

Birdathon 2016

It's hard to believe that another year has passed since I did the Birdathon. Bird Studies Canada (BSC) sponsors the Great Canadian Bird-a-thon annually to fund volunteer research projects in Ontario and



other parts of Canada for the benefit of wildlife. Thanks to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, over \$250,000 was raised last year for this ambitious project. The monies are distributed to individuals and groups who are working on projects to protect, enhance and study bird populations. Some of the recent projects funded by the Bird-a-thon include ones that focus on owls, Piping Plovers, Purple Martins, bird banding stations, Loggerhead Shrikes, seabirds, breeding bird atlases and Barn Owls, to name a few. Most of these worthwhile projects could not survive without your generous donations.

I will be doing the Bird-a-thon in late May 2016 in support of North Durham Nature.

I'll be out for about twenty-four consecutive hours looking for birds between Ajax, Oshawa, Port Perry, Kirkfield, Algonquin and environs. Annually I find in excess of 155 species of birds and last year I found 171 species – my best ever! I raised over \$2600, 25% of which came back to our Club to support our own projects.

But I can't do this without your financial support. I believe in and support these projects and would ask you to consider pledging your support this year to help North Durham Nature and the birds!

Send me an email or snail mail or better yet do it online – fast and easy! My personal website to make a donation is:

<http://birdscanada.kintera.org/birdathon/geoffcarpentier>

AGM 2016

by Jay Thibert

On February 25th, North Durham Nature held its second Annual General Meeting at the Port Perry Public Library. President Derek Connelly was pleased to report that the past year has been a very successful and busy one for our group. He reported that in 2015 our events included six nature talks, a feature film, eleven outdoor experiences, and other conservation activities such as

our bird box project. He was also pleased to see North Durham Nature partnering with other groups and noted that we helped two teens attend the Ontario Nature Camp this past summer. Derek reminded us that the coming year holds many interesting opportunities for members and he hoped that more families and children would join us to conserve and protect nature in North Durham.

He gave special thanks to two board members who are stepping down from active board duties. Alan Wells, Past-President and John Mclean were praised for setting the foundation of North Durham Nature on firm ground during their tenure on the board. James Kamstra and Carol Asperon were welcomed as new board members.

The meeting continued with a presentation from Michael Measure, the founder of F.L.A.P. (Fatal Light Awareness Program). He made it very 'clear' that many migrating song birds are killed and injured due to collisions with buildings. He discussed solutions that are within our grasp and urged everyone to take the necessary actions. He was also very pleased that the film "The Messenger" was shown in Uxbridge on March 6, 2016. Visit the FLAP website ...



Cats at Large

Recently both Uxbridge and Scugog Councils advised that they had asked staff to review municipal bylaws to determine if a Trap-Neuter-Release amendment to local bylaws should be considered for feral cats. Simply stated this means, should the Township support catching feral cats, neutering and micro-chipping them, giving them health check-ups and shots and then releasing them back into the landscape at a cost of about \$100/cat? This initiative was brought forward by a group called Action Volunteers for Animals.

This is a complex issue and the Board of Directors has taken a stand against this initiative and has written to both Councils in this regard.

Feral cats are a devastating influence on native wildlife. Recent studies show that, in Canada, cats-at-large (i.e. free-ranging house cats and feral cats) annually kill approximately five per cent of Canadian birds — that's 269 million birds killed every year in Canada by cats. Around the world, domestic cats are recognized as a threat to global biodiversity and are known to have significantly contributed to the extinction of 33 species. The impacts are so great that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) now lists domestic cats as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species.

TNR programs have been proven historically to be ineffective and in fact often generate outcomes exactly opposite of what is desired. There are many reasons for this, but one that stands out is the fact that people became complacent about

releasing their pets into the wild as they know someone else will care for them. This is a common and negative outcome of TNR.

Uxbridge touts itself as the Trail's Capital of Canada and Scugog proudly encourages residents and visitors to explore its flora and fauna. Cats-at-large and feral cats are not part of a natural community and never have been. They are as alien as Phragmites or Emerald Ash Borer and, at least for wildlife, more devastating. There is no place for them anywhere in a natural environment and, if anything, they should be eradicated not fostered.



The Board realizes this is an emotional issue but is forfeiting the lives of millions of birds and mammals justification enough to permit these uncontrolled predators from devastating local populations? Is it not enough that climate change, habitat loss, pesticides, and urban sprawl have diminished MOST of the songbird and grassland populations in North America by 50-70% over the last 50 years?

