



Submitted by John McFeeters

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Please submit your pictures and articles for the May newsletter no later than May 15 to Nancy Muzik at [john\\_nancy\\_m@rogers.com](mailto:john_nancy_m@rogers.com)

# THE NATURALIST

DURHAM REGION FIELD NATURALISTS  
CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION  
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## President's Message

Ah, springtime! Well almost! As I am writing this, spring is officially a week away and it is still cold and there is still ice and snow on the ground. But one can dream especially when the sun is shining. It has been a long, cold winter. Derek and I were lucky enough to go somewhere far south of here and far warmer if only for three weeks. Hopefully you were able to get out a bit and enjoy our winter nature, perhaps even join DRFN on one of our outings. If so, you might have had a chance to see wintering gulls on the November trip to Niagara. Some of these spend their breeding season in the high arctic. These birds go south to the Niagara area for the winter! Or perhaps you enjoyed the Annual Winter Bird Feeder Tour and Potluck Lunch in January. It was your chance to see other birds that call this area the "Deep South" such as American Tree Sparrows, Snow Buntings, Pine Grosbeaks and Dark-eyed Juncos. Then in March we have the outing to Presqu'île Provincial Park where you had the chance to welcome returning waterfowl stopping in the thousands on their way to northern breeding grounds.



Maybe you helped combat cabin fever by joining a DRFN meeting. We had such entertaining and informative programmes. In November we had one of my favourite speakers, Kevin Callan, who introduced us to paddling the Thames. In January many folks braved a winter storm to allow Otto Peter to take us on a journey to Eastern South Africa. In February Rayfield Pye honed our skills in hawk identification.

And when you weren't out with DRFN you might have taken time to peruse our excellent November and January newsletters. Perhaps you even wrote an article or sent in some nature photos.

The executive members at DRFN have all worked hard to help you survive the winter, sanity intact. So, am I leading up to something here? You bet! I hope I just showed you a slice of what the executive members

## Upcoming Meetings

*Meetings: last Monday of each month except June-August and December*

*Time: 7:30 p.m.*

*Place: Civic Rec Complex, Bobby Orr Room, 99 Thornton S., Oshawa.*

*Come a little early to enjoy conversation and refreshments ('lug-a-mug')*

### **March 25, 2019**

**Paul Laporte, North America Native Plant Society**  
*Building Biodiversity with Native Plants*

### **April 29, 2019**

**Dr. Jeff Bowman**  
*Bobcat and Lynx a Tail of Two Ontario Wild Cats*

### **May 27, 2019**

**Members Night**

do because the May meeting is the AGM in which you get to vote who will lead us into the 2019-2020 DRFN season. And it is your opportunity to become an executive member to make that season successful.

The following will give you an idea of the duties and responsibilities involved in each executive position.

All executive members are expected to attend general meetings (8 per year) and executive meetings (5 per year) and provide reports and updates as well as an annual report for the May AGM.

**President :** chair general meetings and executive meetings, answer e-mails and other forms of communications, pass on pertinent info to executive members and/or all members, participate in ON Nature Network Lake Ontario North meetings, Oh! And write the president's message for the newsletters.

**Vice President :** chair general meetings and executive meetings when the president is unable to do so and take on special projects.

**Treasurer:** look after DRFN financial requirements such as making deposits, writing cheques and keeping receipts, keep a set of Financial Books (manually or electronically), reconcile monthly bank statements, produce yearly financial statement in January, audit the books, prepare CRA Tax forms, pay invoices, and arrange facility rental.

**Programmes:** arrange for guest speakers (easier said than done), care for and set up sound system, computer and projector, introduce and thank speakers.

**Membership:** keep track of members, take membership dues, set up and man membership table at general meetings.

**Newsletter:** produce and edit five newsletters per year

**Outings:** arrange monthly outings to local natural areas and lead some of these outings or find a leader to do so.

Ontario Nature Contact: liaison and communicate with Ontario Nature personnel to let them know what we as a club are doing and to inform our club about ON projects and campaigns, attend and report at ON Nature Network Lake Ontario North meetings.

Conservation: keep abreast of nature activities and those activities that affects nature in Durham Region.

Publicity: keep the DRFN website up-to-date, repost nature related articles on Facebook, update our display boards and attend and represent DRFN at local nature festivals.

