



The Quinte Naturalist

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

January



Photo by Kyle Blaney

Gray jays are a highlight of any winter trip to Algonquin Park. On the QFN Algonquin trip this month they seemed more evident than they have been in some recent years. If you look closely at the bird's right leg you can see 2 bands. The left leg has 2 similar bands. Using bands of 11 different colours in various combinations researchers have been able to identify individual birds. They have found that the species' habit of caching food has allowed it to survive better through harsh winters than migratory birds which suffer high mortality during their long journeys. Unfortunately this survival strategy seems to be losing its effectiveness in the park because of climate change and the species habit of nesting as early as February. When freezing temperatures arrive later in the fall stored food is more likely to spoil and be unavailable for nestlings in late winter.

REMEMBER TO BRING ITEMS FOR THE TREASURE TABLE

The Quinte Naturalist – February 2013 – Page 1
Unless otherwise noted all articles are written by the editor.

THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER

TERRY SPRAGUE

BEYOND THE BEECH – A LOOK AT WOODLAND CRITTERS



This has become a popular presentation for owners of woodlots. What does a forest or woodlot contain besides beech, maples, oaks and conifers? You will be surprised after viewing this presentation as we look at everything from the larger, more obvious mammals, right down to the smallest mammal in North America - the pigmy shrew. Learn about millipedes, pill bugs, fungi, ferns and wildflowers, and see what birds either nest in nearby woods, or use the woods as a feeding ground during migration.

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), 7:30, 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 – March 10, 2013

Please send submissions to john.blaney@sympatico.ca

ALGONQUIN TRIP

They missed! After interfering with five consecutive QFN events the weather gods dumped the biggest snow storm of the season on us the day before a planned trip to Algonquin Park. True, we did have to dig ourselves out but eight of us managed that task and headed for the park on Saturday, February 9.

The day unfolded as more of a bird-feeding than a bird-finding day. Gray jays, in greater numbers than I've seen for the past few years, joined the ubiquitous black capped chickadees looking for free food at both the regular Opeongo Road stop and the spruce bog trail parking lot. Even a red-breasted nuthatch accepted the occasional hand held peanut.



*Photo by Kyle Blaney
For the past two winters this leucistic black-capped chickadee has joined its more traditionally-patterned relatives looking for handouts on the Opeongo Road.*

From the visitor centre viewing deck we watched pine grosbeaks and common redpolls join a mob of blue jays at the feeders. A downy and a hairy woodpecker made a few forays in to the suet feeders. Undoubtedly the best bird of the day was a single white-winged crossbill which mingled with the grosbeaks and provided a good chance to study the differences between the two species. (See page 8)

We did miss some of our target species. A search for spruce grouse proved unsuccessful. The boreal chickadee which had been seen earlier in the day on the Spruce Bog Trail declined to make a repeat appearance for our benefit. The reported great gray owl near the Opeongo store disappeared before we arrived. Marjorie and Dirk left a few minutes before our group dispersed and did see an owl near the logging museum. Unfortunately even that bird refused to wait until Sharron and I arrived. Of course, such misses are really just an excuse for another trip to the park.

NEXT OUTING

By now you may have seen the first sign of spring, Roll Up the Rim cups sprouting by the roadside. The first major birding opportunity of the year is the appearance of thousands of waterfowl of more than 20 species appearing at **Presqu'île**. I'm trying to outguess the weather gods so the next outing is scheduled for **Saturday, March 9**. We'll meet in **Zwicks Park where the Golden Jet used to be at 8 a.m.** Remember that you need a **park pass**.

It's time to renew your membership. Please pay by cheque.

QFN SUPPORTS UPCOMING DOWNTOWN DOCFEST

by Denice Wilkins



Mark your calendars! The 2nd annual Belleville Downtown DocFest is coming up on March 1-3 at the CORE (Belleville's old Library). I encourage everyone to check out the lineup of award-winning, international documentary films at www.downtowndocfest.ca. Last year I found the event to be inspiring, eye-opening, educational about issues ranging from the environment, social justice, food security and more. I'm so excited I already have our tickets for this year! \$35 gets you into about 4 films a day plus the two evening galas on Friday and Saturday night. If you only have time to see a couple of the docs (you should have a good cry), but you can do this by just giving a donation at the door and skip the ticket.

