politician and founder of Earthday



Photo by Kyle Blaney

CBC data has shown hooded mergansers to be increasing in number. We've found them on 7 of 12 Belleville CBCs usually on open sections of the Moira River like this fellow loafing in downtown Belleville.

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.

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Next Newsletter Deadline – January 10, 2014

Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com