Secretary: record minutes of the executive meetings and the AGM. Not a comprehensive list of duties but it gives you an idea. So please think of taking on one of these roles. An excellent club does not stay excellent without excellent hard-working people.

And did I mention the potlucks! We executive members have two per year, one in December and another in June. Great fun!

***Lois Gillette***

## Future Outings

**Sunday, April 28 at 10:00 AM**

**Hydro Marsh and Alex Robertson Park (Pickering)**

This wonderful parkland and marsh are located adjacent to Pickering Generating Station. We'll have a casual walk in search of migrant birds from the South. The trees and undergrowth can harbour a wide variety of species, as does the marsh.

Directions: If you come by the 401, from the east exit at Liverpool or from the west, exit at Whites then take Bayly Street east to Sandy Beach Road. Drive south until you're near the nuclear generating station berm. There will be sports fields to your left. Turn right to the parking for Alex Robertson Park.

Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly.

Difficulty: Easy to moderate walking depending on the state of path/road clearing. Paths may be damp so hiking boots or waterproof shoes would be safe.

**Saturday, May 18 at 10:00 AM**

**Old Swamp Road Walking Trail and Yeo Side Trail (Murray's Woods) with Maria Prisciak**

Join Maria in search of spring wildflowers on the Oakridge Moraine near Mosport.

Directions from highway 401: Exit Liberty Street in Bowmanville. Head north on Liberty to concession 8. Turn right (east) on concession 8 until you approach the village of Leskard. Go past the three way stop and immediately turn left (north) on Leskard road. Travel up the road 1 km to a small parking lot on the left side of the road.

Directions from Taunton Road: Travel east on Taunton Road to Leskard Road (just prior to entering Orono). Turn left (north) and continue until you reach concession 8 in the village of Leskard. There is a jog in the road at concession 8. Turn right and take an immediate left to stay on Leskard Road. Travel up the road 1 km to the small parking lot on the left-hand side of the road.

Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly. Bring water and insect repellent.

Difficulty: It is a 5 km (out and back) moderate linear trail with abundant flowers and good birding opportunities. There is one big hill to climb but the rest of the trail is easy.

***Don Docherty***

**June 7 – 9, 2019**

### **DRFN Annual Weekend Outing**

This year for our annual spring weekend outing we are going to one of my favourite parks, Sandbanks Provincial Park. It is situated in Prince Edward County along Lake Ontario not far from Picton and about an hour's drive from Oshawa. Derek and I usually go there in May during the spring migration. PEC, aka The County is well-known for its birds, its cheese and its wine. Sandbanks P.P. is famous for having the "world's largest baymouth barrier dune formation" <https://www.ontarioparks.com/park/sandbanks> and lovely sandy beaches. It has 8 km of walking trails "that allow visitors to experience the dune and wetland habitats of the park". Nearby, is Beaver Meadow Wildlife Management Area with walking trails through a deciduous forest and wetlands. So please join us for this exciting weekend of seeking out nature in this beautiful location, enjoying the company of fellow nature lovers, and sharing food on Saturday evening after a long day of hiking. Derek and I will be camping in the park but there are also B &B's and motels nearby. Wellington is the nearest town to the park. Note: if you do not wish to stay overnight you can still spend Saturday with the group. I will provide a sign-up sheet for the March meeting. Or contact me at [dlgill@sympatico.ca](mailto:dlgill@sympatico.ca).

***Lois Gillette***

## **Butterfly Garden Spring Clean-Up**

**Thursday, May 23, 10:00 a.m.**

This year, our annual maintenance day is on Thursday so we can all attend the Feathered Friends Festival at Second Marsh on Saturday, May 25.

There's lots to do to get the Butterfly Garden ready for summer - edging, spreading wood-chips, weeding, pulling grass, pruning, cutting dead stalks, planting marigolds, cleaning up litter, etc. etc. Please come and lend a hand to keep this pollinator garden going.

Bring garden tools, gloves, drinking water and dress for the weather.

Park on side streets Glencairn or Ansley, then walk a short distance to the garden on Rossland Road just west of the Oshawa Creek.

Note: Help is also (desperately) needed over the summer – a couple of hours as often as you can come. Contact Dianne to arrange.

