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# THE NATURALIST

DURHAM REGION FIELD NATURALISTS  
 CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION  
[www.drfn.ca](http://www.drfn.ca)      [drfn1955@hotmail.com](mailto:drfn1955@hotmail.com)

## President's Message

I am excited to announce that after two years away we are finally returning to in-person meetings at the Oshawa Civic Recreation Complex next month! We are planning for the April and May meetings to be in-person and we are excited to see everyone once again!



During the pandemic we only advertised our outings to members to keep attendance low in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions. With the loosening of restrictions, we thought it would be a great time to invite the wider community to join us once again. We are planning a "Birds and Bags" event for Earth Day this April. We will start the morning off with birdwatching in Thickson's Woods looking for early spring migrants. After some early morning birdwatching we are planning to move to a litter pick-up event. Small groups will spread out around Thickson's Woods, Thickson Road and along the waterfront trail. We hope you will join us to celebrate Earth Day.

I will end my message by reminding everyone that we are still searching for some new faces to join our executive committee. Below you will find descriptions of each of the positions, and we encourage you to reach out if one of these positions looks interesting to you.

I hope to see you all in person again soon.

**Kristen Osborne**

## DRFN Executive Position Duties

We are always looking for new faces to be on the DRFN executive. This year we have one position becoming vacant, that of President or Co-President and possibly other positions.

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

## Upcoming Meetings

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

*Time: 7:30 p.m.*

*Place: Note Beginning in April, Civic Rec Complex, Bobby Orr Room, 99 Thornton S., Oshawa.*

### **March 28 – Zoom**

**Speaker:** Jeff Bowman, “Flying Squirrels”

Jeff will speak on recent research on flying squirrels in Ontario, including updating the distributions of Ontario's two species and the discovery of their hybridization He will also discuss the use of ultrasound by flying squirrels, and the recent discovery that they are UV fluorescent.

### **April 25 – In Person at the Bobby Orr Room**

**Speaker:** Paul Laporte, “Woodland Plant Identification”

### **May 30 – In Person at Bobby Orr Room**

AGM and Members Night

## Newsletter

## Submissions

Please submit your pictures and articles for the May newsletter no later than May 15, 2022. Email all submissions to Nancy Muzik at [john\\_nancy\\_m@rogers.com](mailto:john_nancy_m@rogers.com)

**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.

**Lois Gillette**

## Welcome New Members

A special welcome to Durham Region Field Naturalists new members. We hope to see you at our meetings and in person at one of our outings.

Keeva Fitzpatrick  
Shannon Mawhinney  
Kate, Steve, Dylan and Keira Potter  
Melanie Simons  
Brian Wood

# Future Outings

## **Saturday, April 23 at 9:00 AM Thickson's Woods – Spring Walk**

Leader: Don Docherty

In celebration of Earth Day lets walk one of our favourite places and help by picking up the garbage that has accumulated in the general area. Plan to walk then we'll break into groups to pick-up garbage. Spring migration will be getting underway, so plan to welcome back Kinglets, early Warblers and Sparrows.

Difficulty: Easy walking.

Wear appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast. Wear appropriate footwear for walking conditions. Some black oil sunflower seed or a few peanuts would be appreciated by many of the residents. Bring a garbage bag and gloves. (We'll try to bring some extras and arrange with the city to pick-up afterwards.)

## **Saturday, May 14 at 10:00 AM Heber Downs Wild Flowers and Nature Walk**

Leaders: Wilf Bradnock

Heber Downs South Woods is a wonderful place to see a wide assortment of wildflowers in Spring. We will meet at Lyndebrook Road to access the south woods.

Directions: From Taunton Road go north on Coronation Road in Whitby to Lyndebrook Road turn right (east) and park on the side of the road near the end of the road. We will enter the South Woods from there. Don't block the street.

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. Bring water and insect repellent (just in case).

***Don Docherty***

## **Butterfly Garden Spring Clean-Up Saturday, May 28, 10:00 a.m.**

The Rossland Road Butterfly Garden, established in 2004, is still growing strong and still in need of an annual spring clean-up by its sponsor, DRFN.

There's lots to do to get the Garden ready for summer - edging, spreading wood-chips, weeding, pulling grass, pruning, cutting dead stalks, planting a few annuals, cleaning up litter, etc. Please come and lend a hand to keep this garden thriving. The pollinators will love you! You might even see the largest, most beautiful butterfly milkweed *ever*, poking its welcome stems out of the soil.

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. There are three gardens, so lots of space to 'social distance' if we still need to.

Note: Help is also needed over the summer – a couple of hours a week, or as often as you can come. Contact Dianne to arrange. A few members of Oshawa Garden Club helped last summer, which was much appreciated.

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

***Dianne Pazaratz***

# Past Outings

## Frenchman's Bay – February 26



Submitted by Maria Prisciak

Conditions were cold but clear for our morning trip. About a dozen came to see a good selection of waterfowl on open water of the bay. Walking was fine on the main trail but it got a bit tricky near the water with a lot of ice to deal with. The wind was quite ferocious in unprotected areas so we had to look quickly and move or be left frozen in place.

