



The Quinte Naturalist

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

January



The Quinte region has had several noteworthy avian visitors this winter. One of the many snowy owls found this year is pictured on page 5. The great gray owl on the left is the only one found locally. It spent some time just outside Wellington.

Great grays appear massive. They are large birds but they are about 15% smaller than great horned owls. If food is available in the boreal forest where they nest they will spend the winter there rather than moving south. Much of their apparent mass is made up of plumage designed to protect them from the bitter cold. People sometimes mistake a barred owl for a great gray but if you know what to look for the difference is fairly obvious. Barred owls are mainly brown while great grays are, of course, gray. Note the yellow eyes and the white bow tie on the bird in the picture. Barred owl eyes are jet black and the bird wears no formal attire.

Photo by Kyle Blaney



The Harris's sparrow shown here is far rarer than either of the two owl visitors. It appeared at a feeder near East Lake over the holidays. Normally this bird nests northwest of Hudson Bay and winters around Texas. According to *Birds of the Kingston Region* there have been only three confirmed sightings of this species since 1966.

Photo by Jeff Hafner

THIS MONTH'S SPEAKERS

George Thomson and Elizabeth Churcher

Gardening with Nature

Monday, January 27, 2014 – 7:00 p.m.



This month our speakers really do need no introduction. George and Elizabeth, as nature and wildlife lovers, will explain the strategies they use to support nature while living sustainably from the crops they grow.

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 – February 10, 2014

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OTHER NEWS FOR NATURALISTS



Annual General Meeting

The business part of our January meeting is always our annual general meeting. It's a chance to ask questions about and vote on the budget attached to this newsletter. 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. We offer internships. Unpaid, of course.

Other Opportunities to Volunteer

If you would like to be more involved in the club but don't feel ready to join the executive there are many other ways to help – lead a field trip to an area that you particularly like, write an article or submit a picture for the newsletter, find a stimulating speaker for a meeting, help publicize our activities and projects, represent the club at an event by helping to staff a display. Write a letter about an important local, provincial, or national environmental issue. You're a member because you enjoy nature. Help to preserve what you love and explain its importance to others.



Remember

February is Treasure Table Month. Look around and find some items that you are ready to part with but that others might enjoy. Donate homemade preserves, baking, crafts, etc. Put price stickers on the items and bring them to the February meeting. It's a fund-raiser for our club.

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.



CLUB NEWS

Hastings Stewardship Council Winter Speaker Series



The Hastings Stewardship Council is a local, volunteer organization made up of mainly rural land owners. They promote cooperation among different land user groups and good land stewardship. Their work includes workshops such as the annual Trenton Woodlot Conference and the Winter Speaker Series. Dr. Linda Rutledge's presentation on the eastern wolf was part of that series as are the two February speakers mentioned below. Two March presentations will be listed in the February edition of *The Quinte Naturalist*.

Local naturalists, particularly visitors to the Frink Centre and the Quinte Field Naturalists, have benefitted from the funding which the council provides for public education. On the trails at the Frink you will see signs financed by the council identifying tree species. A donation from the council allowed us to sponsor a student for Ontario Nature's Youth Summit a couple of years ago. This year they are financing our printing of a bird checklist for the Frink Centre and turtle ICUs.

The series is held at the Masterson Thurlow Community Centre on Harmony Rd. Events are free, but donations are gladly accepted. Refreshments will be served.

Feb. 13 - Emily Conger, President of A2A (Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaboration) and Leora Berman, Corporate Founder and CEO of The Land Between, will be talking about the Biodiversity Project.

Feb. 27 - Don McCabe, VP of the OFA (Ontario Federation of Agriculture) will be talking about OFA environmental concerns and the stewardship of soils. This presentation is in collaboration with our local chapter of the OFA, the Hastings Federation of Agriculture.

Presqu'ile Events



Feb. 15 – Winter Soup Hike, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. – Travel through the snow-covered park to discover life during the “dead” of winter. See Presqu'ile's active ice volcanoes (weather permitting). Enjoy bird watching, tracking, plant and fungus life, marine activity on Lake Ontario. Finish off with a slide show and a hot bowl of soup or hot chocolate. Space Limited, Registration Required.\$5.00 per person or \$8.00 per family, includes park admission.
Call (613) 475-1688 extension #2 to register.



