



# The Quinte Naturalist

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

## February



*Photo by Kyle Blaney*

***For Quinte area birders March is waterfowl month. Overwintering birds and returning migrants, all in immaculate new plumage, gather to fatten up in preparation for the busy season ahead.***

As one of our more extreme winters winds down I'm ready to look ahead. It's not that I haven't enjoyed the winter. As someone who spent his teenage years in Muskoka I want the winters I remember, over a foot of snow on the ground and temperatures consistently below freezing. Actually I remember four feet of snow and temperatures 20 degrees below freezing but Environment Canada seems to disagree. This winter has been maybe a little extreme but even Environment Canada admits that it has been very like the winters of my youth so I'm happy.

So it's time for a new season.

Besides our own experience there are a couple of good sources of information for our look ahead, a fairly recent book and eBird.

Two years ago Peterborough naturalist Drew Monkman published *Nature's Year: Changing Seasons in Central and Eastern Ontario*. After a short introduction he outlined what to expect every month. The book is a pretty accurate reminder of what to look for.

Even if you aren't entering records in eBird, and if you aren't why aren't you since it's easy and you can immediately call yourself a "citizen scientist", have a look at it. There have been enough entries for the County and for Hastings that the bar charts for the more common species now suggest when to look for returning birds. You can also just browse through the website and see where specific species have been found.

With these two sources and my own apparently faulty memory readily available I offer some suggestions on what to look for in March beginning on page 5.

## THIS MONTH'S SPEAKERS

**Matt Ellerbeck  
(The Salamander Man)**

### Save the Salamanders

Monday, February 24, 2014 – 7:00 p.m.



Matt first became fascinated with salamanders when he was very young. He now devotes himself full time to publicizing the need to conserve and protect these small animals. He speaks to classes of students of all ages and to interested audiences of any size. He gives radio, television and newspaper interviews which reach international audiences. He plans to bring guests to the Quinte Field Naturalist meeting, live salamanders.

*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

**Treasurer**

Doug Newfield  
613-477-3066

**Outings/Newsletter**

John Blaney - 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – March 10, 2014

Please send submissions to [john.blaney@sympatico.ca](mailto:john.blaney@sympatico.ca)

**Past President**

Wendy Turner

**Environmental Officer**

Denice Wilkins  
613-478-5070

**Recording Sect'y**

Bernadette Hymus  
613-962-7926

**Membership/Mailing**

Marjorie Fisher  
613-968-3277

**Corresponding Sect'y**

Elizabeth Churcher  
613-478-3205

**Refreshments**

Sharron Blaney  
613-962-9337

## CLUB NEWS



### **A LOOK at the BUDGET**

#### **Annual General Meeting**

Because our January meeting had to be cancelled the business part of our February meeting becomes our annual general meeting. It's your chance to ask questions about the budget and to vote on the budget, the executive for the next two years and any important issues which have arisen. Our nominating committee (i.e. Marjorie Fisher) has done an excellent job of compiling a full slate of candidates for this year's executive. Nominations from the floor are also possible. Don't be shy if you would like to join the executive. We are nothing if not flexible. Candidates are willing to take on different club responsibilities if there is a job you would like to try.

#### **Slate of Officers**

President – George Thomson  
Recording Secty. – Bernadette Hymus  
Treasurer – Doug Newfield  
Environmental Officer – Denice Wilkins

Vice-President – Phil Martin  
Corresponding Secty. – Elizabeth Churcher  
Membership/Mailing – Marjorie Fisher

#### **Membership**

It's time to renew your membership. There is no change in the fee this year. It's \$25 single and \$40 for a family. To help our treasurer keep accurate records please pay by cheque made out to "Quinte Field Naturalists." You can pay at the meeting or by mailing your cheque to Quinte Field Naturalists, Treasurer, 161 Thrasher Rd., RR #1, Plainfield, ON K0K 2V0. If you are joining for the first time include your mailing address and telephone number. We save money and labour by sending the newsletter by email so include your email address as well. We do not share these addresses with anyone.



#### **Treasure Table**

Don't forget items for our February Treasure Table. Please mark prices clearly on your donations. Bring treasures someone else might enjoy, - books, baking, crafts. (No yard sale rejects, please.) Money raised goes to club projects.



