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Executive Committee

President/Publicity: Lois Gillette
 dlgill@sympatico.ca

Vice President: Kristen Osborne
 kristen.osborne@hotmail.com

Secretary: Satu Pernanen
 spernanen@gmail.com

Treasurer: Ted Crichton
 tedcrichton@rogers.com

Programmes: Otto Peter
 opeter@rogers.com

Membership: Diane Peter
 dpeter@rogers.com

Outings : Don Docherty
 annanddon@bell.net

Ontario Nature Contact: Maria Prisciak

Conservation: Rayfield Pye
 raypye@interlinks.com

Newsletter: Nancy & John Muzik
 john_nancy_m@rogers.com

THE NATURALIST

DURHAM REGION FIELD NATURALISTS
 CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION
 www.drfn.ca drfn1955@hotmail.com

President's Message

Welcome to 2021! Hopefully a much better year than the last! Once again, we are in a COVID-19 lockdown. But we will continue to conduct our meetings via ZOOM. I hope that is working for you. If not give Otto a call and he may be able to help you with setting up ZOOM. Some of us are finding it very convenient. We can participate in DRFN's interesting and informative meetings from the comforts of our own homes. And there is no driving back and forth on cold, dark nights. Although the comforts of my home are wearing thin and we are all missing social contact.



Outings, of course, will be cancelled for the time being. Unfortunately, it is now not advised to wander too far from your home. So, birding will be limited. Derek and I have been keeping a list of the birds we see in our front and backyard and while out walking every day.

Even though COVID-19 is high on the list of worries for the whole world it is necessary not to forget that an even bigger concern is climate change and global warming. It was announced recently that 2020 was the hottest year on record. I hope you had a chance to see the documentary "Kiss the Ground". Netflix has it but you can also watch it through their website [Kiss the Ground Film | Official Website \(kissthegroundmovie.com\)](https://www.kissthegroundmovie.com). The film compellingly explains a method of farming that keeps CO₂, a greenhouse gas and major contributor to global warming, in the soil and sequesters more from the atmosphere. It gives a message of hope by suggesting that "When we regenerate the world's soils, we can stabilize the Earth's climate, restore local ecosystems, and create abundant food supplies"

And speaking of climate change and COVID-19, we now have in Ontario a government who seems more than happy to pave over and "develop" our natural environment, including a Provincially Significant Wetland

Upcoming Meetings

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

Time: 7:30 p.m.

*Place: **To be held via Zoom.***

Invitations to the video conference meetings will be sent by Otto Peter with instructions on connecting, via computer, tablet or phone including the URL and access code

January 25, 2021

Mike Burrell

“30 Top Spots to Bird in Ontario”

February 22, 2021

TBA

Newsletter Submissions

Please submit your pictures and articles for the January newsletter no later than March 15, 2021. Email all submissions to Nancy Muzik at john_nancy_m@rogers.com

. in Pickering. This at a time when it is ever more important to save natural areas to mitigate climate change and at a time when people are finding out how important natural areas are for their mental health and well-being and for their children! On nature's side is Ontario Nature <https://ontarionature.org> , Environmental Defense <https://www.facebook.com/EnvironmentalDefenceCanada> , CELA (Canadian Environmental Law Association) <https://cela.ca/> , Ontario Greenbelt Alliance <https://greenbeltalliance.ca> and a host of other concerned groups. You can let the Ford government know about your concerns via <https://ontarionature.org/take-action/advocate-for-nature/> . It's not too late.

Lois Gillette

Future Outings

Due to the COVID-19 stay at home order, there will be no Bird Feeder Tour this month. Depending upon the severity of the lockdown you still may be able to safely see some feeders and birds. Follow any Provincial Regulations that are in effect before heading out.

Do It Yourself Bird Feeder Tour

Thanks to the huge danger of COVID-19, we won't be doing a traditional bird feeder tour this year. The birds, feeders and habit are still available but group gatherings can be major points of transmission. The answer may be a personal/family drive. Earlier this week, I checked our usual route and a few more places and developed a template that you may wish to follow within current Government guidelines. The usual suspect birds this year are Chickadees, Nuthatches (Red and White-breasted), Cardinals, Downy Woodpeckers and Goldfinches. Norther Finches have come south so you may encounter Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, or Pine Siskins. Bohemian Waxwings may also stray south.

Here are my suggestions.

