



# The Quinte Naturalist

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

## OCTOBER

### EVENING GROSBEAKS



*Photo by Terry Sprague*

Where are the evening grosbeaks? For me the best winters include large flocks of colourful, noisy grosbeaks feasting on the seeds of Manitoba maples and devouring as many sunflower seeds as you care to put in your feeders. These images are an artifact of my teenage years in Muskoka reinforced by the large flocks which would invade Belleville in the 1970s. In fact these winter invasions may have been just a blip in the history of the species.

(See page 2 for this month's outing and more on grosbeaks.)

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**Oct. 27 Speaker – Drew Monkman, Climate Change in Central Ontario**

**7:00 pm – Sills Auditorium, Bridge St. United Church**

*New Member*

*Welcome to Roseanne Duke*

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In the early 1800s evening grosbeaks were found only in the west, particularly the Rocky Mountain region. Small numbers were reported to the east and by 1854 one was seen in Toronto. Toward the end of the century, possibly following their favourite winter food, the Manitoba maples which were being planted in eastern North America, they expanded their range in much larger numbers. By the 1960s winter populations were found as far east as the Atlantic coast and as far south as Alabama and Georgia.

Christmas Bird Count data offers some clues about the disappearance of these engaging birds from our feeders. Their numbers were increasing or stable until about 1980. Since that date there has been a significant and increasingly rapid decline in the number of grosbeaks reported particularly in the northeast and Great Lakes areas. The population does seem stable in the Rocky Mountain region. What is happening?

One possibility is that there is no significant decline at all. Because of global warming they could be staying farther north because their winter food is more readily available. Or the eastern decline may simply mean that there are fewer grosbeaks nesting north of us to make the trip south to our area. Grosbeaks feed their young spruce budworm larva and with the end of the serious budworm outbreak in the northeast the birds may have decided to nest elsewhere. Perhaps the expansion of their range was an anomaly resulting from some condition we don't totally understand. In that case the species could simply be retreating to its historic range in the Rocky Mountain region. We do know that the population is still considered abundant and widespread enough that the species is not currently at risk. Nature is complicated and always changing. We have to get used to it. Still, I miss them.

**OUTING – Sunday, Nov. 9 – Presqu'ile Provincial Park**

*The outing is Sunday because Saturday hunting closes part of the park.*

Take advantage of free entry to the park and join us to find some of the late fall migrants and early winter residents. Entry to the park is free because of Christmas at Presqu'ile, a large juried craft show (see the Naturalist's Calendar). Spend the money you save on the park entry fee (\$10.75) at the craft sale to support the projects of the Friends of Presqu'ile. Bring a lunch if you want to accompany us to Tremur Lake north of Trenton in the afternoon and perhaps one or two other local hotspots.

**Meet behind the Shell station at the Quinte Mall at 8:00 a.m. or at the park entrance at 8:45 a.m.**

# NEWS

## TURTLE ICUs

Please let Denice ([denicejohn@live.ca](mailto:denicejohn@live.ca)) or John ([sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com](mailto:sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com)) know how successful the turtle ICUs were. Did people use them? Did they protect the eggs? Did the eggs hatch?

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



Our Christmas Bird Count is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 27. You don't have to be a real expert, just interested in learning about our winter birds and willing to do some walking. Please let me know if you are interested. A "maybe" answer is fine. It looks as though we are going to be short of counters so I am open to changing the date if that means more counters will be available.

## PROJECT FEEDERWATCH



Why not join other QFN members and report the birds you see at your feeders? Project FeederWatch begins on Nov. 8. Details are in The Naturalists Calendar (page 7) under that date.

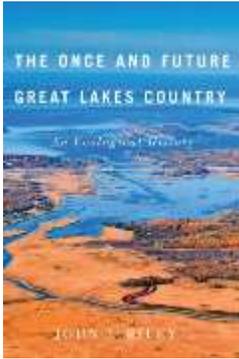
## WEBCAM

You can also watch feeders in a backyard in Manitouwadge, 378 kilometres northwest of Sault Ste. Marie. Unfortunately I missed the reported face-off between a grackle and a ruffed grouse but last year some winter days were brightened by flocks of vivid pine grosbeaks. Follow this link [http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/38/FeederWatch\\_Cam/](http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/38/FeederWatch_Cam/).

## KITCHENER-WATERLOO FIELD NATURALISTS

The K-W group was threatened by the Canada Revenue Agency (just a friendly caution, of course) shortly after a letter critical of the federal government appeared on their website. It's encouraging to know that federal officials are interested in reading about nature. Perhaps they will also pay attention to the more than 800 foreign scientists from renowned institutions like Germany's Max Planck Institute who signed a letter asking that the government end the "burdensome restrictions" on communications by government scientists. Unlike the K-W group QFN is not a registered charity so we are not vulnerable to such threats. I suppose my personal tax return could be audited.