To support this entirely volunteer-run event and promote QFN's values in the community, our group is sponsoring the film, *Symphony of the Soil* (see description below) which is being screened on Saturday at 10 a.m. At that time, I'll tell the audience a little about QFN and encourage them to check us out and then introduce the film. We will also have a display set up in the lobby of the CORE (thanks to George and Elizabeth).

Last year, one of the docs I saw was *The Clean Bin Project*, about a young Vancouver couple who challenged each other to a contest to see who could produce the least garbage over the course of a year. I bought the film and would be happy to loan it out.

Being overcome with inspiration, I looked around at the styrofoam coffee cups and soup bowls being used at the festival and volunteered myself to help "green" this year's DocFest. They didn't forget! So this year, acting in my position as Environmental Officer for QFN, I've made greening suggestions to the committee. Compost and recycling bins will be onsite. The website will encourage patrons to lug-a-mug. Pitchers of water and glasses will be available to reduce bottled water use. Kathy from the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory will be supplying the organic, fair trade, Bird Friendly coffee for the CORE to sell by the cup and she will have a display in the lobby to sell bags of coffee to theatre goers. Quinte Trash Bash is joining QFN in the greening efforts.

Come, be inspired and leave ready to “Be the Change!”

Symphony of the Soil

104 min. 2012

Saturday, March 2, 10 a.m. THE CORE
(USA)

Director: Deborah Koons Garcia

Drawing from ancient knowledge and cutting-edge science, *Symphony of the Soil* is an artistic exploration of the miraculous substance, soil. By understanding the elaborate relationships and mutuality between soil, water, the atmosphere, plants and animals, we come to appreciate the complex and dynamic nature of this precious resource. The film also examines our human relationship with soil, the use and misuse of soil in agriculture, deforestation and development, and the latest scientific research on soil’s key role in ameliorating the most challenging environmental issues of our time. Filmed on four continents, featuring esteemed scientists and working farmers and ranchers, *Symphony of the Soil* is an intriguing presentation that highlights possibilities of healthy soil creating healthy plants creating healthy humans living on a healthy planet. Beautiful cinematography and musical score.



BIRDS AND BUILDINGS LAWSUIT VINDICATION

The following article refers to two court cases launched by Ontario Nature and Ecojustice, one against Menkes Developments and the other against Cadillac Fairview. These two companies own buildings with large reflective glass surfaces which birds mistake for open sky and trees. Several hundred birds are killed or injured each year when they strike the glass surface. All the buildings involved have since been retrofitted with window films which provide birds with visual cues to the hazards. City of Toronto Bird-Friendly Guidelines require that buildings built after January 2010 include measures such as the films to reduce bird deaths

Submitted by Caroline Schultz, Executive Director, Ontario Nature

Ontario Nature and Ecojustice may have failed to get a conviction against Menkes Developments in the landmark Birds & Buildings lawsuit last year, but a ruling on a similar case this month has brought an unexpected victory. During his acquittal of Cadillac Fairview on animal cruelty charges related to migratory bird deaths caused by their Toronto towers, Justice Melvyn Green concluded that the suffering and deaths of the birds did violate Ontario animal welfare laws and other building owners could be held liable under those laws. Cadillac Fairview was acquitted because Justice Green found that they acted with due diligence in rectifying the situation when they installed a film over top of the glass so migrating birds can see there’s an obstacle ahead. Lawyer Albert Koehl, who acted for Ontario Nature and Ecojustice, called this “a significant legal precedent ... a major victory, not a complete one.”

NEWS FROM THE TWEED HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY WEBSITE

George Thomson and Elizabeth Churcher gave a power point presentation entitled, “Wildflowers through the Seasons” at the February Tweed and District Horticultural Meeting. Both George and Elizabeth’s love of nature was evident as they spoke and shared outstanding photos taken by George. This passion for nature started when they were young children. George grew up in the Toronto area and he would bike through the many ravines in Toronto to get his “fill of nature” whereas Elizabeth who spent her early years growing up east of Bancroft merely had to step outside “to get her fill”.



Elizabeth and George with Joan Morton, president of the Tweed Horticultural Society

Now, Elizabeth and George are fortunate to be surrounded by nature at their home in Tweed known as Hepatica Hill -named after the white, pink and violet wildflowers that bloom there on sunny spring days.

Their presentation took the members on a walk through the seasons to see the many wildflowers that grow in our local area. Interesting details were given about each wildflower as it was shown on the screen and heads nodded in the audience as members recognized them.