Questions: Dianne Pazaratz 905-433-7875 or [dpazaratz@sympatico.ca](mailto:dpazaratz@sympatico.ca).

***Dianne Pazaratz***

## Past Outings

### Amherst Island: Raptors

Saturday, February 23

Weather was fine for our trip to Amherst Island. The island was surrounded in ice with Ring-billed Gulls, Herring Gulls and a Greater Black-backed Gull in line with the ferry's path of broken ice chunks. The island roads were clear but muddy at times and a layer of ice and snow covered the fields.



Submitted by: Lawrence Horwood

We spent the afternoon traversing main roads and found many Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks and Northern Harriers. In addition, a couple of adult Bald Eagles were present but were not actively hunting. At one point we got out of our cars and had a binocular image of two courting Red-tails, a Bald Eagle and a Rough-legged Hawk. A small flock of Wild Turkey were feeding in a field beyond them.

Most participants saw voles or birds carrying voles. We also saw a resident American Kestrel patiently scanning a ditch for them. At times it got tiring as we stopped to investigate a hawk or two in every field. The bright sun was not always helpful for identification but the raptors were, clearly, doing well.

I expected to have to wait until the late afternoon to see Short-eared Owls but we spotted them at around 2 PM. They were hunting a field with Harriers under the watchful eye of a Bald Eagle. A smaller group was also seen in another part of the island.

Snowy Owls were not immediately visible. They seem to like to go out on the ice during the day then return to land in the late afternoon. We saw one on a hydro pole at around 4:30 PM.

We had hoped for migrant passerines like Snow Bunting, Redpolls, or Horned Larks but it was not to be. Perhaps the crust of ice made foraging too difficult. We ended the trip as we began to lose the sun. It should be a good place to visit for raptors for another month or two but be prepared to get a car wash when you return home!

## Ontario Nature Report

We hit the ground running in 2019. Thanks to you we had a major victory for nature! Last December, the Government of Ontario introduced Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act. Schedule 10 of this bill would have overridden protections for water, natural heritage and farmland in municipalities across Ontario. We called on you for help and you answered. Thanks to you, we successfully stopped Schedule 10 of Bill 66. Your voice made the difference.

The fight isn't over for our endangered species

Thank you for responding to our Action Alert on the review of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We had over 5,100 people speak up for species at risk and stronger environmental protections. For those of you who are getting caught up, learn about why the government's review of the ESA spells trouble for Ontario's most vulnerable plants and animals. The public comment period is now over and we await the government's release of its proposed amendments to the ESA. Meanwhile, we continue to reach out to political leaders and MPPs to ensure our voice is heard. Subscribe to our blog and follow us on Facebook and Twitter to stay updated on this issue.



Submitted by Maria Prisciak

### Ontario Nature's 88th Annual Gathering

Join us at Mohawk College in Hamilton for a weekend of change-inspiring workshops and a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club – one of Ontario Nature's founding groups. The weekend will be filled with expert-led workshops, guest speakers, and opportunities to connect with new and old friends. The deadline for booking is May 1st, 2019, so please make sure you register before then. Details and registration links are online at:

<https://ontarionature.org/events/annual-gathering/>

***Maria Prisciak***

## California Dreaming in Greater Palm Springs



When you think of Palm Springs, does the Rat Pack singing in a smoky casino to an audience of blue hairs come to mind? Or do you think of acres and acres of wilderness to explore?

The greater Palm springs area has many habitats to explore; desert, palm oasis, mountain, canyon and wetland all within an hours-drive. There are more wilderness areas to explore than you can do in a one-week's stay.

Our first day trip was to the famous Salton Sea. The habitat contains over 32,000 acres of salt marsh and open water and 2,000 acres of fresh water marsh. The lake is 32 miles long and is saltier than the Pacific Ocean. The Sonny Bono Salton Sea national wildlife refuge is the winter home to thousands of migrating birds.

Although the area is under stress from the receding water due to years of drought and water diversion to farms, you can still find many lifers here. The sight of hundreds of snow geese in flight is something to behold. There are several observation lookouts along the south side of the lake. You can spend a whole day driving from lookout to lookout, viewing shore birds, ground birds, fly catchers and various birds of prey. We were lucky to find quite a few lifers here including a prairie falcon, Cinnamon Teal and Californian Towhee. We also saw a loggerhead shrike from only a few feet away. No scope necessary!