## THE ONCE AND FUTURE GREAT LAKES

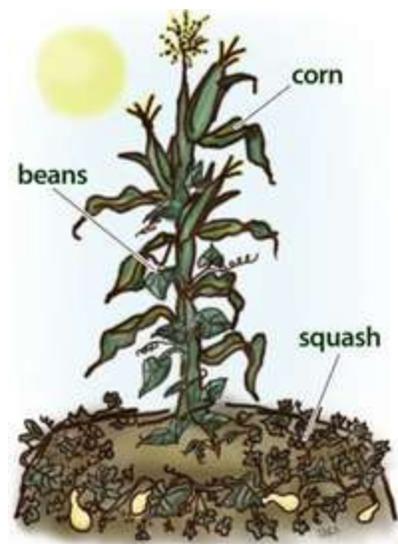


Recently I finished reading a fascinating, enlightening and optimistic book. Fascinating because it had a lot to say about the home area of the Quinte Field Naturalists, enlightening because it dispelled ecological myths about the Great Lakes basin, optimistic because while it outlined past ecological devastation John Riley, the author, believes there are many signs that we are beginning to head in the right direction.

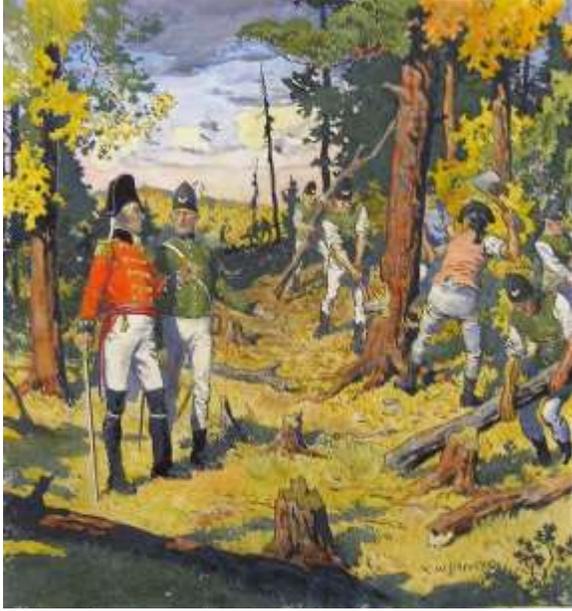
Riley is well qualified to write a book like *The Once and Future Great Lakes*. He is senior science advisor at the Nature Conservancy of Canada with a wide background in many related fields. The over 100 pages of notes and bibliography attest to his research. Don't be put off by the volume of these references. They do not intrude on Riley's easy to read style.

The title of the *Afterword* makes Riley's main theme clear, "Nature Never Repeats Itself." During the past 20,000 years natural forces and humans have combined to create and drive a constantly changing ecosystem. During that period the role of humans has increased significantly.

In Ontario south of the Canadian Shield the landscape has been in constant change. During the past five centuries alone there have been several variations. When the first European explorers and missionaries arrived there was a population of 75,000 to 100,000 Iroquoian peoples. They had converted over 5% of Ontario south of the Shield to agriculture. As much as a further 15% of the land was modified by fire and cutting to develop a landscape which would support hunted browsers and mast feeders like deer, turkey, passenger pigeons and many other species. At the same time a climatic change known as the Medieval Warming from 900 to 1400 encouraged the shift in vegetation toward open woods and prairies.



*The Haudenosaunee or Iroquois inhabitants of the lower lakes practiced a very sustainable system of agriculture based on the "three sisters." Corn provided support for climbing beans which added nitrogen to the soil. The squash kept weeds down and reduced the evaporation of moisture.*



***This painting by C.W. Jeffreys depicts Governor Simcoe supervising the Queen's Rangers as they worked extending Yonge Street north. It was the beginning of southern Ontario's rural roads which led to the fragmentation of the landscape, a revolutionary change in the province's ecology.***

By the late seventeenth century a change Riley calls re-wilding was well underway. The climate was cooling. The wars among the various Iroquoian groups so vividly portrayed by Joseph Boyden in *The Orenda* and more significantly the diseases introduced by Europeans left southern Ontario with only small groups of humans. Agriculture largely disappeared and hunted species increased in numbers. After a century and a half of re-wilding and wars Europeans arrived again, this time to settle and occupy the land. They found old growth forests completely unlike what the seventeenth century visitors had found. Settlement policies and practices transformed the land again with forests seen as an enemy to be beaten back. Agriculture and roads fragmented the landscape.