The information provided for each wildflower displayed the presenters’ wealth of knowledge on the subject; for example,

- trout lilies can live more than 100 years
- Jack in the Pulpit can be male or female in the same year
- the Ontario trillium grows very slowly and will have only one leaf for 6 years
- purple asters attract butterflies while white asters attract bees
- orange hawkweed attracts butterflies due to its colour not the nectar
- native people ate succulents as a vegetable as it is high in Vitamins A and C

Their talk highlighted the colour, structure, pollination, habitat and even uses of some of our local wildflowers.

As Elizabeth said at the conclusion of the presentation, “you simply have to look to enjoy the wildflowers as they are everywhere.

**REPORT TO DONORS AND FRIENDS OF THE
OSTRANDER POINT APPEAL FUND**

February 22, 2013
By Cheryl Anderson

The preliminary Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT) hearing into the appeal of the Ostrander Point turbine project continues. The hearing started on Feb 8 in Picton and has been continued in Toronto with an open telephone line to the County on Feb 14 and 21. Lawyers for the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and Gilead Power are defending the project approval against the appeal by Prince Edward County Field Naturalists (PECFN) and the Alliance for the Protection of Prince Edward County (APPEC). PECFN is appealing on the grounds that the project will cause serious and irreversible harm to plant life, animal life or the natural environment. APPEC's grounds for appeal are based on harm to human health.

After much discussion and debate over the three days some decisions have been proposed. There seems to be agreement that the two branches of the Appeal will be heard separately. It has been agreed that the PECFN appeal will be heard first by the Tribunal. Issues of requiring disclosure of witnesses' medical records for harm to human health are delaying progress on the APPEC appeal.

As part of its notice of appeal PECFN requested a stay – that is that no construction activity take place until a decision has been made by the Tribunal. The regulations require the Tribunal to come to a decision by early July. Gilead is protesting the stay request and the Tribunal will rule on the request after hearing arguments on both sides. Gilead wants to begin construction immediately because part of the project approval was the Minister's ruling that no construction can take place during the avian breeding season from May 1 until July 23 and that road construction would be done between the months of October and February. These conditions leave a short spring window for construction in April. PECFN is determined to present firm defence of the habitat before the ERT decision has been made.

Several dates have been established for the Main hearing: Mar 4-8, Mar 25-28, and April 3-5. Other dates will be set as required. The venue was announced as Sophiasburgh Town Hall in Demorestville; however, attempts are being made to find a larger, more convenient location.

In addition to the hearing itself, approval documents show that there are some other items that must be completed before construction can begin. The Minister has required Gilead to complete an Alvar Management Plan for Ostrander Point with input from the public. In addition, Traffic Management Plans must be completed and filed with the municipality and a Community Liaison Committee established within three months of the approval.

PECFN continues to be confident of success and continues to actively fund raise to save Ostrander Point. Thank you.

www.SaveOstranderPoint.org

AN IDENTIFICATION CHALLENGE



Photo by Adam Penson
White-winged Crossbill



Photo by Kyle Blaney
Pine Grosbeak

Most field guides make no mention of just how similar male white-winged crossbills and male pine grosbeaks can appear. I must admit this similarity had never occurred to me either until the recent QFN trip to Algonquin Park. Probably we have all assumed that the size difference is so great that you are really unlikely to confuse the two species.

It's true that sitting side-by-side the two species would be noticeably different in size. Pine grosbeaks are close to robin-sized while white-winged crossbills are only a little bigger than song sparrows. Of course the problem is that the birds never sit quietly beside each other. From the park viewing deck it was surprisingly difficult to see any difference at all. The one crossbill refused to sit still and any time it was close to a grosbeak it seemed to have its wings extended as it either took off or prepared to land.

If you see the birds well the difference in the bills is obvious. The odd shape of the crossed bill of the crossbill allows it to pry open conifer cones and pick out the seeds with its tongue. The thick, conical bill of the grosbeak is used to crush seeds or fruit to get at the meat inside or to nip buds and new conifer needles.

If you can't get a good look at the bill what the bird is eating is a good clue to its identity. On the infrequent occasions when these two species occur in the Quinte area, birds in a mountain ash or ornamental crabapple tree are probably pine grosbeaks. Birds feeding on spruce or pine cones are almost definitely white-winged crossbills.

From the deck at Algonquin the easiest way to distinguish between the two species proved to be the white wing bars. Those on the crossbill were particularly obvious when the bird flew. The crossbill also has a dark line outlining its cheek which the grosbeak lacks.

Differentiating between the two species can be a challenge but it is not impossible. It just requires careful observation.