



The Quinte Naturalist

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

November



Project Feederwatch has started. Read the article beginning on Page 2 if you want to know where you can watch these feeders.



Monday, Nov. 28 - Saving Grassland Birds Kurt Hennige, President of the L&A Stewardship Council, will review his research on local nesting Bobolinks and Meadowlarks and outline the land management strategies that will help save these threatened species.

January – Tom Mason – Spiders of Ontario

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH

For information on the best types of feeders and seed to offer you click on [“feeding birds and creating a safe feeding environment.”](#) For information on what you might expect to see at your feeders this winter go to Terry Sprague’s website (<http://naturestuff.net/site/>) and follow the links under “Birding.”

Our own feeders have been set up for several days to establish a regular clientele. Our first days to record birds were Nov. 15 and 16. They happened to hit what was, for us, a particularly good day on the 16th. We had 11 species with highlights of red-breasted nuthatch, red-winged black bird and a female purple finch. In addition to the usual herd of mourning doves it looks as though it’s going to be a good year for house finches and dark-eyed juncos at the Blaney feeders. Last Monday, the season’s first day with snow covering the ground, we had over 30 juncos.



Project FeederWatch Ice Sculpture

Black-capped chickadees are also annual visitors at our feeders. In fact chickadees are



Every year there is a weekly photo contest associated with Project FeederWatch. This photo of a house finch by Janet Lewis of East Grand Rapids, Michigan was the grand prize winner in the People’s Choice category.

the most common birds reported in northeastern North America where they appeared at 97% of the 6498 sites reporting. Dark-eyed juncos at 94% of these sites were almost as ubiquitous. Why bother reporting common birds if almost everyone has them anyway? Bird populations change. We don’t want to repeat the British experience.

Between 1962 and 1974 volunteers in Britain were told not to bother reporting house sparrows because there were so many of them. Since then house sparrows have declined drastically in numbers. Research into causes is hampered by the lack of data about the actual extent of the

decline. One British biologist summed up the situation. *“What fools we were... It is these common and widespread species that are perhaps the best barometers of the health of our own environment, as we, too, are a very common and widespread species.”*

The article below describes an example of research based on FeederWatch records. It's a satisfying feeling to be able to contribute to a better understanding of nature. You don't even have to leave the house.

Oh, yes, the feeders shown on page 1. They belong to Tammie and Ben Haché of Manitouwadge, north of Lake Superior. You aren't likely to have pine grosbeaks at your feeder this year but you can see them and other northern birds through Ben and Tammie's feedercam - http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/38/Ontario_FeederWatch/. A warning, it's addictive.



PINE SISKINS



Photo by Tony deGroot

Pine siskins are unprepossessing little birds. Often mistaken for sparrows they are part of that collection of similar-looking species known to many birders as “little brown jobs.” Look at them a little more closely. Despite their brown streaks, their size, shape and slender bill betray their close relationship to goldfinches rather than sparrows. They even share a bit of yellow. Males have a yellow wingbar and the flight feathers of both sexes have yellow edges.

Siskins are also typical of the boreal seed-eating birds which occasionally visit our area in large numbers during the winter. For many years biologists have assumed that these mass migrations or irruptions are a result of food shortage in the north. A recent study using Project Feederwatch data suggests that the answer is more complicated than previously imagined.



Photo by Gilles Bisson

Like the pine grosbeaks seen on page 1 common redpolls belong to another branch of the finch family. They are all boreal seed-eating birds noted for their occasional irruptions.

The researchers analysed more than two million pine siskin observations by feeder watchers. They carefully noted where pine siskins were or were not reported in every year from 1989 to 2012. Using complex mathematical calculations they correlated their findings with climate variability and came to a number of conclusions.

Siskins nesting in the boreal forest tended to move in an east-west direction while those nesting further south in the mixed forest area like Hastings County tended to move in a north-south direction. Furthermore these

two migrations did not necessarily occur in the same years.

Pine siskins are very resistant to cold so harsh winters did not induce boreal birds to move if the seed crop met their needs. Surprisingly birds in the less harsh mixed forest regions were sometimes influenced to move by unusually cold weather. As would be expected both groups of siskins left regions with low seed production but they did not wander aimlessly in search of food all winter. They moved in their preferred direction until they found an area with enough food to sustain them through the winter and they stayed there.