Signs of Spring were singing Cardinals from lofty perches and Juncos singing from low down in a small woodlot. In the bay, we found good numbers of Redhead, Greater Scaup, and Common Goldeneye. In addition, all three Merganser species were present as well as Mallard, Bufflehead and Black Duck. A walk south along the pier provided good views of

Long-tailed Duck and Common Goldeneye. We also saw an unusual Goldeneye that, upon expert review, proved to be a hybrid Goldeneye.



Hybrid Goldeneye by John Muzik

A few participants went to the other side of the bay for close looks at Mute and Trumpeter Swan. There were a lot of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls on the ice. One Iceland Gull was mixed in with the Ring-billed Gulls.

Our next outing should offer ducks and more as we head to Presqu'île Provincial Park. It's a popular place because of the different habitats that provide a wide assortment of birds.



American Tree Sparrow by Maria Prisciak



Redheads and Canada Geese by Maria Prisciak



Long-tailed Duck by Brian Reid



Greater Scaup by John Muzik

## Ontario Nature Report

Spring has arrived and it is time for our Lake Ontario North Spring Regional Meeting. It will be held on Wednesday, April 27th, 2022 by ZOOM.

On Monday, March 14th, seven environmental and community organizations filed a lawsuit in Federal Court against the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault. The lawsuit challenges the Minister's failure to designate the Bradford Bypass highway project for a federal impact assessment. For the full story and details about the groups involved check the ON website under media.

On March 11, 2022, Environmental groups attended the Ontario Court of Appeal in a case that saw the interpretation of key habitat protection provisions under the province's Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA) challenged. The town of South Bruce Peninsula is appealing its conviction for damaging Piping Plover habitat at Sauble Beach on the shores of Lake Huron. In 2019, the town of South Bruce Peninsula was convicted on two charges of damaging Piping Plover habitat, contrary to Section 10 of the ESA. The convictions were upheld on an initial appeal. The Town is now advocating for an interpretation that would seriously weaken the habitat protection provided by the ESA. This unfortunately is another example of endangered species across Ontario

losing ground in their fight for survival. Let's hope the importance of the survival of the Piping Plovers fate, is upheld again.

ON Nature Magazine for spring 2022, is a water themed issue, and discusses the presence, and preservation of Simcoe County's pure groundwater. It also looks at movement to designate rivers, lakes and other natural features in Ontario as legal "persons" with rights to self-preservation and legal redress. And a rare abundant population of Brook Trout in the West Credit River is under threat from a proposed wastewater treatment plant. Can this cold-water specialist be saved? Read the spring ON online and also check the ON website for more articles, events, and action postings, and be a nature advocate.

***Maria Prisciak***

## Letter from John Pratt (DRFN Past President 1975-76)

Dear Fellow Nature Lovers:

I am 91 years old and came to the Naturalist Club in my second year of teaching. I went to the Pape Ave. School in Toronto and got a job just up the road in Raglan where I had eight grades and 40 students. I was busy with teaching, farm duties and had no time for studying other creatures. But, on my third year I was at Pickering Beach a "paradise" public school, no less, with a nature sanctuary and marsh with flocks of waterfowl, snakes etc. I was an observer, then became a member of DRFN.

My dad and I gave a small piece of land for Camp Samac, just from the Simcoe St. entrance where the Scout Director's house was built. My first volunteering job was planting trees at Samac, my first job away from home. Many years later, after 32 years of teaching, I retired as director of Outdoor Education for Camp Samac. Thanks to my helpers and teachers and volunteers from seven clubs I was a member of. We were told it was the second-best camp in Ontario. Kids cheered when they set foot there. I wish I had proof of this. I am now in a wheelchair.

## The Haliburton Forest Wolf Centre

On February 10 of this year, I visited the Haliburton Wolf Centre with two of my photo buddies. We went to observe and to take photos of this wild unsocialized pack of Western Timberwolves roaming freely in a more than 7-acre forested enclosure. The large indoor facility consists of an interpretive centre, a theatre, two observation areas and knowledgeable staff to answer questions about all aspects of the wolves and their care.

Of course, the highlight of our trip was the observation areas where we had an upfront view of the 6 wolves in the pack, 3 males and 3 females. The wolves are viewed entirely from the inside through one-way glass. The day-to-day life of the pack is made as natural as possible with very little human interaction. They are fed mostly beaver, deer and moose on a random feeding schedule about every five days from donations by hunters and trappers as well as roadkill.

We were very lucky during our visit; all 6 wolves spent most of the time in sight and were relatively active so we managed to achieve some pretty natural shots of the wolves, both individually and interacting with each other.

A great visit!

For more information and to book a visit: <https://www.haliburtonforest.com/things-to-do/wolf-centre/>

***Maureen McVarish***



## The Mystery of the Blue Snow



On a crisp, sunny morning in early February, while reading the morning paper, Nancy suddenly looked up and exclaimed, “Who’s been drinking windshield washer fluid”? Sure enough, throughout the backyard there were several blue circles glistening on the snow. Convinced that the local rabbits and squirrels were not breaking into neighbourhood garages and having wild antifreeze drinking parties, I did some research.