1. Feeders: Starting from Mount United Church (2993 8th Concession), drive east then north on Balsam Road. Drive north of Concession 9 and check the feeders at 2 houses on the right around 5388 Balsam. Aside from the usual suspects, I saw a Red-bellied Woodpecker at one feeder. Make a U-turn a bit further north at the parking area for the TRCA property then drive back to Concession 9.
2. Trees and Shrubs worth checking: Drive east from Concession 9 and Balsam to Sideline 2 and drive south. When you reach Concession 7, drive east to Lake Ridge Road then south to Highway 7 and drive west to Audley Road and drive south.
3. Feeder: Drive south on Audley to the first house on the east side and check the feeders. These have produced some great birds over the years so check the seed and suet feeders, the ground below and the nearby trees. The road to the south may also be productive.

We found a Flicker at the side of a tree that would have been easily missed. There were also a large number of Robins and Starlings further to the south. Make a U-turn and drive back to Highway 7 and drive west to Greenwood by turning onto Concession 6 and driving west.

4. Trees, Shrubs and Fields worth checking: Drive slowly along Concession 6 in search of Juncos and Sparrows feeding by the roadside. (This will be easy because they have installed numerous tank traps on the road.) We found a large number of American Tree Sparrows with the Juncos and a single, enduring Song Sparrow. Keep driving until you almost reach Westney Road and check the feeders at Barn Swallow Pottery and the house beside it. Check every Goldfinch for a streaked breast. Besides House Finches, Redpolls and Siskins are possibilities this year. We also had a Cedar Waxwing here.
5. Trees, Shrubs and Fields worth checking: Whitevale is an interesting hamlet to visit but road construction has made it very difficult this year. I suggest taking Whitevale Road (Concession 5) west from Brock Road. Investigate the birds that you see on the shoulders of the road and in adjacent fields and shrubs. I had a Northern Shrike and a Robin pop up as I drove. They landed on separate trees, stayed a short while then departed in different directions. When your passage is blocked and you're asked to detour I suggest turning around and heading home

General Guidelines:

- Drive slowly if there is no traffic on local roads and check the edge of road for Juncos and Sparrows. Check the fields for Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and more rare possibilities. If you see fresh manure spread on a field, stop and look more closely. If the manure attracts birds, check the tops of nearby shrubs and trees for Northern Shrike.
- Check hedge rows with fruit and seed. You may get Starlings but there are also lots of Robins in the area. Northern finches like Redpolls are also possible. With hope, Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings are also possible and we've seen them on Bird Feeder Tours in the past. (Keep a window rolled down a little. If Bohemian Waxwings are around, you may hear them first.)

We won't be meeting to enjoy a wonderful potluck this year but consider having something waiting for you when you get home. Canadian Living: <https://www.canadianliving.com/food/mediagallery/20-slow-cooker-recipes> , Chatelaine: <https://www.chatelaine.com/recipes/recipe-collections/canada-150-best-slow-cooker-recipes/#gallery/canada-150-10-best-slow-cooker-recipes/slide-1> and America's Test Kitchen: <https://www.americastestkitchen.com/guides/healthy-slow-cooker/slow-cooker-recipes> might interest.

Please send me an email if you would like to share interesting finds, good pictures or recipes. I'll share the results in our next DRFN newsletter. Stay Safe.

PS: Hopefully, next month, Rayfield and I will provide a similar trip template for area Gulls. It all depends upon the severity of the lockdown.

Don Docherty

66th Oshawa Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, December 20, 2020

Overnight the north half of the circle had snow and the south half had rain. The weather for most of the day was rain, drizzle, or fog. At 7 AM it was 2 degrees C and 3 PM it reached a high of 4 degrees C.

High Counts: Belted Kingfisher, Northern Cardinal, and Winter Wren.

CW- count week: bird not found on the count day, but seen 3 days before or after the count.

Km driving- 769, Kms walking- 125

Hours driving- 34, Hours walking- 76

Feeder Watchers: John and Nancy Muzik, Satu Pernanan, Mike McEvoy, Falmai Page, Otto and Diane Peter, Irene and Ted Warren, Dianne Pazaratz, Brian Reid, Kristen Osbourne, David Wysotski, Jake Munroe, Paul and Yvonne Dodgson, Craig McLauchlan, Al Brochu, Susan Smyth, Sam Miller, Tom and Margaret Graham, John and Diane McFeeters, Violet, Coral, and Susan Hall, Andrew and Holly McCallum, Izabella Balletine, and Marylin Curtis

Field Counters: Don Docherty, Kristen Osbourne, Rebekah Persad, Charmaine Anderson, David and Mary Beth Worthington, Glen Coady, Brian Steele, Gloria Levitt, Margaret Carney, Dennis Barry, Otto and Diane Peter, Jim McKnight, Joan Ellis, Dianne Pazaratz, Satu Pernanan, Randy Parisien, Brian and Simon Henshaw, Tyler Hoar, Michael Ferguson, Geoff Carpentier, Peter Hoganberg, James Kamstra, Greg Moon, Mark Saunders, Jay Thibert, Rayfield Pye, Lois and Derek Gillette, John and Nancy Muzik, Brian Reid, Lisa Corbeil, Rich and Mary Wannamaker.