What is the significance of this study? The authors believe that for the first time they have shown that irruptions of boreal seed-eating birds like pine siskins are driven by climate variability on a continental scale. The study provides proof of a process that had been assumed by scientists but was vulnerable to attack because it was merely an assumption. It strengthens the case that we must deal with climate change on an international level. The study could only have been done using data collected on a continental scale through a citizen science program like FeederWatch.

A WALK IN LATE NOVEMBER

**Photo and Story by Elizabeth Churcher and George Thomson
First Published in the Tweed News, December 2, 2015**

Shopping, a whirlwind of people scrambling to and fro trying to get the best deals, is not exactly what either of us enjoy. While we attempt to minimize our adventures in the commercial realm, we can't avoid them entirely. At this time of year, we find ourselves racing from store to store to obtain those anticipated items that will fill gift bags for friends and family. After an exhausting day in the city, we have discovered the perfect solution. A long walk in a natural setting relaxes our muscles and refreshes us. It erases the hustle and bustle and connects our minds with the natural world around us --- with the little things and events that we often wouldn't think about or even notice.

During the crisp afternoon of November 22nd when there was a light dusting of snow on the ground, we decided that it was time to take a break. After arriving at Vanderwater Conservation Area, we meandered along the paved road to its end, stopping often to take a closer look. What was that plant with a white tuft of hairs at the top and crumpled, frost-killed leaves that we kept seeing along the roadside? It looked vaguely familiar, as though we should have known the answer. --- But change had occurred and left us with uncertainty. As plants change with the seasons, we have to observe more closely. The flowers had turned into fruits that were filled with seeds, each of which was equipped with a long, white hair. A more thorough search revealed a thimble-shaped fruit and opposite, lobed leaves. It was Canada Anemone, a member of the Buttercup family, which we are more accustomed to seeing in the flowering stage. Each time we identify a specimen in our natural world, we get a little thrill of satisfaction, a tiny boost. Added together, these perks are just what we need to confront life's challenges!

As we strolled along, appreciating as many details as our senses could capture, we acknowledged how the natural world was slowing us down, helping us relax and causing us to think more deeply. Surrounded by its richness, nature was permeating our very being, opening us up to more and more of the sights and sounds around us. We glanced up to take in the beautiful lichen patterns etched along tree branches and then down to see more lichen artistry on the rocks at our feet. To our left, evergreen ferns decorated the forest floor in front of fallen logs that were carpeted thickly in moss. In all directions, the prominent Marginal Wood Fern displayed its beautiful green leaves, camouflaging the fact that it was late November. Our fascination with our immediate surroundings was interrupted by the more distant sound of footsteps on dry leaves. We picked up our pace as we moved to the edge of the road and then peered into the woods. Now in closer proximity, we recognized the clucking and the loud whirr of wings as the sounds produced by a Ruffed Grouse. While we were unable to see this bird, perhaps because it detected

our presence and moved further into the forest, it had taken us to another location where we could stop and look.

It was not long before we found ourselves praising the grouse for helping us to refocus our observations. We stood in one spot for a few moments, feasting our eyes on all that they could take in. At our feet was a bed of fallen leaves that assisted us in identifying a number of tree species. There were Red Oak, Big-toothed Aspen, Slippery Elm, American Beech, Black Maple and several others. After internalizing the leaves' generous clues, we were able to look up and reinforce our knowledge of tree characteristics. The deep ridges in the bark of the Red Oak, the yellowish bark of the Yellow Birch and the shaggy, curling bark of the Hop-hornbeam or Ironwood were all more deeply engraved in our memories. Seeing things over and over helps us to learn and understand nature more deeply. We are rewarded with satisfaction and calmness!

A little further down the trail, we paused to watch a small flock of White-breasted Nuthatches working at the bark of trees to recover a dinner of small dormant insects and insect eggs. Actually, it was the "yank, yank" chatter of these birds that initially attracted our attention. Soon, we were distracted by another sound which was moving closer and closer. After our detection of the guttural, croaking caw of the Raven, it seemed like only



moments before this curious bird had flown in to inspect us! --- And then came the scolding tones of a Red Squirrel who was peering down at us from a branch high up in a Red Pine tree. We knew that we were surrounded by friends!

The trail that veered to the left seemed inviting, so we changed our course and started down a path that would eventually take us to Moneymore Road.

