



The Quinte Naturalist

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

October



Despite the warm weeks we were enjoying during September and earlier this month the weather now makes it clear that it is autumn. Overnight temperatures are hovering around zero. Residents of rural areas are reporting frost-shriveled plants. Surrounded by intimations of the snow to come we appreciate sunny days with at least a bit of warmth even more. Last Sunday was just such a day after a miserable, wet Saturday. Sharron and I took a short expedition into the County to enjoy the day and see what we could find.

A stop at Campbell's Orchards on Rednersville Road emphasized the autumn theme. The harvest was displayed. With the weight of a bag of apples, two litres of cider, a spaghetti squash and a rather large turnip added to our vehicle we headed south on Pulver Road to the Harry Smith Conservation Area in Ameliasburgh where

we ate our lunch. There was another sign of late autumn. Yellow-rumped warblers were constantly in motion among the red cedars. They were attracted to the blue berries which were so abundant that the female trees appeared to be a beautiful hazy blue colour. Can conifers like red cedars be said to have berries? We're not trying to be technically correct today; they look like berries so I'm calling them berries. It's an autumn scene, migrating birds relying on ripe berries to prepare for the trip south.

Finally we walked a short section of the Millennium Trail on the causeway over Consecon Lake. The autumn theme seemed to break down here. Numerous small red dragonflies populated the trail, some hovering alone or in tandem, others soaking up the sun while perched on the trail or on twigs. Dragonflies are associated with hot summer days, aren't they? What are these confused insects doing on a late fall day with the temperature about 12 degrees? Back at home a check of the field guides answered the question. They are autumn meadowhawks, our latest flying dragonflies. If the weather co-operates we may still see them in November. It is definitely late autumn. Don't get used to it. Probably in the next newsletter I'll be pointing out signs of winter.

THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER

Dr. AMY CHABOT & JONATHON WILLANS
Wildlife Preservation Canada

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE RECOVERY

Monday, October 28, 2013 – 7:00 p.m.



Outing for Members

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY SOUTH SHORE IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

Last year Mike Burrell spoke to the Quinte Field Naturalists about ebird. He's now the Coordinator for the Ontario IBA program. He's offered to lead a trip to the IBA on the County's south shore. He'll explain the features of this IBA and tell us why the IBA program is so important. You heard a lot about the IBA lately. Here's your chance to learn more. Meet beside the playground in Zwick's Park, **8 a.m., Saturday, November 9.**

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 – October, 2013

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CLUB NEWS

More News from the September 17 Executive Meeting – As announced in the September Quinte Naturalist members will be asked to amend the constitution so that the term for executive offices will be two years rather than one.

The annual dinner in April will be held at St. Mark's United Church in Cannifton.

After an outstanding cheque is cashed our bank balance will be \$2940.57.

We have 59 members including 6 life members, 16 families, 27 singles and 1 associate member.

No students applied for a grant to attend the Youth Summit in September. Funds for the grant came from the Hastings Stewardship Council so we will ask them if they are happy with an alternate project which is to be determined.

We have sent a letter of support for the Hastings Prince Edward Land Trust to purchase trees for the Miller Family Nature Reserve.

The Hastings Prince Edward Land Trust has sent us the Baseline Documentation Report and the Stewardship Plan for the Miller Family Nature Reserve. There are a number of volunteer opportunities described in the Stewardship Plan.

We hope to increase our profile in Quinte and better inform members of our activities. Plans include posting our correspondence and meeting minutes on the website, inviting the press to monitor and write about member activities such as Marsh Monitoring and developing a Facebook page.

In addition to the very small honorarium which speakers receive we will now offer dinner for speakers coming from out of town.

I will work on a bird checklist for the Frink Centre.

We need a new table top display board. It would be used to advertise the club at various events and to revive the quizzes which used to be posted on the panels which have been removed from our meeting room.

Note: Since the executive meeting Kerrie Wilcox who co-ordinates Project Feederwatch emailed me regarding an interview to publicize Project Feederwatch. I have contacted Luke Hendry of the Intelligencer who will be writing an article about Feederwatch soon.



The autumn meadowhawk doesn't appear until late July and breeding may not begin until late August. Females lay their eggs in the water. The eggs hatch in the spring.

FRINK CENTRE



Of course I became aware of the H.R. Frink Education Centre and Conservation Area very soon after we moved to Belleville many years ago. It's close to the city and has some well-marked, fairly easy hiking trails. We've enjoyed family outings there and I often go birding there. Recently I started work on a bird checklist for the area and it soon became obvious just what a valuable and fascinating resource it is.

