



Trumpeter Swan by Brian Reid

What's Inside

President's Message

Future Outings

Past Outings

Ontario Nature Report

Nature FYI – Snowfleas aka
Springtails

Marco Island Burrowing Owls

ABA Code of Ethics

Member's Pics

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THE NATURALIST

DURHAM REGION FIELD NATURALISTS
CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION
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President's Message

Global warming, massive deforestation in Brazil, the loss of millions of animals and their habitats in Australia! Now we have a COVID-19 pandemic! So much to worry about! On that note it is sad to write that we must **cancel the March meeting** featuring a presentation by Peter Thoem from the Owl Foundation due to the virus. Hopefully we can reschedule him next year.



On my way back from a great DRFN outing to Algonquin P.P. the subject of the COVID-19 virus kept creeping into our conversations. Depressing! What else could we talk about? Nature of course! But then Falmai pointed out that even though she loves nature and loves being a naturalist the topic can become quite depressing too. So much bad news! So, let's find some good news nature stories. Otto mentioned a few. So, I thought about it and decided to do a little research to find some more good news nature stories out there.

Derek and I were on South Georgia Island on our way to Antarctica in 2015. They were desperately trying to trap all the rats and mice before there was enough glacier melt to allow them to circumnavigate the island. Was that goal achieved? Well I Googled it and was happy to find that they have indeed achieved their goal with an announcement made in the May 9, 2018 edition of The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/09/south-georgia-declared-rat-free-centuries-rodent-devastation> "The world's biggest project to eradicate a dangerous invasive species has been declared a success, as the remote island of South Georgia is now clear of the rats and mice that had devastated its wildlife for nearly 250 years." You can read more about it at <http://www.sght.org/sght-habitat-restoration-project/>

We visited New Zealand in 2012. They too had a problem with rats and other feral animals including cats, possums and stoats. They were working on eradication programmes especially on the smaller islands. The island of Tiritiri Matangi, a wildlife sanctuary just off the coast near Auckland was reforested and cleared of invasive mammals during the 80's and 90's. www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/habitat It is now home to many endangered species. I couldn't find news of any more islands that have become pest free but New Zealand now has an ambitious programme to eradicate all mammalian pests by 2050.

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 30, 2020

CANCELLED

Future Meetings may be cancelled if the current social distancing measures are not lifted and the facility remains closed. You will be notified of any further cancellations.

April 27, 2020

Martyn Obbard

“How Black and Polar Bears Prepare for the Winter”

May 25, 2020,

Members Night and Annual General Meeting

Newsletter

Submissions

Please submit your pictures and articles for the May newsletter no later than May 15, 2020. Email all submissions to Nancy Muzik at john_nancy_m@rogers.com

Good news in the making.

OK, how about the goats on Santiago Island in the Galapagos! We visited there in 2001 and were told of the efforts to eradicate the over 80,000 goats which were introduced in the 1920's to 1940's. According to Nature international weekly journal of science <https://www.nature.com/news/2009/090127/full/news.2009.61.html> “The goats grazed the island mercilessly, causing erosion, threatening the survival of rare plants and trees and competing with native fauna, such as giant tortoises.” Good news! An eradication programme commenced in 2001. In 2009 the island was finally considered to be goat free

Did you know that DRFN is a member of Ontario Nature. <https://ontarionature.org/>. Ontario Nature has “been protecting wild species and wild spaces through education, conservation and public engagement since 1931.” I encourage you to become a member yourself.

Lois Gillette

Future Outings

Note: future outings are subject to cancellation if the Provincial health guidelines prohibit or recommend against any gatherings

Saturday, April 25 at 9:00 AM
McLaughlin Bay

April brings warmer temperatures and, perhaps, some showers. We can expect to see lots of returning local birds and some migrants. The air should be full of song.

Leader: Don Docherty

Difficulty: Light walking.

Meet at the southwest corner of the GM Canada Head Office parking lot.

Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly.

Dress for weather conditions. Bring water and insect protection.