**See page 5 for Outings**

## Belleville Downtown DocFest

By Denice Wilkins

Once again this year QFN is sponsoring two environmental films at Belleville's International Documentary Film Festival happening Friday, February 28 – Sunday, March 2. This is a great way for us to get our message out in the community, attract potential new members and support a terrific volunteer initiated and run local event.

For the entire list of films on offer go to [downtowndocfest.ca](http://downtowndocfest.ca). You can pick a few films at \$10 each or get a pass to three days of films and special events for \$40. Below are the two films we have sponsored. Hope to see you there!

### REVOLUTION

*Friday, Feb. 28 at noon, Belleville Public Library*

**Change the world, go for it, take a stand and fight for something.**

Climate change, environmental degradation, species loss, ocean acidification, pollution, and food/water scarcity are reducing the earth's ability to house humans and we need to start doing something about it now! With vivid images of natural wonders such as coral reefs and a passionate narration conveying how urgent and dire our situation has become, *Revolution* is a provocative film that will inform and empower audiences to make a difference in our changing world.

### PEOPLE OF A FEATHER

*Saturday, March 1 12:30 pm Core Arts and Culture Centre*

For the Inuit of the Belcher Islands, survival during the harsh winter depends on the Eider duck – a species now suffering mass die-offs. Featuring striking footage from seven winters in the Arctic taking you through time – connecting past, present and future – unique cultural relationships are studied through recreations of traditional life juxtaposed with modern life in Sanikiluaq. The eyes of a remote subsistence culture challenge the world to find energy solutions that work with the seasons of our hydrological cycle.



## OUTINGS

### **Staturday, March 15. Waterfowl Weekend at Presqu'ile Provincial Park**

Presqu'ile's Waterfowl Weekend has been an annual tradition since 1977. But the waterfowl that are the stars of the event have been coming through Presqu'ile for much longer than that.

Presqu'ile Bay is a major stopping area for waterfowl as they make their way north in the spring. Spring for waterfowl starts as soon as the ice starts leaving the bay. The ducks congregate along the retreating ice edge, diving under the ice to find areas of newly exposed food. Numbers can reach 20,000 birds on some days and twenty different species seen on one day is not an unusual occurrence.

The Nature Centre and Lighthouse Centre, featuring “ducky” displays and children’s activities are open 10am to 4pm. The Friends of Presqu'ile will also be there with a BBQ starting at 11am, and the Gift Store will be open.

**Meet beside the playground in Zwicks Park at 9 a.m. If you prefer you could also meet us at the entrance to Presqu'ile. We should arrive there between 9:30 and 9:45. The entry fee is \$10.**



*Photo by David Bree*

A fairly typical scene on Waterfowl Weekend. I could find 4 species. Can you add to that?

## LOOKING AHEAD TO MARCH

### Birds

Waterfowl are not the only birds to start appearing in numbers in March. Many robins overwintered this year so it's hard to tell whether the birds in town scouting for nesting sites are migrants or simply locals who spent the winter in more protected areas. At our feeders the true harbinger of spring is the common grackle. It's too bad that its aggressive behaviour usually makes it an unwelcome visitor. I prefer the song sparrow with its cheery serenade.

In the marshes male red-winged blackbirds will loudly proclaim their sovereignty over their chosen sites, awaiting the females who arrive a couple of weeks later. Even before the ice is melted Canada geese will engage in noisy squabbles in the same areas. As ice does start to melt watch for pintails, mallards and wood ducks in large puddles in farmers' fields.

Overhead you may see soaring pairs of red-tailed hawks or the year's first turkey vultures. Alerted by their loud bugling calls you may also see sandhill cranes either flying by or performing their elaborate courtship dances in local fields. These large birds are sometimes mistaken for great blue herons although they are not that closely related.



