

Sunday February 28 – Amherst Island Hawks and Owls - Full Day 6 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Amherst Island in the east end of Lake Ontario is a well-known place to look for raptors in winter. Geoff Carpentier led a group of 13 NDN members and friends around the island on this fine winter day.

Once on the island we slowly drove around the roads keeping eyes peeled for birds perched on bare trees or soaring over fields. Both Red-tailed Hawks and Rough-legged Hawks were frequently observed with more than a dozen of each. At one point a Northern Harrier and a Rough-legged stood near each other among long grass while a Red-tailed Hawk flew over them. Several of the distinctive two-toned, dark morph Rough-leggeds were also spotted.

After driving for a while, we took a walk in the Owl Woods – a privately owned woodlot, where birders are welcomed. Soon we saw, a massive bird flapping overhead, followed by a second: two immature Bald Eagles, perhaps siblings. At an opening in the woods, bird feeders were setup where fearless Black-capped Chickadees were eager for handouts. They descended anywhere we placed seeds: in our hands, on our heads - anywhere. Further along the trail in a mature cedar grove, a pair of Long-eared Owls perched patiently in their roost. We continued searching more conifers for other owls. We soon found a lone Saw-whet Owl roosted in a small pine and not far away we spotted a second one. The bird sleepily opened its eyes, then watched us, unconcerned.

Back to the vehicles we drove more roads. Geoff spotted a distant nest high up in an elm. Through the scope we could see one Great Horned Owl sitting on the nest and a second standing beside her. In another field a Snowy Owl perched upright on a fence post, surveying the surroundings. Abundant black spotting told us that the bird was an immature.

It was time to catch the ferry back. While waiting, Geoff and Mark Dorriesfield scanned the expanse of ice to the north of the island with their scopes. They picked out six distant Snowy Owls resting on the ice. Four species of owls today so we were not disappointed!

Sunday February 7 – Snowshoeing and Winter Botany at the Nonquon Provincial Wildlife Area

10:00 am - Nonquon E.E.C. Pheasant Pen Site, 19745 Old Simcoe St., approx. 1 km N of Scugog Line 10

We were hoping for deep snow and ice to have a hearty slog through the frozen wetland. The winter has been inconsistent and no snow covered the ground on the day, however. Snowshoeing was a washout but 22 eager souls including six children came out for an outing led by James Kamstra and assisted by Cara Gregory. Without the summer foliage the extent of the wetland was more visible, and the wetland boundary was easy to discern. We were able to learn about some wetland trees and shrubs which are as readily identifiable by their bark as by their leaves. There was Paper Birch with its gleaming thin peeling sheets, Black Ash with flakey bark that rubs off and Balsam Fir with gum filled bubbles on the trunk. We also learned the difference between the two red twigged shrubs: Red-osier Dogwood and Silky Dogwood. Very similar but when the stem is cut the pith of Red-osier is white while the Silky pith is rusty. We had a good winter outing and learned some plants along the way