Monday, May 18 at 10:00 AM
Stephen's Gulch Wild Flowers and Nature Walk

Leaders: Our DRFN Plant Experts

Stephens Gulch is a little jewel in Spring with a wide assortment of wild flowers

Meet at the Stephen's Gulch parking lot.

Difficulty: Easy walking.

Bring appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast. Portions of the area may be slick and muddy, depending on the weather, so bring appropriate footwear.

Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area is located northeast of Bowmanville. To reach the Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area parking lot, following these directions:

If coming from the south: From Liberty Street North, turn east (right) on Concession Road 4, turn north (left) on Bethesda Road, turn east (right) on Stephen's Mill Road, proceed along Stephen's Mill Road to Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area parking lot.

If coming from the north: From Taunton Road (east of Liberty Street North), turn south on Bethesda Road, turn east (left) on Stephen's Mill Road, proceed along Stephen's Mill Road to Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area parking lot.

Bring water and insect repellent (just in case).

Weather permitting, consider bringing a lunch

Don Docherty

Butterfly Garden Spring Clean-Up
Saturday, May 30, 10:00 a.m.

Can you believe that the Rossland Road Butterfly Garden has existed since 2004? That's 16 years! Just think how many pollinators this garden has nurtured over all those years. Imagine how many Monarch caterpillars hatched and grew up there. We've really provided a small oasis on the side of a very busy street in an ever-expanding city for these very important insects, as well as for the visual enjoyment of passersby.

There's lots to do to get the 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 garden thriving. The pollinators will love you!

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 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.

2020 DRFN Annual Weekend Outing, June 12-14

This year for our annual spring weekend outing we are planning on going east again to visit Charleston Lake Provincial Park situated northeast of Gananoque and about a two and a half hour's drive from Oshawa. <http://www.ontarioparks.com/park/charlestonlake> Its rocky landscape is an extension of the Canadian Shield, always a lovely place to be in late springtime. The park has 5 trails that are easy to moderate in difficulty. Two more are difficult. We will not pursue the difficult trails. We will be there to slowly soak in the beauty of nature not to try our stamina.

We also hope to visit the nearby Ontario Nature's Lost Bay Nature Reserve on the Sunday morning. There is camping in the park and nearby cabins to rent. If you have not already signed up, please let me know that you would like to join us by contacting me at dlgill@sympatico.ca. As of this writing the provincial parks intend to stay open and are encouraging camping.

Lois Gillette

Past Outings

Thickson's Woods – Winter Walk February 17

We had an amazing turnout of over 70 people for our walk around the woods and meadow. We split the group into 4 so that everyone would be more likely to see the birds and hear the leaders. The weather accommodated with reasonable February temperatures and lots of sunshine.

This was promoted as a fine opportunity to feed the Chickadees but we all hoped that we could find the resident Great Horned Owls.



Submitted by John Muzik

Thankfully they were helpful and a number of people saw one for the first time as they basked in the morning sun in one of the huge White Pines.

We didn't see many birds but 2 surprises were in store. Many saw a Catbird and Mockingbird in the meadow. Catbirds are normal spring and summer residents who head south in the fall. For some reason, a number of Catbirds across southern Ontario chose to overwinter this year.



Mocking Bird by John Muzik



Great Horned Owl by John Muzik

Mockingbirds have been expanding their range into southern Ontario. Will the one we saw stay in the meadow and find a mate? We'll have to keep visiting and see what happens.

Thanks to everyone who attended and those who volunteered and lead subgroups.

Don Docherty

Algonquin Park – March 14

On Saturday March 14, eleven intrepid souls drove on a cold, overcast morning, up to Algonquin Park in search of northern birds. We were a mix of excitement (my first trip to the Park), positive thinking (a prediction of certain sun by the time we arrived), and the usual camaraderie of DRFN members.