New York, N.Y. and Ithaca, N.Y. – From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, bird watchers from more than 100 countries are expected to participate in the 17th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), February 14-17. Anyone anywhere in the world can count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at www.BirdCount.org. The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps keep track of the health of bird populations at a scale that would otherwise not be possible. The GBBC is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology <http://www.birds.cornell.edu> and the National Audubon Society www.audubon.org with partner Bird Studies Canada <http://www.birdscanada.org/>.



“People who care about birds can change the world,” said Audubon chief scientist Gary Langham. “Technology has made it possible for people everywhere to unite around a shared love of birds and a commitment to protecting them.”

In North America, GBBC participants will add their data to help define the magnitude of a dramatic irruption of magnificent Snowy Owls. Bird watchers will also be on the lookout for the invasive Eurasian Collared-Dove to see if it has expanded its range again. GBBC observations will help show whether or not numbers of American crows will continue to rebound after being hit hard by the West Nile virus and whether more insect-eating species are showing up in new areas, possibly because of changing climate.

Photo by Tom Wheatley

This owl didn’t appear in my backyard but it was in somebody’s. Tom Wheatley and I found this guy in a small field beside a house on Huycks Point Road in the County. Actually this “guy” may very well be a girl. Adult male snowy owls have very little and sometimes none of the black barring you see here. Females and first year males have more black. Whichever it is the bird was an excellent example of camouflage. Despite the fact that it was fairly close to the road I had trouble finding it even after Tom pointed it out.

Last year's Great Backyard Bird Count shattered records after going global for the first time, thanks to integration with the eBird online checklist program launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab and Audubon. Participants reported their bird sightings from all 7 continents, including 111 countries and independent territories. More than 34.5 million birds and 3,610 species were recorded – nearly one-third of the world's total bird species documented in just four days.

“This is a milestone for citizen science in so many respects – number of species, diversity of countries involved, total participants, and number of individual birds recorded. We hope this is just the start of something far larger, engaging the whole world in creating a detailed annual snapshot of how all our planet's birds are faring as the years go by,” said Cornell Lab director Dr. John Fitzpatrick.

“Canadian participation in the Great Backyard Bird Count has increased tremendously in recent years, and it's wonderful to see the program growing locally,” said Bird Studies Canada President Dr. George Finney. “The count is introducing unprecedented numbers of people to the exciting field of bird watching.”

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with nature and make a difference for birds. It's free and easy. To learn more about how to join the count visit www.birdcount.org and view the winning photos from the 2013 GBBC photo contest.

If, like me, you grew up in “the olden days” and have pterodactyls on your birding life list you have constant struggles with your computer and take hours to learn what the young seem to know instinctively. Take heart. Unfamiliar technology causes problems for people of all ages.

The following story appeared in *The Globe and Mail* last Wednesday

Clutch Decision *A trio of thieves in Springfield, Mass., jumped a food delivery driver last week, pulling a knife and demanding the cuisine and the keys to his car. Easy peasy, right? Free grub and a car to go. Wrong. Turns out the car had a manual transmission – and none of the three stooges knew how to drive stick. The bad boys argued among themselves, The Associated Press reports, and then fled on foot with the food.*

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the GBBC. You can count for longer if you wish. Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like. Submit a separate checklist for each new day, for each location, or for the same location if you counted at a different time of day. If you aren't sure what species a particular bird belongs to just don't report it. Counts of common birds are important in case they become uncommon in the future or they are in danger of becoming nuisances. I report lowly pigeons, starlings and even mute swans.

All data is submitted online. You will need either a GBBC account or an eBird account. It's easy but don't worry if you don't know how to do this. Help is available. The GBBC is a great activity to do with your kids or grandkids so why not involve them in this aspect of the project as well? I have spent the hours mentioned in the sidebar above learning how to do these things so I can help also. Just like the doctor in those “olden days” I will make house calls.

12th ANNUAL BELLEVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – DEC.27, 2013

Wrong again! Because of weather conditions I predicted a poor Christmas Bird Count this winter. After the results came in it was clear that our twelfth annual count was one of the best. Counters found 7728 birds of 53 species compared to medians of 6900 birds of 48 species for the previous 11 counts on count day. Count week includes 3 days before and after count day and during that period counters reported 3 more species to bring our count week total to 56 species.