Our next stop was Joshua Tree National Park.

We planned to visit a birding hot spot, but unfortunately, the trail was closed as a result of flooding from a recent hurricane. Undeterred, we moved on to other hikes throughout the park.

One of the popular attractions is the cactus garden. Don't stray off the path here.

We ate a picnic lunch while watching some rock climbers. After lunch we went in search of "Slim Jim", a very tall Joshua Tree, about 30 feet tall with no branches until the very top.

We ended the day with a hike to Barber Dam. Here we were treated to a flock of Oregon Juncos foraging for food on the ground. We also saw a California Scrub Jay.

The next day we visited Coachella Valley Preserve. The San Andreas Fault runs through the park. The Thousand Palm Oasis Preserve features two fan palm

oases separated by a desert wash. The oases are a result of fault-dammed ground water which keeps them full of water. We were met by a volunteer who called himself a "small b birder". He told us to be on the lookout for a long eared and horned owl. Of course we didn't see either, however we did see three phainopepla, one of our target birds.

The following day we went to Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and Covington Park for a guided bird walk. The walk was led by The Friends of The Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. This preserve features a cottonwood oasis. Walking through this oasis did not give you the sense of being in a desert. The leader of the walk was very helpful identifying birds, and adding to our lifer list. He taught the group how to distinguish the difference between a



Ladder-backed woodpecker and the more common Nuttall's woodpecker. I won't forget the Ladder-backed wears a dirty t-shirt. However, the highlight of the walk was a barn owl hiding in the fronds of a palm tree.

No trip to Palm Springs would be complete without taking the tram to Mount San Jacinto. The tram transports you from the valley floor to an elevation of 8,516 feet and with this a temperature drop of 30 degrees Fahrenheit. When you disembark the tram, you find the sand and palms have given way to giant pines and rocky terrain. Hiking up here was a real challenge due to the thinner air.

On our final day we visited the historic Sunnylands estate for a guided bird walk through the gardens. Sunnylands is the 200-acre winter home of the Annenberg's which included a private golf course. They entertained many presidents and other dignitaries at their estate giving it the nickname the Camp David of the West. We unfortunately didn't see our target bird the vermilion flycatcher during the walk. It apparently, is found on the golf course which requires a golf cart birding tour be booked. However, the naturalist directed us to a local park where we found the fly catcher waiting for us as we parked our car.

We were also given a list of all the bird walks available in the area. Most are free or have a nominal charge.

Big Morongo Canyon: Every Wednesday from Oct. – Mar.

Whitewater Preserve: Second and fourth Tuesdays.

Coachella Valley Preserve Sundays and Mondays Oct. – May.

Sunnylands: Every Friday in the garden. Golf cart tour Thursday's reservations required.

As well several Audubon societies have walks which are advertised on their websites: Borrego Springs, San Bernardino Valley and San Diego.

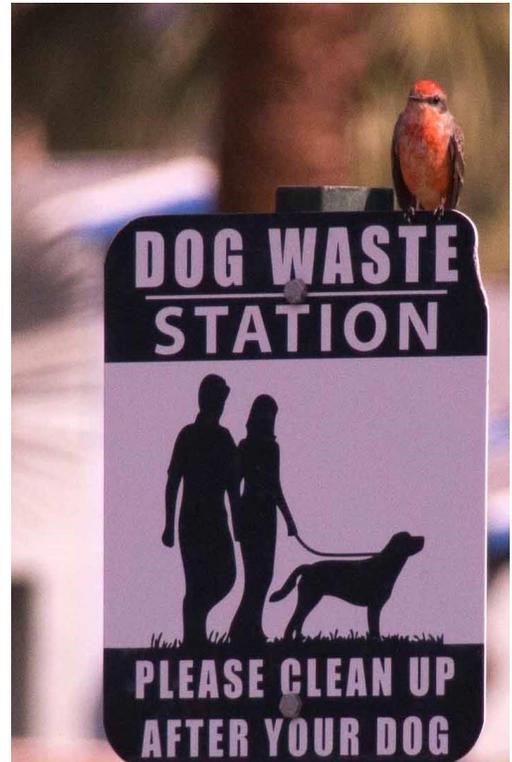
***John and Nancy Muzik***

## The Tale of the Mangy Coyote

Do you know what causes mange? I didn't, until a mangy coyote started frequenting our backyard this winter.

