

North Durham Nature Club

A recent article about Citizen Science outlined the positive impact volunteers have on the scientific community. The next logical step from individuals gathering data is for groups to do so in an organized and systematic fashion. In this light, the North Durham Nature Club (NDNC) was formed this fall by a small group of local nature enthusiasts who wanted to put some structure to their passion. Meeting in a darkened cellar on a dead-end street (well not really, the room was well-lit and the road has two ends), they forged the concept for a new nature club to focus on Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge Townships, since this area was not well-represented by clubs surrounding our region. Gathering experience and dedication to ensure the formation of the club was successful was easy, for there is much knowledge and experience within our community.

The idea for the Club found its roots in myriad local wildlife projects and censuses (e.g. Durham Spring Bird Count, Christmas Bird Counts, CBC4Kids, The Brook Never Sleeps, bluebird nest box trails, migratory hawk surveys, butterfly and dragonfly censuses, marsh monitoring, and reptile and amphibian atlases). The broad knowledge base of our local naturalists and teachers ensure that adults and kids alike are exposed

to nature at its best – and what better place than North Durham! Durham Region is well known as a wonderful place to view and study wildlife, with its forests, fields and marshes. A stroll through the countryside may take one to the Nonquon River Valley, Lake Scugog, Durham and Glen Major Forests, Beaver River Wetland, the Seaton Trail, the shoreline of Lake Iroquois (really the edge of the Oak Ridges Moraine now), the Saintfield (Reach) Marshes and the Osler Tract to name but a few.



Building on important work that has been conducted in the area over the years, the NDNC executive has planned an exciting program to better document and protect the wildlife of the area and to introduce it to area residents. At least four outdoor rambles and four indoor speaking events will be held each year, utilizing the expertise of local naturalists and teachers. A periodic newsletter will

inform and teach about our flora and fauna. The future of Ontario's nature rests with future generations. It is fundamental that children develop interest early in their lives so that wildlife will be protected for generations to come. Fostering this awareness is essential to the success of this objective and the protection of wildlife, so the Club plans to develop youth-centred activities as part of its schedule.

More scientifically, the Club will start to compile inventories of local flora and fauna, with the goal of developing annotated lists of flowering plants, trees, insects, birds, mammals and reptiles/amphibians over time.



The Club's Executive is led by President Alan Wells, who brings a lifetime of experience to the group. Derek Connelly, Mark Stabb, John McLean, Nancy Melcher, Pat Asling, Jay Thibert and yours truly round out the Board's members, each bringing his or her own experience and knowledge to this new initiative.

The Club will play an important role in documenting and protecting the flora and fauna of North Durham. Visit the Club's website to learn more about its programs and

to get information on joining - www.northdurhamnatureclub.com.

This article was originally published in The Standard newspaper and was written by Geoff Carpentier. Photos of Northern Saw-whet Owl and Green Darner were taken by Geoff. Visit Geoff on-line at www.avocetnatureservices.com.

Beyond Our Borders

Does noise impact birds?

Recent studies show that it does and not in a good way. Ovenbirds sing louder near oil rigs in the boreal zone of Canada, expending more energy. House finches sing at a higher frequency in urban areas where traffic noise is excessive. European Robins sing more frequently at night to offset the competition with early morning traffic. All of these impacts, while subtle, influence the success of breeding males and the defense of territories. (Adapted from "Pure Bird Song" by Diana in Bird Watcher's Digest (Vol. 35. No. 4)).

Foxes and Shrikes Don't Mix

The Loggerhead Shrikes of San Clemente Island in southern California have been under siege for decades by foxes, feral cats, goats, pigs, cattle and sheep which either prey on them or destroy their habitat. Many of these animals have now been removed from the island, but the foxes remain and themselves need protection.

Scientists are using a unique deterrent to keep the foxes away from the shrike nests – a shock collar was affixed to the foxes and a shock antennae located at each nest. When the fox approaches

the nest, it receives a mild jolt of electricity and as such predation has dropped incredibly. (Adapted from “Survey Says - San Clemente Island Loggerhead Shrike” by Chuck Graham in Bird Watcher’s Digest (Vol. 35. No. 4)).