It was not long before we had another joyous meeting. Once again, we heard the crunching of dry leaves and turned around to see a Porcupine shuffling along, backlit by the lowering sun. Sensing our presence, he made a detour through the woods, perhaps grumbling all the way about the people who had blocked his pathway. None-the-less, he was stored in our memory as a part of nature's intrigue and beauty.

Watching the sun fade in the sky and remembering that the walk out was as long as the trek to our current location, we turned reluctantly to retrace our footsteps. Even in the dimming light, there was more to see, to feel and to hear --- more to refresh our beings. We reached our car at the end of day, relaxed in body, mind and soul. Our late November walk had renewed us!

CLUB NEWS

Christmas Bird Count (CBC) – Like Project FeederWatch the CBC is a chance for amateurs to contribute data to research projects while enjoying themselves. Teams of birders cover as much as possible within a 24 kilometre circle and count all the birds they see in a single day. It's North America's longest running citizen science project. Beginning in 1900 with 27 counts it has expanded until last year thousands of volunteers conducted 2505 counts in centres from Arctic Bay in the high Arctic to Recife in Brazil. Our count will be held on **Tuesday, Dec. 27**. There are still a few spots available on our count teams so contact John Blaney if you are interested in participating. sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com.

Outing – The Canadian Geographic has announced that their choice for Canada's national bird is the gray jay. I think it's a great choice. These jays are hardy birds which refuse to migrate and begin nesting in the snow in February. Some people have complained that many Canadians have never seen gray jays. They aren't shy birds. In fact they will eat out of your hand so let's go find some. On **Saturday, Jan. 21 at 8 a.m.**, weather permitting, we will meet in the Lowe's parking lot on Millennium Dr. and head north to Algonquin Park. You can bring a lunch or eat at the restaurant in the Visitor Centre. More details will follow in an email closer to the event.



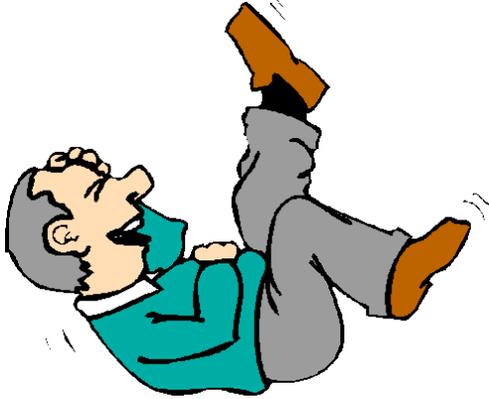
Photo Courtesy Ontario Parks

QFN has expressed concern about the Wetland Conservation Strategy for Ontario in a letter to Minister McGarry. While we fully support Premier Kathleen Wynne's pledge to reverse wetland loss in our province by 2025, we do not believe that the proposed Wetland Conservation Strategy with its weak overall targets, loose commitments and failure to earmark areas for government investment will serve to achieve this objective. Go to the QFN website to review the letter that was submitted to Minister McGarry.

Frink Centre. With assistance from County Farm Supply in Foxboro, Picton and Madoc QFN is providing seed and helping to maintain the feeders at the Frink Centre this winter. During the week staff from the Education Centre maintain the feeders but on weekends and over the Christmas holidays volunteers from QFN fill the feeders. If you would like to help please contact John Blaney.

Please "Like" QFN on Facebook

And visit Terry's website for all the latest news on nature
in the Quinte Area - naturestuff.net



Researchers for the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority found over 200 dead crows near greater Boston recently, and there was concern that they may have died from Avian Flu. A Bird Pathologist examined the remains of all the crows, and, to everyone's relief, confirmed the problem was definitely NOT Avian Flu. The cause of death appeared to be vehicular impacts.

However, during the detailed analysis it was noted that varying colors of paints appeared on the bird's beaks and claws. By analyzing these paint residues it was determined that 98% of the crows had been killed by impact with trucks, while only 2% were killed by an impact with a car.

MTA then hired an Ornithological Behaviorist to determine if there was a cause for the disproportionate percentages of truck kills versus car kills. The Ornithological Behaviorist very quickly concluded the cause. When crows eat road kill, they always have a look-out crow in a nearby tree to warn of impending danger.

The conclusion was that while all the lookout crows could say "Cah," none could say "Truck."

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an 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, 2017