Submitted by John Muzik

On arrival we discovered that the Visitor Centre had been ordered closed, as of that morning. This was a disappointment for me as I had heard about the interesting displays and bird-feeder viewing. Not to be daunted (of course!) with Rayfield and Don leading, we headed along some icy paths to a lookout. During this episode, one kind-hearted member loaned me her extra spikes, even helping to attach them to my hiking boots; three gallant gentlemen offered me an arm at the most slippery parts of the walk; and we all arrived safely at the lookout....to.... no birds! (But the sun was shining!!!!) We retraced our steps in an attempt to get closer to the feeders when lo and behold, we were rewarded with a flock of Evening Grosbeaks in the trees, male and female, the sun glinting off their brilliant colouring.

We dallied for a while, enjoying this splendid gift.

This event was followed by a sighting of Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills in the trees as we walked to the cars.

We then drove to the Spruce Bog Boardwalk area and enjoyed a leisurely walk on this very pretty trail. We had been hoping for a Spruce Grouse. We did observe a newly pecked-out Pileated Woodpecker hole, the fresh bark at the foot of the tree. (Always something of interest.) And we had sightings of a Crow and a Raven. But as the path promised to become increasingly icy, we headed to the Opeongo Road.

Here was our next reward: as we stood around our cars (in the sun!!!) eating our lunch, in came the Canada Jays! The next portion of our trip turned into a friendly competition as to who could entice a Canada Jay to feed off an outstretched hand. Let's listen in:

“Ok, you’ve had a turn, back off!” “I want one to come to me!” “Try this nut, they like it!” “No!” “They like these yellow seeds but they don’t like my white jacket!” “Some people are hogging the show!” “Well move further away!” “I got one, I got one! Yea!”

(No these were not children; these were the lovely DRFN members.) And by this time the Blue Jays had joined us, swooping down for the gleanings on the ground.



Canada Jay by John Muzik

The Canada Jays continued to come and feed from our hands, along with the Chickadees, as we ventured down the (sunny) paved trail. From the colours of their tags, Don estimated that we had encountered three or four different families of Canada Jays along the trail. He also explained that they might be hiding some of the food for later. They often use their sticky saliva to glue



Submitted by Lois Gillette



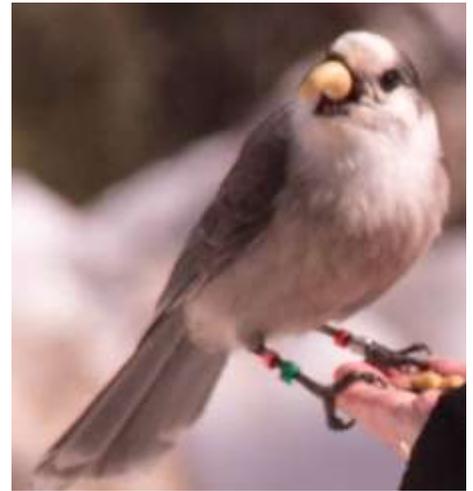
Submitted by John Muzik

small food items to branches, in preparation for colder days ahead.

When we got back to the cars there was a mixed flock of Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills, male and female, sometimes on the ground, sometimes in the trees. What a lovely close to a lovely day!

Mary Assaf

Canada Jay Bird Bands Seen



Canada Jay Bands by John Muzik



Below is how to figure out the Code AOBLCODR

The first 3 letters describe the top and bottom bands on the left leg. The 5th and 7th letters describe the colours of the bands on the right leg. The 2nd and 6th O means over. K = Pink

ROSLKOG (Cameron Lake Road, male, 9)

GOYLBOSR (missing green band; Opeongo Bridge, male, 5+)

WOSLROWR (Cameron Lake Road, female, 4)

ROLLPOSR (Cliff, male, 9+)

ROSLKOG (Cameron Lake Road, male, repeat observation, 9)

BOPLOOSR (Opeongo Bridge, subordinate bird, female, 1)

GOYLBOSR (missing green band; Opeongo Bridge, male, repeat observation, 5+)

YOYLWOSR (north Bog, subordinate bird, female, 2)

Don Docherty

Ontario Nature Report

Below is a letter from Carolyn Shultz to all Ontario Nature members.