Cute and Cuddly – But Deadly

Scientists with Environment Canada have found that human-related activities destroy roughly 269 million birds and 2 million bird nests in Canada each year. Most human-related bird deaths (about 99%) are caused by impacts of feral and pet cats and collisions with buildings, vehicles, and electricity transmission and distribution lines. Cats appear to kill as many birds as all other sources combined. Feral and pet cats are believed to kill more than 100 million birds per year in Canada. An estimated 13.8 million birds are killed in Canada annually by colliding with vehicles. (Adapted from a report written by: *Bird Studies Canada and originally published in Avian Conservation and Ecology*).

Protecting Seabirds on the Isles of Scilly

A project aimed at protecting seabird populations on two of the Isles of Scilly by killing more than 3,000 brown rats is underway. The islands are home to breeding populations of 14 seabird species and approximately 20,000 birds. A similar project on South Georgia Island, is entering its third season and has been hugely successful, with much of the island now rat free. Seabird populations begin to recover within months of the eradication of these alien predators. (Adapted from Focusing on Nature and the SGHT website).

The club owes a special thanks to Jacquie Visconti who has created and maintains our website free of charge. At the website, upcoming events, photos, and articles about our events are displayed plus much more.

Closer to Home

The Aroma of a Winter Walk

Photos and story by The Nature Nut



William Blake said, “In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.” We have many reasons to

enjoy winter along the North Durham trails. This is the season when we can truly get a feel for the lay of the land. Our view through the woods isn't blocked by the deciduous tree leaves, allowing expanded views into valleys and up to ridge crests that are masked by summer's foliage. Wide, flat, clear valley bottoms are avoided until we're sure the ice on these ponds is thick and safe.

It's quiet in the winter. Often the only sounds we hear are our footsteps, the crunch and squeak of the snow



exclaiming our passage, step by step, across the landscape. There are fewer birds and their voices carry well through the bare branches. Chickadees and blue jays are reliable feathered companions

on our wintery walks, especially in areas with feeders well stocked with seeds. Woodpeckers tap out a staccato refrain on tree limbs high above.

However, evidence of other inhabitants abounds. Footprints in the snow mark the passage of rabbits, mice, squirrels, porcupines, grouse, foxes, and other residents of the woods and fields adjacent to the trail. Lucky observers may see where an owl or hawk has grabbed a meal as evidenced by wing prints left behind, each feather tracing its own distinct groove.

There aren't many local smells or tastes on the trail. "In the bleak midwinter, frosty winds made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow."



However, a flask of hot tea or coffee provides satisfying aromas, rich tastes, (especially when accompanied by some cookies or squares), as well as a warm glow in one's tummy. There is also the smell of pine tar when re-waxing wooden cross country skis, faint but intoxicating with the promise of adventure. The crisp, clean winter air refreshes as we resume our journey down the trail.

Our hands, encased in mittens and gloves, are deprived of the sense of touch. It's only when we remove the protective layers that we can

experience the tingle of snowflake crystals on our skin, the roughness of the wind's bite, or the tight grasp of a chickadee's feet using a finger for a perch. When the weather turns nasty, exposed faces take the brunt of the wind's wrath with stinging cheeks and prickling eyes.

In 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass' Lewis Carroll pondered, "I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says, 'Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.'" Bundle up – it's cold outside – and take a hike. Enjoy the stillness, the scenic forest vistas, and the chance to walk to places not easily reached in summer, on winter's quilt of snow.

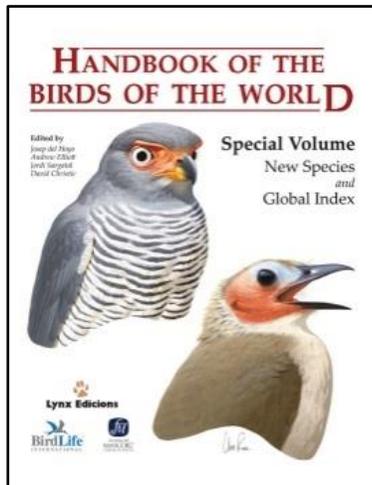
The Nature Nut is freelance writer Nancy Melcher. Her regular column appears monthly in "The Uxbridge Cosmos" newspaper. She enjoys observing the natural world around her home in the Trail Capital of Canada. You can ask questions about sights along your trails at TheNatureNut@bell.net. Her website is www.nancymelcher.ca.