*Photo by Kyle Blaney*



*Photo by Ian Dickinson*

Surprisingly toward the end of the month the first insect eaters often appear. Open water at the mouth of Moira or elsewhere will attract any tree swallows trying to beat the rush for nesting cavities. Eastern phoebes like the one to the left are the first of the flycatchers to return. They have adapted well to human habitations and frequently nest under bridges or the eaves of rural buildings. Note the all black bill and the lack of obvious wing bars. These two features distinguish the phoebe from the Eastern wood-pewee which will arrive later in the season.

### Insects

Monkman points out that the insects these insectivorous birds are consuming are most likely midges. These tiny insects look very like mosquitos but they don't bite. That does not mean that they are not annoying. Most midge species live as larva in the mud at the bottom of rivers, lakes, and ponds. After they transform into pupa they rise to the surface, emerge from the pupal case

and fly into the air. Males waiting for females form clouds which are so dense that they look like smoke. They are weak fliers so breezes cause them to light on any available surface such as walls or cars where their numbers may cause significant stains. The swarms can also make outdoor activities unpleasant if you get caught in one.



Their numbers do make midges extremely important in food chains particularly in the early spring and late fall.

Some species fly in temperatures only slightly above freezing. The presence of some species is also indicative of a healthy ecosystem.

From the human point of view a mourning cloak butterfly is likely to be a more welcome sight. These butterflies have an antifreeze protein in their cells which enables them to overwinter as adults. Look for them in a sugar bush. Look for them feeding on sap dripping from trees along with other early emerging insects such as some bees, moths and ladybugs.

## Plants

By late March the buds of pussy willows are signaling the arrival of spring. Buds on many trees and shrubs including aspens, sugar, silver and red maples are swelling. One of my favourites is the leaf bud of the shagbark hickory shown on the right. If you didn't look closely you might mistake it for some exotic flower rather than emerging leaves.



By the end of the month skunk cabbage should be appearing through the snow. Monkman describes this plant as rare in eastern Ontario but it flourishes right beside East Hungerford Road in the Stoco Fen near Tweed. The plant generates its own heat so you will notice that it has melted the snow around it. The speckled outer shell is called the spathe. The flowers are small yellow blossoms on the spadix seen inside the spathe. Later in the season the spathe will wither. The spadix will become a purple seed head surrounded by large leaves which may be as much as 55 cm. long and 40 cm. wide. Another unique feature of the skunk cabbage is its contractile roots. As the roots contract they pull the stem a little further into the mud each year so that after a few years it becomes almost impossible to dig the plant up.



Watch for coltsfoot flowers beside rural roads. From a distance they look like dandelions but they are actually a member of the aster family. Like dandelions coltsfoot is not a native plant and it tends to be invasive but many people see it as a bright spot on a dreary March day.

In his book Monkman also looks ahead at mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians and even the weather and the night sky in March. The message is clear. There's always something to see.

## NATURALIST'S CALENDAR

### **Tuesday, February 25. Prince Edward County Field Naturalists**

Kari Gunson – “The Road Ecology Group”

Kari will speak on the work of the Ontario Road Ecology Group which is a network of government and non-government scientists studying, publicizing and working to mitigate the effects of roads on the natural environment.

7:00 p.m. Bloomfield Town Hall

### **Thursday, February 27. Hastings Stewardship Council**

Don McCabe, VP of OFA – Sustainable Farming

Don is a corn, soybean and wheat producer in Lambton County. He is also president of the Soil Conservation Council of Canada.

7:00 p.m. Gerry Masterson – Thurlow Community Centre, 516 Harmony Rd.

### **Friday, February 28 – Sunday, March 2. Belleville Downtown DocFest**

QFN is sponsoring two films. For details see Denice's article on page 4. You can find full details about DocFest on the website <http://downtowndocfest.ca/>.

### **Monday, March 3 - Quinte Conservation**

Community Wildlife Monitoring Information Night

Frogs and birds tell us a lot about the health of our ecological system. Terry Sprague will explain how you can help to maintain the health of the Bay of Quinte. There are two programs you can join. Frogwatch Ontario is great for families. The Marsh Monitoring Program is more structured and involves both birds and frogs.

7:00 p.m. Quinte Conservation office. Old Highway 2 at the corner with Wallbridge-Loyalist Rd.