Maria Prisciak

I hope you are doing well under these extraordinary times.

I wanted to let you know that Ontario Nature is closely monitoring the rapidly evolving situation to keep our staff and wider community safe, and to do our part to help flatten the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have cancelled some upcoming events and may cancel events in the future depending on how the coming weeks unfold. If you have registered for an event that has been cancelled, we will provide you with ample notice and reimburse your registration fees in full.

Please do not visit the office at this time. Our staff are working from home to facilitate social distancing and we have postponed all work-related travel. We do not anticipate interruptions to our services, though there may be slight delays. If you need to communicate with us for any reason, you will still be able to contact us by phone or email.

I want to personally thank you for your continued support during these extraordinary circumstances. Despite these trying times, our role as the voice for nature in Ontario does not end. I am humbled and so grateful to our resolute monthly donors and members during this time of health, social and financial upheaval. Rest assured, we will not let you, or the wild species and wild spaces in this province, down.

While practicing social distancing, I've found great solace walking in the woods near my hometown and feeling a personal connection with nature. Seeing and hearing the first migrant bird arrivals and other early signs of spring are uplifting. These are just one reminder of how important our mission is, not just for the health of wild species but for our own health.

If you have any questions, please contact us at info@ontarionature.org or 1-800-440 2366.

Take good care of yourselves and your families in the face of COVID-19. We are all in this together.

Stay safe,

Caroline Schultz, Ontario Nature

Executive Director

Nature FYI

SNOW FLEAS (aka SPRINGTAILS)



Many of us like the colder months because we do not have to put up with those pesky biting and stinging insects of the warmer months. Imagine your surprise when walking past a snowbank during a warm spell in winter and seeing what look like insects that dot the snow like dirt or pepper. On closer examination they catch our attention because they are jumping about on the snow. You might mistake them for fleas and in fact many people call them Snow fleas, also known as Springtails or Collembola. Their scientific name is *Hypogastrura harveyi* or *Hypogastrura nivicola*, depending on the species. Snow fleas although they have 6 legs are not insects. They are wingless and do not bite. They are known as hexapods a subtype of the arthropod family and some researchers say they are more closely related to crustaceans.

Why do people call them Snow Fleas? First, these small creatures happen to look a lot like fleas. Second Snow fleas also have the same super-powered jumping ability that regular fleas have. But unlike cat and dog fleas, which use powerful, enlarged hind legs to leap long distances, snow fleas have a sort of tail (called a furcula) that is responsible for their jumping. As the furcula unfolds, it launches the Snow flea over large distances up to 8 inches — hence the name “springtail.” Third, Snow fleas produce their own type of antifreeze, a protein that is rich in the amino acid glycine. Glycine prevents the formation and enlargement of ice crystals, enabling these creatures to keep on eating organic materials despite the bitter cold. You’ll see them on warmer days when the snow melts because Snow fleas are rising to the surface of the snow in search of new food sources.



Spring Tails by Kristen Osborne

Because Snow fleas live in areas rich in organic materials (like leaf litter), they are quite common around tree trunks. Snow fleas are small, about two to three millimeters in length, and they are blue-black in color.

Even though they look a lot like biting, parasitic fleas, we shouldn’t fear them. They won’t bite and they are excellent for your lawn and gardens because they help to decompose organic material. Male springtails distribute packets of sperm cells, attaching them to the substrate. Females pick up the sperm sacs, and the eggs are fertilized as they are deposited on or in the earth. The eggs may be laid either singly or in batches. A female springtail can lay 400 eggs in her lifetime.

So, get out there on one of those warm winter days and see if you can find a colony of these intriguing creatures.

Otto Peter

Marco Island Pays Residents to Protect Burrowing Owls

CNN reported in January that Marco Island city council is paying residents \$250 to host Burrowing Owls in their yards www.winknews.com/2020/01/26/marco-island-is-paying-residents-to-let-a-special-owl-burrow-in-their-front-yard/.