The more than 12 kilometres of trails lead through a great variety of habitats. Forests range from silver maple swamps to cedar swamps to the deciduous forests of the drier uplands on the drumlin. In addition to the swamps the wetlands include a beaver pond and marsh crossed by a boardwalk, the riparian zone beside the Moira and a wet meadow visible from both the Cedar Trail and a lookout platform with a bench beside Parks Creek.

There's a corresponding variety of wildflowers from the almost ubiquitous introduced rose-purple herb Robert to the rarer, spectacular native yellow lady's slipper. The animal kingdom demonstrates an equal variety in the Frink's 341 acres. In size mammals range from voles and mice to chipmunks and squirrels and larger species such as otters, beavers, and deer. Amphibians and reptiles flourish in the provincially significant wetland. During the warm summer months you will often see Blanding's turtles catching a few rays.

Another great thing about the Frink is the variety of resources available. Friends of the Frink is a community group which hosts at least one event every year. Occasional guided hikes introduce visitors to the property. Signs at the Frink and a detailed trail map from the Quinte Conservation website make self-guided walks a cinch. The Hastings County Stewardship Council has provided signs identifying trees. From the Quinte Conservation website you can download an 18-page booklet to help you identify and understand the significance of 32 species of trees found in the conservation area.

What of the bird checklist that started my detailed investigation of the Frink Centre? I found records of 155 species. As I was putting my list in order Tom Wheatley found species number 156, a Nelson's Sparrow. According to the *Birds of the Kingston Region* the Kingston Field Naturalists systematically searched for the species annually and yet in the 21 autumns from 1987 to 2007 there were 5 years when they did not find any Nelson's Sparrows. It's the Frink's rarest bird.



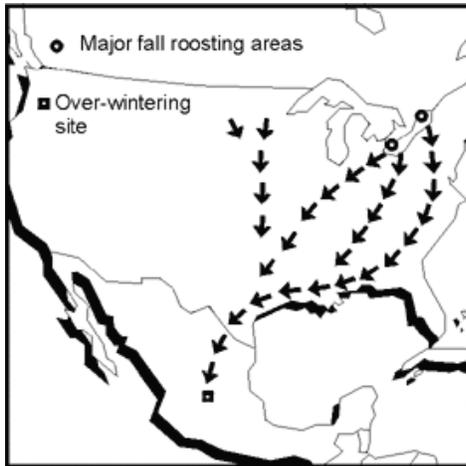
Photo by Tom Wheatley

Nelson's Sparrow at the Frink Centre

It's my hope that we will be able to have our bird checklist printed in a form which can be used by students and other visitors to the Frink Centre. In the meantime there will be copies of the provisional checklist at the October meeting.

HEADED FOR EXTINCTION?

Naturalists all over southern Ontario have noticed a distressing decline in the the numbers of monarch butterflies seen this year. Sightings of one or two monarchs have been considered so noteworthy that they are mentioned in discussions on the internet. During our recent QFN outing to Sandbanks we saw 2 monarchs in a period when there should have been dozens or even hundreds. What is happening? I decided to see if I could get an answer. The answer appears to rest in what is a very complicated microcosm of the ecological dilemma facing our species.



Map by Parks Canada

The adults which leave us in the fall are in diapause, a stage of suspended development during which they cannot reproduce. With a large percentage roosting at either Point Pelee or Prince Edward Point as shown on the Parks Canada map they undertake the approximately 4800 kilometre trip to central Mexico. They overwinter there and as the days warm they reach the stage where they can mate, head north and lay their eggs on milkweed in the southern United States before dying.

The next three or four generations of monarchs will live only a month or so. This is not enough time to reach southern Ontario so the monarchs we see are two or three generations removed from the butterflies which originally left the overwintering grounds.

Last winter entomologists believe that the overwintering generation had been reduced by 59%, the largest decline in ten years.. For many years the decline has been blamed on the deforestation of the wintering grounds. Orley Taylor, an insect ecologist at the University of Kansas believes that the large scale deforestation has been reduced to an occasional poverty-stricken Mexican cutting one tree for the \$300 it brings. Taylor has a much more intricate answer involving large corporations, a new agricultural technology, struggling farmers and even efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and pollution caused by herbicides. The following is Taylor's explanation given in an interview for Environment 360, an online magazine published by Yale University.