Book Review

Handbook of the Birds of the World – Special Volume: New Species and Global Index. 2013.

Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott, Jordi Sargatal and David Christie. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. Hardcover 812 pages. 145.00€. ISBN: 978-84-96553-88-0.

Well it was bound to happen – any project has a beginning and an end and usually the end is a



welcome relief – but not always! I was sad to see the last volume published for I have been reviewing the Handbook of the Birds of the World books for 1 ½ decades – and for each of its 16

volumes, I always anticipated the thrill of opening its pages and seeing what marvels awaited me. I was never disappointed. Now that the project has ended it seemed necessary that the editors produce one final volume that would update the information presented in the previous editions – and so they did! The study of the links between species and speciation itself is an unending task for thousands of biologists and researchers, and the fruit of their labour is the clarification of origins and relationships between species and a broader knowledge base. Staying current with the many changes that happen almost daily is a difficult challenge and the printed media is at an immediate disadvantage, for once it is published it is likely already out-of-date ... but more on that in a minute.

Let's take a gander at this tome. As always the book opens with a series of essays on timely topics of interest. Herein these included topics such as the emergence of BirdLife International as a world authority. In this 60 page essay, the author discusses how this organization went from a council of experts to a global partner for most avian focussed organizations. Important milestones and anecdotal project vignettes

make this a very readable and important chapter. From its roots and early champions to its current international status, its history and achievements are outlined for the reader. Known, not only for the field work it supports, such as its Global Seabird Program to deal with the negative impacts of longline fishing and bycatch, its members also produce important works, such as "Endemic Birds Areas of the World and the Red Data Books. The next essay deals with the complexities of speciation and how it is in flux, due to new field and genetic work. This is a must read for anyone trying to figure out when a species is a species and how it got to be so. The author is an expert in his field, and although he clearly is an academic, he still writes in an understandable style explaining how shorebirds emerged from the avian soup and why a skua isn't really a gull, but rather an auk. The next essay, written by the same author deals with the approximately 126 new species of birds which have been discovered since the HBW series began. A great analysis of where new species are most likely to be found worldwide is presented and the concept of using Google Earth to find "hotspots" where unique vegetative types and subsequently new species might be found is described.

From here we go to the details of the new species which are the focus of this volume. Taxonomy, distribution, habitat notes, food and feeding, breeding, movements, and status and conservation are described for each species. Accompanying each species account is a very well done painting. So here's what you can look forward to – a new Kiwi, 8-10 tubenoses (depends who you listen to), 3 raptors, 2 wildfowl, 4 rails, 1 snipe, 5-7 parrots, 15 owls, 3

nightjars, 5 hummingbirds, 1 hornbill, 2 barbets, and 76 passerines.

So all is well and good so far, then a strange thing happened – the next 174 pages are dedicated to pretty pictures of birds. All very nice but why? Those pictured are not always rare or new-to-science species, and in fact are often quite common, such as Gentoo Penguins and Great Blue Herons. Now don't get me wrong, some of these are marvellous works of art, but The books closes with an updated bibliography, new indices and author listing - all will be very useful to the serious ornithologist, writer or teacher.

Now looking forward – can one reasonably publish a book like this annually? Probably not, but what if you could get it online where it is updated daily? Well, good news you can. Lynx has started another project – Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive”, where for an annual subscription fee, you can access current information on all the world's birds. This web-based service will include all the text and photos contained in the 17 volumes published to date – bonus if you've been waiting to buy your own copies. Add-ons like voice recordings, behavioural tips, links to other information sources, etc. are also available. The potential uses for this database are limitless, as information becomes more widely distributed via the web, this becomes a vital central repository for it. One thing I liked was the concept of wikicontributions – this means that anyone can enter tidbits of information that otherwise might be lost as there was no forum to share this type of info. So many things come to mind here – the story of my “smart” juncos

which learned to hunt the scraps dropped by Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers from my suet feeder, the hummingbird who hates Pine Warblers, the Osprey who wanted to clean its feet ... well you get the idea. Each of these factoids by itself is not a story, but together they can form a clear picture of biology or behaviour.