In the last section of the book Riley deals with the current challenges which are once again transforming the Great Lakes basin, invasive species, climate change, energy use and urbanization.

Riley believes that it is still possible to “keep what is best” in the northern part of the basin but acknowledges that south of the Shield the challenge is to “keep what is left.” While noting that “most people’s appreciation of their place in Nature has rarely been so slight” he does see “remarkable changes in public policy” Riley expresses hope for the future because of projects like the Greenbelt.



***Despite its title Riley's book focuses on the part of the Great Lakes south of the Canadian Shield. This picture taken at night from an American satellite shows how brilliantly lit this area is. It also demonstrates two current challenges - incandescent waste of energy and the new city-states of the area***

# The Naturalist's Calendar

**Friday, Oct. 31**

**Last Day of Banding at the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory**



*Photo from the PEPtBO Website  
Ron, long-time assistant at PEPtBO, holds a  
barred owl and a northern saw-whet owl to  
show just how small the latter bird is.*

As the season winds down the weather has been more co-operative. On the evening of Thursday, Oct. 23 the observatory banded 103 northern saw-whet owls to bring this fall's total to 352 banded saw-whets. The observatory welcomes visitors although on a busy evening they won't have much time to talk to you. The first check of the nets is 7:45 pm. Visit the website [www.peptbo.ca](http://www.peptbo.ca) to see a running total of owls banded nightly, weekly totals of all species and other information about the station.

PEPtBO is a member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, an organization of 25 banding stations across Canada. These stations monitor the populations of species which nest in the inaccessible boreal regions as well as species found elsewhere.

PEPtBO is also the Caretaker for the globally significant 279.31 square

kilometre Prince Edward County South Shore Important Bird Area.

Visit the website, become a member. The organization is a completely volunteer-run registered charity.

(the Calendar continues on the next page.)

**Saturday, Nov. 8**

**Project FeederWatch Begins**



Submit records of birds seen in your yard. Start a young birder in a career as a citizen scientist. This is a great project for beginning birders. The information you submit helps scientists study winter bird populations. You must be a member of Bird Studies Canada but you will receive a charitable receipt for your fee. With your membership you will also receive a bi-weekly newsletter and four issues of *Birdwatch Canada* magazine. See the Bird Studies Canada website for details [www.bsc-eoc.org](http://www.bsc-eoc.org). You need only report the birds that you recognize.

**Nov. 7**

**Searching for Owls**



Codrington area's Leslie Abram will have a photography exhibition at The Studio Above the Grind, 45 Front Street in Trenton (the corner by the Farmers' Market a couple of doors from Tomasso's restaurant) on November 7th, from 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. A portion of all proceeds from her exhibition, "SEARCHING FOR OWLS" will go to "Fixed for Life". Come on out, bring a friend and spend some time with the owls! Visit her blog at [www.leslieabram.com](http://www.leslieabram.com) to see more examples of her work.

**Friday, Nov. 21, 2014**

**25th Annual Trenton Woodlot Conference**

**Where:** Knights of Columbus Hall, [57 Stella Crescent, Trenton, ON](#)

Excellent Speakers and a Field Trip to the Frink Centre.

Admission is \$30.00 and includes a locally catered roast beef & pork lunch plus bus transport for the field trip. To register by Nov. 7, please contact [Matt Caruana](#) at 613 391 9034 or by email at [info@hastingsstewardship.ca](mailto:info@hastingsstewardship.ca).

**Monday, Nov. 24**

**QFN's November Meeting**

***Nov. 24 Close Encounters with Damsels & Darners***

Retired Wildlife Biologist, Robert Ferguson, will illustrate the beauty and diversity of the dragonflies of Hastings County, as captured in his stunning digital photographs.

## TURKEY VULTURES (RANDOM THOUGHTS)



*Photo by Ian Barker*

Almost any day in the fall you can see dozens of migrating turkey vultures at Sandbanks Park. It's not unusual to see 20 or 25 at once soaring overhead (a kettle) or loafing on the beach or in a tree (a committee). A group feeding on a carcass would be called a wake of turkey vultures.

Despite their less than beautiful appearance there is a Turkey Vulture Society which aims to spread knowledge about their important role in disposing of dead animals. Unlike most birds they have an extremely strong sense of smell which allows them to find carcasses well over a kilometre away.

By the way did you hear about the turkey vulture who decided to fly south on Air Canada instead of migrating in the usual way? As he was boarding the plane carrying three road killed raccoons the flight attendant stopped him. "I'm sorry, sir. You're only allowed one carrion.

*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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**Past President**

Wendy Turner

**Vice-President**

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Next Newsletter Deadline – November 10, 2014

Please send submissions to [sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com](mailto:sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com)