While adult butterflies consume nectar from a number of plants monarch caterpillars eat only milkweed. There used to be milkweed in every corn and soybean field in the American Midwest and along every roadside. In the 1970s Monsanto introduced Roundup, an effective herbicide against actively growing plants like milkweed and one which had a more limited lasting environmental impact because it became ineffective relatively quickly. In 1997 genetically-modified Roundup-ready soybeans and corn were introduced. They were unaffected by the herbicide and prospered with no competition from weeds such as milkweed. By 2007 Roundup was the most widely used herbicide in the United States.





Another factor in the decline of monarchs is listed on the gas pump at your service station. Governments have been promoting the use of ethanol as a fuel. It's made from such plants as corn and soybeans. It's sustainable because there's a new crop every year; emissions from using ethanol fuel are less environmentally harmful than those from carbon-based fuel; it benefits farmers who now have a new market.

What's a farmer who is concerned about his or her livelihood to do? Planting more corn and soybeans looks like a good bet. They are easier to grow than they used to be and the market is larger. You can plant closer to the road where there's space which now just produces non-marketable milkweed and other non-marketable plants. In the United States you may also have land registered under the Conservation Reserve Program. This is a government program which pays farmers to set aside their more marginally productive land for wildlife. Much of it is milkweed habitat. It's more profitable to plant corn or soybeans.

Recent research has shown that the American Corn Belt is a hub for northern-bound monarchs. In the past few years a whole generation of butterflies has arrived at the Corn Belt with only a very small hope of finding the milkweed they need to produce the next generation.



U.S. Corn Belt in Red

What's the cause of the monarch's problems? Deforestation in Mexico? The use of Roundup. Burning ethanol as a fuel? Conversion of wildlife habitat to cropland? You could probably throw in edamame salad and vegetarian meals unless they are composed of organic soybeans. At the end of

the interview Professor Taylor adds one more factor. If climate warming continues the trees in the highlands where the monarchs overwinter may die as they can't adapt to such a change. What's the common factor? It's us, homo not-so-sapiens.

ISN'T THERE ANY GOOD NEWS?

Although we can probably never restore monarchs to the spectacular numbers of earlier years



there are snippets of good news. Monarchs do reproduce rapidly. Professor Taylor does not believe that the monarch will become extinct. It's widespread and a strong flier. It can cross wide expanses of water and has established itself on islands as widespread as Australia, New Zealand the Canary Islands and the Azores. Taylor also notes that by planting milkweed in our own gardens we can provide a small measure of relief for a monarch ready to lay eggs.

Researchers at the University of Rhode Island have also made a discovery that has implications for Quinte. Black Swallowwort or Dog-Strangling Vine is an invasive, vine particularly well-



The floor of a Maryland woodlot is carpeted with Dog-Strangling Vine.

adapted to old fields in limestone areas with thin soil. That's a good description of Prince Edward Point which is a Monarch Butterfly Reserve and many other parts of Quinte. The vine smothers native plants in large patches resulting in a different habitat which cannot support many native species.

Dog-Strangling Vine belongs to the milkweed family. Adult monarchs are deceived into laying their eggs on the plant. Unfortunately all the larva which hatch die because the plant will not sustain them. In the Ukraine the researchers found a moth, *Hypena opulenta*, which, like the monarch, can survive on only one plant. That plant is Dog-Strangling Vine. If the moth is definitely found to be non-invasive and its introduction is successful it would be an important control on the plant.

In the Point Traverse woods near the bird-banding station there are significant patches of dog-strangling vine. *Hypena opulenta* could keep these woods from looking like the picture above and also make Prince Edward County generally a little more hospitable to the struggling monarch.

THIS AND THAT

Project Feederwatch



Project Feederwatch begins on Saturday, November 9 this year. It's easy and a great way to introduce kids to the birds in the backyard or the school yard. You just record the birds you see once a week. It doesn't matter if you can't identify all the birds or watch every week. You can get the details on the Bird Studies Canada website <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/>, phone 888-448-2473.



Vote for the Woodland Caribou

Mountain Equipment Co-op has \$10,000 to give to three Canadian organizations working to conserve wilderness. The applicants have been narrowed down to five finalists. The money will be shared among the three applicants who receive the most votes. Ontario Nature is one of the five finalists. Help ON "speak for the trees" through film and inspire governments and the forest industry to stop logging in areas used by woodland caribou by protecting Ontario's St. Raphael wilderness. Go to this website to vote



<http://www.mec.ca/AST/ContentPrimary/Community/CommunityContributions/WildBucks.jsp>

It's a secure site. There's no danger and it's free

Visit Terry Sprague's website for the latest news about nature in Quinte.

<http://naturestuff.net/site/>.