### **Tuesday, March 4. Trees Ontario**

Forest Management Workshop for Landowners

6:30 p.m. Farmtown Park (Hastings County Museum of Agricultural Heritage), 437 West Front St., Stirling. Please register through the website <http://hastingsstewardship.ca/coming-events/>

### **Saturday, March 15. Presqu'ile Provincial Park**

Waterfowl Weekend. This month's QFN outing is on Saturday, March 15. See page 5 for details. For more information about Waterfowl Weekend itself see the Friends of Presqu'ile website

<http://www.friendsofpresquile.on.ca/>.

### **Monday, March 24. Quinte Field Naturalists**

Our regular March meeting. Dr. Irwin Brodo will speak on the lichens of Ontario.



*Photo by Derek Dafoe*

*The loud call of the northern flicker lets us know it has returned*

Jan 20/14

**QUINTE FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION**

OPENING BALANCE: \$2,084.60 \$2,084.60 \$3,521.27

Budget 2013 Actual 2013 Budget 2014

**Revenue**

|                       |                   |                   |                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Annual Dinner         | \$1,000.00        | 1,450.00          | \$1,125.00        |
| Baillie Birdathon     | 110.00            | 159.25            | 160.00            |
| Bank Interest         | 0.20              | 0.33              | 0.25              |
| Coffee/ Tea Fund      | 75.00             | 115.10            | 100.00            |
| Donation Box          | 75.00             | 208.00            | 75.00             |
| Stewardship Council   | 0.00              | 800.00            | 0.00              |
| Membership Fees       | 1100.00           | 1,065.00          | 1000.00           |
| Treasure Table        | 200.00            | 257.45            | 200.00            |
| Turtle ICU'S sold     |                   | 60.00             |                   |
| <b>Total Revenue:</b> | <b>\$2,560.20</b> | <b>\$4,115.13</b> | <b>\$2,660.25</b> |

**Expenses**

|   |                   |                   |                 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Annual Dinner                           | \$600.00          | \$912.95          | 720.00          |
| Bird Studies Canada                     | 0.00              | 0.00              | 0.00            |
| Insurance (Liability and D&O)           | 570.00            | 523.80            | 570.00          |
| ON Membership                           | 75.00             | 75.00             | 75.00           |
| Hall Rental                             | 400.00            | 400.00            | 400.00          |
| Newsletter Duplicating                  | 65.00             | 0.00              | 65.00           |
| Newsletter Mailing                      | 50.00             | 24.90             | 50.00           |
| Trifold Duplicating                     | 60.00             | 41.81             | 60.00           |
| Awards                                  | 0.00              | 0.00              | 0.00            |
| Speakers                                | 400.00            | 350.00            | 400.00          |
| Speakers Expenses                       |                   |                   | 125.00          |
| Ontario Nature Youth Conference         | 300.00            | 0.00              | 0.00            |
| Association Membership in HPLT          | 50.00             | 50.00             | 50.00           |
| Donation to Ostrander Point Appeal Fund | 200.00            | 200.00            | 200.00          |
| Documentary Film Festival               | 100.00            | 100.00            | 100.00          |
| Miscellaneous                           | 0.00              | 0.00              | 100.00          |
| <b>Total Expenses:</b>                  | <b>\$2,870.00</b> | <b>\$2,678.46</b> | <b>2,915.00</b> |

**Total Revenue minus Expenses: -\$309.80 \$1,436.67 -\$254.75**

CLOSING BALANCE: \$1,774.80 \$3,521.27 \$3,266.52

QFN TREASURER: Doug Newfield

## Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

*To save trees and money we distribute our newsletter by email where possible.  
We do not share your email address with any individual or organization.*

### Membership Category

**Please pay by cheque. It makes life much easier for our treasurer.**

- Single (\$25.00)
- Family (\$40.00)
- Organization/Corporation (\$50.00)

Please note: Memberships run from January to January.

### Membership Information

You can join the Quinte Field Naturalists by submitting the completed application form with a cheque made out to the Quinte Field Naturalists at a monthly meeting or by mailing the cheque and form to:

Quinte Field Naturalists  
Treasurer,  
161 Thrasher Rd.,  
RR #1,  
Plainfield, ON K0K 2V0.