Burrowing owls were listed as threatened in 2017 by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. About 500 Burrowing Owls live on Marco Island but they are exceeding rare in other parts of the state. The Marco Island City Council agreed to set aside \$5,000 every year to pay residents who host burrows for the vulnerable birds. Wildlife crews will dig the holes, stick perches near the burrows to mark the entrance and give the owls a place to peer out. Then it’s up to the owls to move in.

Marco Island is the first in the state to enact a program like this. Since the grant was approved, Smith, a biologist with Audubon of the Western Everglades, and her staff have been inundated with calls from excited Marco Islanders ready to adopt. “Most people I’ve talked to on the phone didn’t care about the money,” Smith said. “People just want owls in their yards.”



Burrowing Owls by John Muzik

If you have visited Marco Island or plan to visit in the future, finding Burrowing Owls is very easy. There are 300 burrows, however not all are occupied. At dusk drive around the island and look for white posts with rope fencing that mark the burrows. The fencing is to protect the burrows from lawnmowers etc.



We visited in early March of 2017 and were able to observe the owls easily without disturbing them. We found the burrows on boulevards of many homes, and in vacant lots. February is nesting season and is the easiest time to find the owls on their burrow. If you are lucky enough to see chicks make sure you do not disturb them.

Visit Burrowing Owls of Marco Island Facebook site <https://www.facebook.com/OwlWatchFL/> to view videos of this year's chicks posted March 19th. They also have livestreaming events planned to keep everyone occupied while we are all practicing social distancing.

Nancy Muzik

American Birding Association Code of Ethics

Practice and promote respectful, enjoyable, and thoughtful birding as defined in this code

1. Respect and promote birds and their environment.

(a) Support the conservation of birds and their habitats. Engage in and promote bird-friendly practices whenever possible, such as keeping cats and other domestic animals indoors or controlled, acting to prevent window strikes, maintaining safe feeding stations, landscaping with native plants, drinking shade-grown coffee, and advocating for conservation policies. Be mindful of any negative environmental impacts of your activities, including contributing to climate change. Reduce or offset such impacts as much as you are able.

(b) Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger. Be particularly cautious around active nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display sites, and feeding sites. Limit the use of recordings and other audio methods of attracting birds, particularly in heavily birded areas, for species that are rare in the area, and for species that are threatened or endangered. Always exercise caution and restraint when photographing, recording, or otherwise approaching birds.

(c) Always minimize habitat disturbance. Consider the benefits of staying on trails, preserving snags, and similar practices.

2. Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members.

(a) Be an exemplary ethical role model by following this Code and leading by example. Always bird and report with honesty and integrity.

(b) Respect the interests, rights, and skill levels of fellow birders, as well as people participating in other outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience and be especially helpful to beginning birders.

(c) Share bird observations freely, provided such reporting would not violate other sections of this Code, as birders, ornithologists, and conservationists derive considerable benefit from publicly available bird sightings.

(d) Approach instances of perceived unethical birding behavior with sensitivity and respect; try to resolve the matter in a positive manner, keeping in mind that perspectives vary. Use the situation as an opportunity to teach by example and to introduce more people to this Code.

(e) In group birding situations, promote knowledge by everyone in the group of the practices in this Code and ensure that the group does not unduly interfere with others using the same area.

3. Respect and promote the law and the rights of others.

(a) Never enter private property without the landowner's permission. Respect the interests of and interact positively with people living in the area where you are birding.

(b) Familiarize yourself with and follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing activities at your birding location. In particular, be aware of regulations related to birds, such as disturbance of protected nesting areas or sensitive habitats, and the use of audio or food lures.

Birding should be fun and help build a better future for birds, for birders, and for all people
Birds and birding opportunities are shared resources that should be open and accessible to all
Birders should always give back more than they take

Member's Pics



Canada Jay by Lois Gillette



Squirrel with red tail by John McFeeter



Mocking bird by Margaret Channon



Cardinal by John McFeeter