So there you have it --- visit www.hbw.com for more information and enjoy the HBW for years to come!

By Geoffrey Carpentier

Christmas Bird Counts

North Durham Christmas Bird Counts

For 114 years birdwatchers have been searching the fields, streams and roads of North America for elusive feathered creatures over the Christmas period. The official reason for the search is to provide data to the scientific community which uses the results to judge the health and distribution of bird species across the continent. Unofficially, 'birders' see the count as a yearly challenge to get out and beat the bushes in their locale and see if they can do better than the year before. The challenge is to see and/or hear as many birds within a 24 hour period as possible. In reality, most of the birding occurs in an eight hour period between dawn and dusk.

Each count area covers a circle with a radius of 7.5 miles. The weather, number and quality of observers and the nature of the environment have a great deal to do with the results of any count circle. Comparing the results of one circle to another is thus not possible but comparing one area from year to year is. North Durham has two very successful Christmas Bird Counts – Uxbridge and Beaverton – that cover much of Uxbridge and Brock Townships and part of Scugog Township.

Uxbridge Christmas Bird Count – December 27th
Derek Connelly – CBC Coordinator



This count has been operating for 9 years and was held this year following a serious ice storm. The ice storm made it difficult for birds and birders on the day of the count. Forty-five species of birds were seen, down from 53 last year, while 5644 individual birds were counted compared to 8367 last year. With ice on the tree branches, birds stayed in the underbush. Bird watchers driving the roads were not able to see as many as those out walking - or should I say sliding along ice covered forest trails and walkways.

Canada geese numbers were down 90% with all waterfowl crowded into a few open ponds. Another factor reducing numbers of species was the abundance of the seed crop in the forests of northern Ontario. This virtually eliminated the winter finch invasion. No redpolls, siskins, crossbills or grosbeaks were found at the feeders this year.

In order of abundance, the largest numbers of birds were Snow Bunting, Black-capped Chickadee, Rock Pigeon, American Crow and Mourning Dove. The most exciting bird was a Snowy Owl which was part of an invasion into southern Ontario from the north. Other owls noted included Eastern Screech, Great Horned, and Barred. A new bird for the count was the Merlin, a falcon, some may remember nested in Uxbridge and attacked birds at feeders near Toronto Street this year. Merlins usually winter in the US, but like some other birds, are extending their range to the north. Several woodpeckers including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker and Red Bellied Woodpecker also appear to be pushing their winter ranges northward to join our Uxbridge Christmas Bird count.

Our effort was also reduced this year with less time (29 h vs 41h) and distance (45km vs 72 km) spent walking and fewer feeder watchers participating (12 vs 17) compared with last year. Bird feeders had to be brought in and warmed up, to melt the ice on perches, and restocked after the freeze.

Thanks go out for all the birders travelling from near and far who braved the weather in the field, to those who counted from home at their

feeders, to Mark Stabb and Caroline Schultz for opening their home for our tally up and potluck and Kim Adams who inputted the data.

Final results will be available on our website www.northdurhamnatureclub.com and later on the Audubon website. You can also contact Derek Connelly at dconn50@powergate.ca to get complete results for this year and those counts in the past.

Beaverton Christmas Bird Count – December 30th – John McLean – CBC Coordinator

This is the 39th year the count has been held. The area stretches from Udora and Blackwater in the south to Beaverton and Woodville in the north. It also includes the extreme south-east portion of Lake Simcoe. During warm years, the lake can produce up to 10 water friendly bird species but this year it was a wasteland of fishing huts and blowing snow. Temperatures on count day ranged from a frigid -20 to -15 degrees Celsius but crystal clear skies and moderate wind speeds made conditions bearable for limited amounts of walking.