Thank-you to Otto Peter for hosting this year's wrap up meeting on Zoom.

Thank-you to Otto Peter and Kristen Osbourne for modernizing the data collection system.

The data will be entered into the Audubon Society website.



Submitted by Kristen Osborne

Rayfield Pye

SPECIES	2020
Snow Goose	1
Cackling Goose	1
Canada Goose	7259
Mute Swan	98
Trumpeter Swan	9
Tundra Swan	1
Gadwall	51
American Wigeon	6
American Black Duck	79
Mallard	1227
Redhead	9
Ring-necked Duck	1
Greater Scaup	3042
White-winged Scoter	1
Long-tailed Duck	360
Bufflehead	229
Common Goldeneye	999
Hooded Merganser	3
Common Merganser	60

Red-breasted Merganser	392
Ruffed Grouse	2
Wild Turkey	79
Great Blue Heron	3
Turkey Vulture	CW
Sharp-shined Hawk	2
Coopers Hawk	9
Bald Eagle	1
Red-tailed Hawk	32
Rough-legged Hawk	2
American Coot	2
Killdeer	1
Wilson's Snipe	1
Ring-billed Gull	983
Herring Gull	172
Iceland Gull	1
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2
Great Black-backed Gull	17
Rock Pigeon	1329
Mourning Dove	1040
Eastern Screech Owl	1

Great Horned Owl	7
Snowy Owl	1
Barred Owl	3
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1
Belted Kingfisher	9
Red-Bellied Woodpecker	11
Downy Woodpecker	82
Hairy Woodpecker	25
Northern Flicker	2
Pileated Woodpecker	3
Merlin	CW
American Kestrel	2
Peregrine Falcon	3
Blue Jay	163
American Crow	102
Common Raven	8
Horned Lark	1
Black-capped Chickadee	1328
Red-breasted Nuthatch	70
White-breasted Nuthatch	129
Brown Creeper	6
Winter Wren	6
Marsh Wren	1
Carolina Wren	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	12
Eastern Bluebird	6
Hermit Thrush	3
American Robin	197
Northern Mockingbird	6
European Starling	2952
Cedar Waxwing	103
Yellow-rumped Warbler	CW
Eastern Towhee	1
American Tree Sparrow	181
Chipping Sparrow	1
Song Sparrow	12
Swamp Sparrow	1
White-throated Sparrow	54
White-crowned Sparrow	4
Dark-eyed Junco	519
Northern Cardinal	298
Red-winged Blackbird	64
Common Grackle	1
Brown-headed Cowbird	101

Purple Finch	2
House Finch	140
Red Crossbill	4
White-winged Crossbill	72
Common Redpoll	606
Hoary Redpoll	1
Pine Siskin	2
American Goldfinch	351
Evening Grosbeak	6
House Sparrow	303
TOTAL BIRDS SEEN	25476
TOTAL SPECIES SEEN	92 CW 3

CBC Pictures Submitted



Barred Owl by Brian Reid



Turkeys by Kristen Osborne



Eastern Bluebird and White-winged Crossbill by Lois Gillette

Ontario Nature Report

Welcome to the New Year. Ontario's wild spaces, forests, species at risk, and conservation areas are being targeted by the present municipal, and provincial governments. Check our Ontario Nature website to be informed on recent concerns, and take action to protect our precious wild spaces.

Ontario Nature's Nature Reserves trail systems will remain open, in accordance with the [**STAY-AT-HOME ORDER**](#) that was filed on January 13, 2021. We recognize that getting outdoors to connect with nature is a critical element of your physical and mental well-being, especially during challenging times like these as we continue to grapple with COVID-19. Please visit only trails in your local area and only with members of your household with a maximum of five people. Always maintain a distance of at least two metres from others and keep your dog on a leash. Please do not touch any railings, signs or other surfaces. We recommend that visitors wear masks. Please follow the current advice of health authorities, and federal, provincial and municipal governments. Stay safe and be responsible.

Annually, from November 1 to May 1, we do not maintain or inspect our trails. Additionally, any public spaces where people come together produces a risk of exposure to COVID-19. Use of our trails is at your own risk.