There is much information on the web to better explain the devastating impacts cats have on avian, amphibian and mammalian

populations. Another new intuitive has just been announced called "Keep cats safe and save birds lives" (www.catsandibrds.ca) that explains how keeping cats indoors can not only save them but will ensure that millions of wild animals are not unnecessarily killed each year.

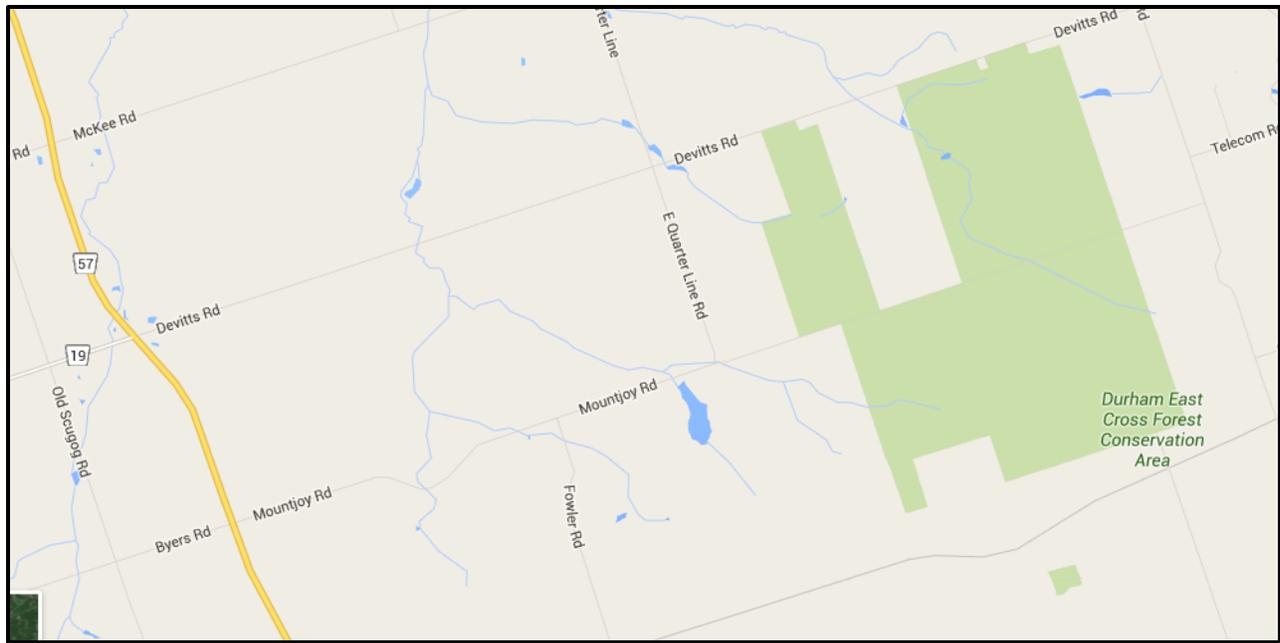
I wrote an article for OFO News (Ontario Field Ornithologists) on the impacts of feral and free-ranging domestic cats recently that explains in more detail the impacts on avian, mammalian and reptilian populations. If you're interested, visit my website (www.avocetnatureservices.com) to read the entire article. If you feel strongly about this issue, please write to Uxbridge and Scugog Councils and express your concern.

Secret Garden

From Trashed to Treasured East Cross Forest Conservation Area

by Mark Stabb

Before the ATV-using community got organized and helped establish trails across Ontario, unauthorized, off-road vehicles used to spread rapidly from areas of high usage to areas of low usage across the landscape. The internet and social media spread the word widely about unattended, unprotected lands that were ripe for pirate ATV recreation. (It still does). The East Cross Forest was one of the victims.

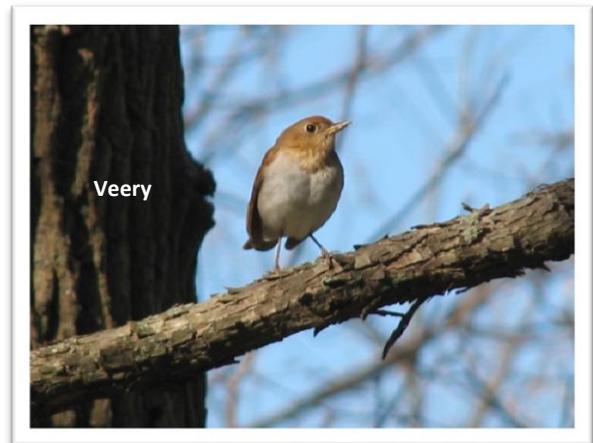


East Cross Forest Conservation Area, managed by Kawartha Conservation, now protects the core of the larger 3350 acre (1355 hectare) forest. It was once a mecca for off-road use of all sorts, and there are many former users that probably lament the “wild west” days that essentially trashed the core of the forest. I have personally seen 6-8 foot deep trenches made in the mud along formerly travelled trails.