There have been a total of 102 species counted in Beaverton's 39 year history with a yearly average of 41 species and a maximum of 58 seen in 2006 when Lake Simcoe was wide open. This year we counted 39 species on count day and another 4 during count week (three days before and after the actual count day). We were pleased with the totals considering frigid conditions and lack of open water on the lake and on the rivers. Significant sightings included 4 Snowy Owls, 10 Red-bellied Woodpeckers (5 times as many as in the past) and record numbers of Cardinals (98) and Horned Larks

(31). One forlorn Belted Kingfisher somehow found enough open water at the dam in Cannington to fish for its food supply. Wild Turkeys, though exceeding 100 were down in numbers from previous years. Hawk species were sparse because the icy snow covering prevented them from accessing their rodent prey. Feel free to contact John McLean at jmclean@powergate.ca to obtain a copy of all the birds observed during our count period and, if interested, for the past 39 years.



We were very pleased this year to have a record number of observers in the field including a handful from North Durham Naturalist Club. We hope to expand the number in the future both in the field and at feeders because it allows us to bird more intensively and therefore to more closely reflect the actual number of birds in our area.

By John McLean with photos by Geoff Carpentier



Food For Thought

Four Reasons You Should Be Drinking “Bird-Friendly” Coffee



1. Growing coffee this way saves forests, which saves birds.
2. It's environmentally friendly in other ways, too – for example, no pesticides or chemical fertilizers are used to grow it.
3. Official certification of the coffee requires that a farm must have a minimum 40 % shade cover, at least 11 species of shade trees and a canopy at least 12 meters high.
4. It guarantees fair, stable prices for even the smallest of coffee producers.

Nature Vignette

A regular feature of this newsletter will be introduced in our next issue as we share nature spots and the natural history of North Durham.

Board News

It is a pleasure to share with the members and friends of North Durham Nature, news from your Board of Directors. NDNC just started in mid-September of 2013 by a small group of interested people. From that group, we formed the Board consisting of Pat Asling, Nancy Melcher, John McLean, Geoff Carpentier, Jay Thibert, Mark Stabb, Derek Connelly and Alan Wells. The board represents a good cross section of experienced naturalists from North Durham. We are committed to carrying out the NDNC mission to foster awareness and appreciation of nature through education, observation and experience, and to promote the protection and conservation of the environment through community activities.

We now have 44 individual and family members and your Board is committed to providing interesting program meetings and field trips. Our October Meeting featured Geoff Carpentier on the flight of Hawks and in November James Kamstra provided an informative presentation on Butterflies. Derek Connelly is our very active program planner and he has lined up four exciting meetings for 2014 starting in February to May: details of our events and field trips are on our website and will be forwarded to you by email. The Fall program will be announced later.

Thank you for joining North Durham Nature Club and please contact us with your field

information, suggestions and interest in volunteering to make your club a success.

By Alan Wells, President NDNC

Club Events

Talks 2014

February 26 - 7 pm: Coywolf with Susan Fleming at the Uxbridge Seniors Centre

March 27 - 7pm: "Home Sweet Hole": The Life of Local Cavity Nesters by Mark Stabb at Scugog Memorial Library

April 24 - 7 pm: Amphibian and Reptile Atlas by Tanya Pulfer at Scugog Memorial Library

May 28 - 7 pm: Algonquin Park Birds by Ron Tozer at Uxbridge Seniors Centre

Outings 2014

January 26 – Bird Feeder tour - Members ONLY – Derek Connelly

March 23 – Duck Migration- Lake Scugog- Geoff Carpentier

March 29 – Cavity Nesters – Lafarge Pit Bird Boxes installation- 7th Concession, Uxbridge Mark Stabb

April 24 – Amphibians with James Kamstra

For more information about NDNC

<http://www.northdurhamnatureclub.com/070~Contact Us/>

Board of Directors:

Alan Wells – President/Treasurer

Derek Connelly – Vice-President

Mark Stabb – Secretary

Pat Asling – Director at Large

Nancy Melcher – Director at Large

John McLean - Director at Large

Geoff Carpentier – Newsletter

Jay Thibert - Director at Large

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John McLean - Editorial Assistant

Nancy Melcher- Editorial Assistant