Bald eagles are still hard to find but for the first time we had 2. There were significant increases over previous records for mallards (688 compared to 536) and purple finches (46 compared to 3). Yellow-bellied sapsucker and Carolina wren were both new species for the count period. The negative feature in every count is the high numbers of three introduced species, rock pigeon, European starling and house sparrow. This year was no exception as they accounted for 38% of the total.

There are many reasons for this success. We had more areas covered by expert counters familiar with the Quinte area than usual. The extensive ice cover on the bay and the river which I had expected to result in low waterfowl counts in fact served to concentrate the waterfowl which did remain in open water visible to counters. A good berry crop convinced many robins, waxwings and yellow-rumped warblers to stick around to be counted. The weather on count day was pleasant so counters could see birds clearly. Of course the main reason for the success was the hard work and careful record-keeping of our 20 counters and 5 feeder watchers. Thanks to all.

cw – count week

45 Canada Goose	1257 Rock Pigeon	13 Golden-crowned Kinglet
7 Mute Swan	828 Mourning Dove	10 Eastern Bluebird
3 American Black Duck	cw Great Horned Owl	676 American Robin
688 Mallard	1 Belted Kingfisher	1625 European Starling
28 Common Goldeneye	3 Red-bellied Woodpecker	918 Cedar Waxwing
3 Hooded Merganser	1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	7 Yellow-rumped Warbler
5 Common Merganser	20 Downy Woodpecker	107 American Tree Sparrow
1 Red-breasted Merganser	12 Hairy Woodpecker	4 Song Sparrow
2 Ruffed Grouse	9 Northern Flicker	1 Swamp Sparrow
54 Wild Turkey	2 Pileated Woodpecker	3 White-throated Sparrow
2 Bald Eagle	3 Northern Shrike	189 Dark-eyed Junco
6 Sharp-shinned Hawk	267 Blue Jay	1 Snow Bunting
7 Cooper's Hawk	96 American Crow	34 Northern Cardinal
50 Red-tailed Hawk	4 Common Raven	46 Purple Finch
1 Rough-legged Hawk	327 Black-capped Chickadee	68 House Finch
2 American Kestrel	cw Red-breasted Nuthatch	1 Pine Siskin
1 Merlin	32 White-breasted Nuthatch	121 American Goldfinch
2 Ring-billed Gull	3 Brown Creeper	100 House Sparrow
6 Herring Gull	cw Carolina Wren	

Christmas Bird Count, continued

The record number of purple finches this year was a very impressive increase over our previous record. One of the challenges for birders, even those with some experience, is distinguishing between male purple finches and house finches. How do you know which species you are seeing?



The colour varies so it's not a reliable way to tell the two species apart. It's the amount of colour which is the determining factor. The house finch in the bottom picture lacks the red colour on the nape of the neck and the scapulars (shoulder area). The purple finch above also has a reddish wash on the back which the house finch lacks. Note also the bold stripes on the belly of the house finch. The purple finch lacks these marks.



The picture below shows the site which provided most of the record mallard count. Knowledge of such "hot spots" leads to good and more accurate CBCs. At the foot of Foster Avenue there is a parking lot which provides access to the Waterfront Trail. A small creek or storm drain empties into the bay here. Possibly because of the salt and pollution content of the water there is an open patch. Mallards gather there because every winter a gentleman spreads cracked corn. His patrons number in the hundreds. I took the picture to the left in mid-January but in December the open area was larger. Ducks were still tightly packed. Just before the CBC Tom Wheatley took a picture of the ducks and counted every one. The total was 498. I told you that our counters worked hard.



Ostrander Update

Last week saw the Environmental Review Tribunal's decision to disallow wind turbines at Ostrander Point in court. Lawyers for Gilead Power and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment argued against last year's decision by an Environmental Review Tribunal that wind turbines could not be erected at Ostrander Point. Cheryl Anderson has reported that 40 to 50 people were on hand in support of the Prince Edward County Field Naturalists and the South Shore Conservancy. Now we await the court decision.