The protection started with a donation of the 552 acre (223 hectare) Huculak property to Kawartha Conservation, a project completed in 2006 with the help of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and Durham Region. This was the most damaged area in the heart of the forest. Since then the Conservation Authority has built a 1334 acre (540 ha) network of conservation lands and a much-appreciated area for non-motorized trail use. Snowmobile use is allowed along a specially-designated route.

From the Kawartha Conservation website:

“Durham East Cross Forest Conservation Area protects an ecologically sensitive part of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Here you will find springs, seepage areas, and wetlands that form the beginnings of East Cross Creek and Pigeon River, along with significant wildlife habitat and natural features. There are currently over 7 km of sustainable trails. They offer excellent



hiking, bird watching, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and snowmobile access for Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) members. Along the way, you will pass through sugar

maple forests, pine plantations, open meadows, and sand barrens. You can spot many unique species of birds, such as Wood Thrush, Canada Warbler, Northern Flicker, and the Savannah Sparrow.”

A long-term habitat restoration plan is now well-underway and plans are in place to acquire more lands for conservation. There is also a volunteer-based natural history exploration known as a “bio-blitz” planned for this spring (May 13 and 14). Visit their website at:

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/blitzing-the-moraine-registration-22743509449?ref=enivte&%3Binvite=OTY1Mjc1NS9qb3NoLmZlbHRoYW1AZmxlbWluZ2NvbGxIZ2UuY2EvMA%3D%3D%2F%3Faff%3Defbnreg>

The Oak Ridges Moraine has many spectacular, intact natural areas, but it needs more areas like East Cross Forest restored to connect natural features across this significant landscape. And given time and care, places like the once-wounded, now recuperating East Cross Forest will again regain their full biological strength.

Book Review

Birds of Botswana. 2016. Peter Hancock & Ingrid Weiersbye. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540. Softcover 398 pages. \$29.95US. ISBN13: 978-0-691-15717-7.

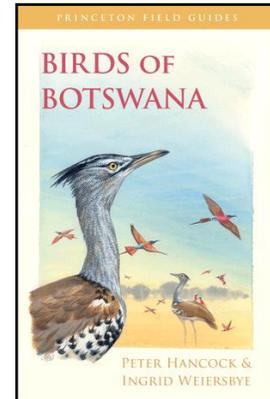
As more and more people travel, the value of field guides be they for birds, mammals, butterflies or

reptiles, rises with one’s interest. When I was a youth, everyone touted the Peterson guides as ground-breaking and they were, but today’s guides far

surpass anything that was out there when I was a kid. The scope of these books is narrowing and the quality rising. I was pleased to see this new book as I hope to go to Africa next year as a guide if the trip sells (hint hint – wanna go with me to Tanzania?). There is a lot of overlap between the birds of Tanzania and Botswana, so this book will assuredly be helpful to me and others who travel to Africa.

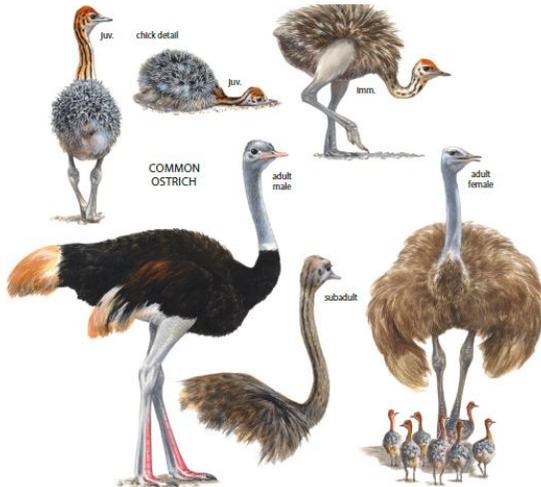
One of the things I find most difficult to identify in Africa and Asia are the raptors as these aren’t treated very well in most of the books. So that’s where I looked first when evaluating this book – and I wasn’t disappointed. I dare say this book has offered the best treatment I’ve ever seen for the hawks, eagles and vultures of Africa. The level of detail and the multiple poses they offered will make the task much easier.

Every one of the 597 species accounts offers dates you might expect to see it, where (map), ID features, size, calls, status, abundance, habitat and conservation needs. All in all this has already become a valuable part of my library and I look forward to using it next year in a true field test. I think my life



list is going to love it!

I've included a copy of a page from the book (below) so you can see how high quality the paintings are and how much detail is provided.