If you have any questions, you can reach us at [1-800-440-2366](tel:1-800-440-2366) or reserves@ontarionature.org. Thank you for your understanding at this difficult time.

Wondering what to do to relieve your boredom? Make sure you also sign up for our Pelee Island Research Webinar on February 2nd, in which you'll learn about the unique ecosystems found on Pelee Island, restoration projects including a controlled burn, and research to assess the effects of these projects on species at risk. <https://ontarionature.org/event/protecting-ontarios-environment-webinar/>

Calling all bird lovers! If you are interested in contributing your avian observations towards conservation research, we invite you to join the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas! This is the third atlas project launched by Ontario Nature in collaboration with various partner organizations. Atlas-3, much like the previous two atlases, aims to map out the distributions and populations of the province's breeding birds to help direct conservation efforts. Interested in getting involved? You can go to the Ontario Nature website and register online.

Conservation Award: Do you know a conservation hero whose efforts and accomplishments deserve recognition? Now is your chance to nominate them for one of Ontario Nature's Conservation Awards and celebrate their achievements!

Don't forget to look us up on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to keep update on current environmental concerns.

Maria Prisciak

Bear Quiz

Take Otto Peter's Bear Quiz. Answers can be found at the end of the newsletter.

1. What size is a polar bear cub when born?
(a) 25 cm, 1 kilo (b) 40 cm, 5 kilos (c) 50 cm, 10 kilos
2. Can black bears hibernate in trees?
(a) T, (b) F
3. What do polar bear females do to attract male bears?
(a) mark territory with urine (b) excrete pheromones from their paws (c) by growling
4. Polar bears can go for more than a month without eating.
(a) T, (b) F
5. Polar bears and black bears hibernate during the same time.
(a) T, (b) F
6. How long is the gestation period for a black bear?
(a) 270 days, (b) 220 days, (c) 150 days
7. What colour is a polar bear's fur?
(a) white, (b) translucent, (c) black
8. All bears are born blind, hairless and toothless.
(a) T, (b) F

Exciting Trail Cam Find

It is always fun seeing what lurks on your property when you are not around. We have had trail cameras set up on our cabin property in the past, but they were old, and not working great. Jim decided to order a new trail cam online from one of his favorite NY camera companies. At the time we did not have a mailing address since we were temporarily living at the cabin, north of Erinsville ON. Some of the DRFN members may recall the property, as we had an outing there a number of years back.

We had the camera shipped to our parents in Oshawa, which meant an hour and a half drive both ways to pick it up. So, approximately 3 weeks after ordering, Jim anxiously opened the package to set it up. Batteries in place, switch turned 'on' and...nothing. Didn't work. Argggghhh! Phone calls made to the NY camera company were made and after some frustration Jim managed to get the company to agree to pay for the return shipping, and for them to send out a new trail cam. We followed the tracking online of the second camera, and reluctantly paid the \$30.00 customs duty before driving once again to Oshawa to pick up the camera. Once again, Jim opened the package, batteries in, switch turned on, and...nothing. After fiddling around a bit with the batteries for a while, a light finally turned on, indicating at least that something in the unit had power. Seemed promising. Around 4pm, Jim hiked the trail cam down to the old homestead area, about 500m away from the cabin, set it up on a tree and crossed his fingers it would work.

The next day, after collecting the trail camera, Jim excitedly removed the card from inside and hooked it up to our computer. The very first picture on the camera, taken only about two hours after Jim had set up the camera, was of a bobcat! Yes, a BOBCAT! Wow! We thought that we had seen large cat tracks every once in a while on the property over the years, but now it was confirmed! The camera took many pictures over the course of that evening and morning...deer, raccoons, squirrels, birds, but no more of the bobcat. Those



pictures were the first and last that the trail camera took - it never worked again. We have since returned the camera to Bushnell, paid shipping for it, and are still waiting for an answer/refund. So instead of owning a trail cam, we are the proud owners of a \$150.00 picture of a bobcat. Although a frustrating experience with the trail cam, we feel the picture of the bobcat was worth it! All of the waiting, returns and dates had to coincidentally happen to get the cam set up for that exact evening when the bobcat visited! Lucky us.

(Although blurry, it is quite evident that this is a bobcat, *Lynx rufus*. A thick animal, with dark bars on the forelegs - unfortunately the stubby tail is not visible at this angle. Photo was taken on November 3, 2020.

Update: Jim went to Canadian Tire and got a package of two trail cams and they seem to be working fine.... we will have to see what they capture in photos over the winter!)