According to Wikipedia, mange is caused by parasitic mites which burrow into the skin of mammals, causing severe burning and itching to the point that they scratch their fur off. This eventually leads to lesions which become infected. The animal gets sicker and sicker and eventually dies of severe infections, freezing or starvation.

I didn't want to watch this horrible slow death take place in my backyard, so decided to take action when a neighbour informed me about her conversations with Toronto Wildlife Centre (TWC) personnel. They instructed us to put out a ground beef 'meatball' each day and monitor when the coyote came to eat it. When it seemed there was a good possibility she would come, we were to inject very strong medication with a syringe they provided, into a meatball and watch closely to ensure she ate it. (The meds would kill a small bird e.g. crow or mammal, hence the



Submitted by Dianne Pazaratz

close surveillance.) They said the first dose would kill the adult parasites, but ideally, she would require a second to kill the eggs that hatched subsequently and, at best, a third to make sure the attackers were all gone.

After many hours of us watching out the window and a couple of unsuccessful attempts, my son David (with the help of a next-door neighbour who alerted him the coyote was coming) managed to watch the coyote eat the medicated food! We were ecstatic.

TWC advised us that the coyote might feel so much better, she would go back to her usual hunting hours in the dark and we might not see her, which happened for a week. Then we spotted her again in daylight hours, when the mite eggs had probably hatched. We thought her coat looked a bit fuzzy, as if the fur was regrowing, and she looked 'bouncier'. She did, however, trail far behind when she chased a rabbit across the yard. She cooperated by eating a second medication-infused meatball two weeks later, and then a third two weeks after that.

Now, at the beginning of March, it is obvious her fur is coming back. She's looking good! We learned a lot about mange and coyote behaviour, and felt 'a bit fuzzy' ourselves for having helped one of nature's creatures back to health.

***Dianne Pazaratz***

## Fun Facts – Virginia Opossum



Submitted by John McFeeters

The Virginia Opossum was once an animal found strictly in the southern U.S. For past several decades it has been showing up in increasing numbers in Ontario. It is North America's only marsupial, with its rat-like tail and exposed nose and ears, is hardly suited for Canadian winters. But as the climate warms, it's one of thousands of species around the world that are extending their range northwards.

At birth, opossums are the size of a honeybee-making them the smallest baby mammals in North America.

Although they have prehensile tails, possums do not hang from their tails like children's stories describe.

"Playing possum" is what opossums will do when threatened and cannot scare away the threat-they scream/screech, roll on their back, dangle their legs, close their eyes, roll out their tongue, drool and let out a horrible smell from their anal glands.

Opossums have the most teeth of any North American mammal, with 50 teeth in their tiny mouths-they will show you their teeth when threatened.

***Nancy Muzik***

## Volunteers Needed

### Co-Observer-Driver Wanted for AAS Surveys

Would you be interested in looking for Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes? The Eastern Loggerhead Shrike is nearly extirpated from Ontario and only occurs in the Napanee Area, Carden Alvar, and one small area on the Bruce Peninsula. Wildlife Preservation Canada runs the Adopt A Site Survey for Shrikes each year. Observers are assigned an area to survey. One visit to the survey area is made each month in April, May, and June. There may be 6 to 10 habitats per visit to survey.

I am looking for a Co-observer Driver interested in participating in the Adopt A Site Survey. I have done this survey for over ten years. I might add that two benefits of the survey is the opportunity to watch the progression of spring in the Carden Area and to visit Carden Alvar after the survey is completed. If you would like to participate, please let me know.

Contact me at [gavian.stellatan@gmail.com](mailto:gavian.stellatan@gmail.com) "

***John F. Foster***

### Feathered Friends Festival – Second Marsh

Saturday May 25

The 6th Annual Feathered Friends Festival is scheduled for, Saturday May 25, 10 - 3 pm.

Volunteers are needed for various duties - lead bird hikes, help with garden planting, face painting, craft station, bird house building, event setup and take down.

If you are interested in helping, please contact Wioletta with Friends of Second Marsh at [wwalancik@secondmarsh.ca](mailto:wwalancik@secondmarsh.ca), or 905.723.5047.