It turns out the blue spots are the result of Eastern Cottontail Rabbits eating the bark and twigs of the European Buckthorn tree. The buckthorn produces phytochemicals through primary and secondary metabolism. It is

believed that the phytochemicals are consumed by the rabbit when it eats the bark or twigs. The compounds pass through the rabbit’s system and come out in the urine. Rabbit urine is normally yellow, but once the urine, tainted with the phytochemicals is exposed to sunlight, it turns blue in about 10 minutes.

An article posted by Lilian Opsomer in Publications Adventure, February 21, 2020, disputes this theory. She argues that chemicals usually turn blue when exposed to oxygen.

Whether it’s sunlight or oxygen, it is always wise to heed that old adage “don’t you eat that yellow, or blue, snow!”

***John Muzik***

# Why Don't We Announce the Locations of Owls?

By Elizabeth Kellogg

Reprinted with permission from the Willow Beach Field Naturalists Newsletter -

Question: I noticed recently on Facebook a heated discussion about whether locations of wintering owls should be announced on social media. Why is this a bad thing? I want to see an owl and would like to know where I can find one.

Reply: This issue has been a matter of much discussion since social media has made it possible to reveal the locations of wintering owls very quickly. Most owls are highly nocturnal so are difficult to find. Many of the people who are causing problems for the owls just want to see one, preferably up close. They have no idea that by trying to get close to the bird, they may be causing the bird stress. Small owls, such as Northern Saw-whets will often stay very still. This is their defense. A mob of people gathering around the bird's roost would definitely cause it stress. Owls repeatedly harassed at their roosts usually abandon those roosts.

Smaller owls are potential prey for larger birds, so they try to stay very still and hidden in the daytime. Predators such as Northern Goshawks will kill small and medium sized owls if they find them during the day. One winter at Amherst Island, a single goshawk decimated a roost of wintering Long-eared Owls that people had flushed while searching through the pine plantations.

Many of the northern irruptive species of owl are in the south because there is not enough food for them further north. They are often at low energy when they arrive and need to save that energy for hunting prey. Any disturbance that causes them to fly makes them use energy that they need for hunting.

Noah Cole has expanded on this topic in an [Ontario Nature blog](#).



Screech Owl by John Muzik

## Member Pictures - Winter



White-tailed Deer by Brian Reid



Snow Buntings by Brian Reid





This Red-tailed Hawk is a daily visitor at John McFeeters' yard.

John McFeeters shared pictures from his new toy a Smartphone Digi Scoping Adapter. This White-breasted Nuthatch is one he shared.

## Nature FYI

### House Finch or Purple Finch?

I have been birding for many, many years and find it embarrassing that I could easily confuse a House Finch from a Purple Finch. Both are Passerines in the Finch (*Fringillidae*) family and genus *Carpodacus*. Both are similar sizes although the House Finch is a titch longer- 12.5-15cm versus 12-15cm and a titch lighter 16-27gm versus 20-30gm for the Purple Finch, making the latter appear somewhat stockier.

The Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) is a moderately common winter visitor to Durham Region feeders. I can't remember if or when we have ever had one at our feeders. However, there are DRFN members who live about 5 km east of us that do get them regularly.

The House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) as the scientific name suggests is a recent newcomer having moved into the northeast possibly via the illegal bird trade in the 1940's, successfully expanding its population in the 1960's. They are now resident to urban and suburban areas and are a common sighting at Durham Region feeders.

Purple Finches remain mainly a forest bird migrating to summer in the boreal forest and overwinter in the lower Great Lakes area to the southern U.S. There is an eastern and a western population. Both males are shades of red. Bird guides show the House Finch with an orange tone and the Purple Finch with a purplish tone. But I have seen House Finches that look rosier than orange. So don't rely on colour alone.

The females are both brownish with streaky breasts. I actually got a good view of a female Purple Finch this winter and found that unlike its female cousin it has a very distinctive wide white patch on each side of her head. Her back and breast are also more distinctively streaked. The male Purple Finch colour extends from its

head and back into its wing bars and it has a whitish belly with rosy patches. The reddish colour on the male House Finch is limited to his head, face and upper breast plus his rump. The flanks are white streaked with brown. So now I will never confuse these lovely little birds again! (I hope).

**Lois Gillette**

**Male and Female Purple Finch by John Muzik**



Field Markings: Male - Raspberry red head, face and back. Distinct markings on the face with a lighter stripe behind the eye and malar stripe.

Female: pronounced white stripe behind the eye, malar stripe and dark streaky breast



More information on identifying finches can be found on the Project Feeder Watch site  
<https://feederwatch.org/learn/tricky-bird-ids/purple-finch-house-finch-and-cassins-finch/>

**Male and Female House Finch by Lois Gillette**



House Finch Field Markings:  
Male: red forehead and brown cheek patch and brown cap, white wing bars.  
Female: brown streaks over all