Kristin Robinson

December and January Member Submissions



John McFeeter had a couple of exciting days in December. He submitted this photo of a visiting coyote on December 1. He then submitted the observation below on December 2.

BIRDER's REWARD

While birding, keeping an eye on the sky is a given. On Wednesday December 2 shortly after 12 noon a truly rare, some would say a once in a lifetime rarity occurred in the bright clear sky for birder John McFeeters. It wasn't a bird; it wasn't a plane and it wasn't Superman. It was an extremely bright meteor that had entered the Earth's atmosphere at a 45-degree angle travelling at approximately 100,000 km per hour. The visual event lasted only several seconds but birder

John plans on entering this flyer as his best sky sighting to date.



Pine Siskins submitted by John Muzik



Turkey Tail fungus submitted by Kristen Osborne



Downey and Hairy Woodpecker submitted by John Muzik

Nature FYI- Is Flash Photography Safe for Owls

By Sharon Gynup for Audubon January 4, 2017

Owls have long been a source of fascination to people: The birds were imbued with wisdom and prophesy in early Indian folktales, considered a protector of ancient Greece, and even associated with witchcraft during the Middle Ages because of their “eerie” after-dark activities.

Part of this allure comes from their huge, round, forward-facing eyes, a feature that also makes them a popular subject for wildlife photographers. Yet the same nocturnal habits that linked owls with black magic also makes them difficult to photograph. To solve this problem, some photographers use flash—but whether it's ethical to flash an animal that relies on keen, night-adapted vision to hunt has become a source of debate.

Unfortunately, there's little scientific research on the topic, but we do know a little something about the way bird vision works. The eyes of owls and humans respond to light in the same way, says Ellis Loew, a professor of physiology at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. When the eye is exposed to bright light—like a flash firing in the dark—photoreceptor cells can become saturated. This causes brief “functional blindness,” a glowing afterimage that affects the ability to see and recognize objects. It can take anywhere from five to 30 seconds for vision to readjust.

Loew doesn't believe that a single flash, or maybe even a couple, would cause physical damage to an owl. But what if there were a group of photographers, say, in a photo workshop, all shooting at once or within a short time interval? Or a birding expedition coming regularly to the same location over weeks or months?

Depending on how many flashes, the frequency, and the total amount of light absorbed by the eyes' photoreceptors, Loew says that continuous exposure might have physiological consequences. With one flash, there's a short recovery time. But Loew thinks that repeated flashes at night might cause “flash blindness”: The photoreceptor cells might sustain temporary damage and would not “dark adapt” to the same level of sensitivity. This could lessen the bird's visual acuity at night, and it could take longer to recover from being flashed.

That would be particularly problematic if the bird is flashed when flying, as it might collide with an obstacle while temporarily blinded, or when adults are feeding their young and need to be searching for prey. “It takes a while to readjust after being flashed in the dark, and if during that time, a bird had to perform some critical life function, it would be at a disadvantage,” Loew says. “During that period, it could not effectively hunt.”

Some experts, such as Denver Holt, director of the Montana-based Owl Research Institute, argue that the educational value of these images can outweigh the potential risk—if the images are used for greater public awareness and conservation, for example, and the photographer works in tandem with researchers who study and understand the particular species. He allows limited use of flash photography when his team bands owls at night.

While the damage flash can have on an owl's vision is not definitively known, other photography tricks have more demonstrable ill effects, such as [baiting owls](#) and flushing them from their roosts in the quest to create dramatic images. These methods combined with environmental issues like habitat loss only increase owls' overall stress levels. In fact, many species were included on the [State of North America's Birds 2016](#) Watch List because they are at risk of extinction without concerted efforts to mitigate various threats.

“Fifteen years ago, you could probably do these things and it wouldn't matter,” says Gerrit Vyn, a photographer and cinematographer with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “But now the pressure cannot be ignored, with so many people affecting these animals day after day.” People should be aware of the impacts and make decisions accordingly, he says, always placing the bird's best interests first.

Bear Quiz ANSWERS

1. (a) 25 cm, 1 kilo
2. (a) T, they can hibernate high in trees, inside hollow trunks, under leaves and in dens
3. (b) The pheromones are spread as the females walk around and the males can find them because of their extraordinary sense of smell. They can smell a seal's breathing hole from 1.6 km away.
4. (a) True, if they don't eat for 7 to 10 days, they can slow down their metabolism to survive
5. (F) **Black bears** hibernate during the winter to conserve energy, stay warm and give birth. Only pregnant **polar bears** den up for the colder months.
6. (b) 220 days
7. (b) Translucent. Their skin is black. Their fur scatters white light so it appears white.
8. (T)