Club Outings & Events

Amherst Island Field Trip – February 28

by James Kamstra

Amherst Island in the east end of Lake Ontario is a well-known place to look for raptors in winter. The island is blessed with many old fields and rough pastures that support high densities of Meadow Voles, and coniferous woodlots that provide good roosting sites. In addition the island is strategically located for migrating birds so many raptors stay for the winter where they find the abundant food supply. Geoff Carpentier, freshly back from the

tropics, led a group of 14 NDN members and friends around the island on this fine winter day.

First we had to get there. A car-carrying ferry leaves Millhaven on the mainland, pushing its way and breaking up a linear passage through the ice on a 15 minute crossing. Once on the island, we assembled, and then 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 while a Red-tailed Hawk flew over them. Several of the distinctive two-toned, dark morphed Rough-legs were also spotted.

After driving for a while, all were eager to get out of the vehicles to take a stroll to Owl Woods. We followed an unplowed, icy concession road surrounded by fields - watch your step! A massive bird flapped overhead, followed by a second: two immature Bald Eagles, perhaps siblings.

At an opening in the woods bird feeders were set up where fearless Black-capped Chickadees were eager for handouts. They descended anywhere we placed seeds: in our hands, on our head or chest. Derek Connelly tried coaxing a chickadee to look through his binoculars by strategically

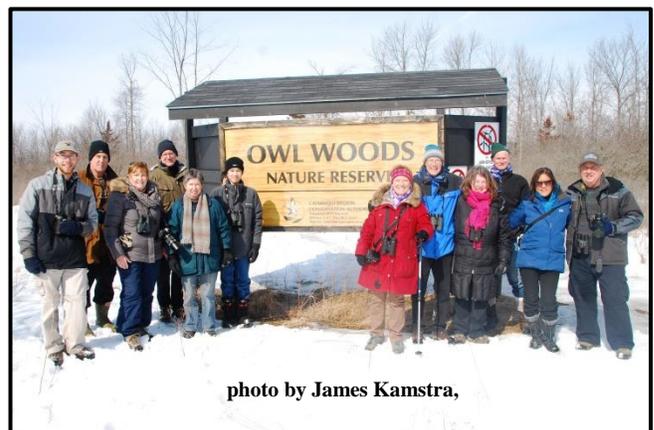


photo by James Kamstra,

placing black oil seeds. Further along the trail in a mature cedar grove, a pair of



Long-eared Owl

Long-eared Owls perched patiently in their roost. With wide yellow eyes, the owls portrayed alertness as they stared back at us, aware of our presence but seemingly unperturbed. We continued searching more conifers for other owls. A lone Saw-whet



Northern Saw-whet Owl

Owl roosted in a small pine and not far away we spotted a second one. The bird sleepily opened its eyes, and then watched us. They two were not particularly concerned about gawking humans, we just had to be quiet and maintain a comfortable distance.

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. This bird is a very early nester and was likely already on eggs. 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.

We stopped in the tiny hamlet of Stella where we caught sight of a frantic flapping black blob of birds on the ground. Two Starlings were engaged in serious battle, beaks poking at each other, and feet grabbing. They were oblivious to a nearby barking dog and we humans. Bright yellow beaks meant they were in breeding mode, likely two rival males fighting over a choice nest hole. This went on for several minutes; in fact the Starlings were still on the ground, one clutching the feet of the other when we left them.



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.

On the crossing, one adult Glaucous Gull was noted resting among Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls to top out our daily bird list at 37 species, including four species of owls so we were not disappointed.

Snowshoe / Winter Botany Hike to Nonquon Outdoor Education Centre Sunday February 7

by James Kamstra

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 White 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



Mark Stabb (left back row) guided us through the unique hardwood, wetlands and field habitats at the Goodwood track. (Photo by Jay Thibert)

Goodwood Tract - March 20

by Mark Stabb

North Durham Nature members and guests spent the first day of spring searching for the first actual signs of spring at the TRCA Goodwood Tract. This included searches for the first spring flowers, which are often found on trees, such as poplar, with male and female flowers on separate trees. Many trees and bushes were in bud already and easily studied. Downy Woodpeckers were displaying and drumming, indicating that their breeding season was underway, well before most migratory species returned. The 1.5 hour walk, mainly along the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, crossed several clean, healthy tributaries of West Duffins Creek and culminated in a fine older growth hardwood stand.

Chickadees, cardinals, nuthatches, Song Sparrows and Pine Siskins sang their spring song for us and brightened a frosty day.

Colombia

Geoff gave an entertaining talk on the club's recent trip to Colombia at our March meeting, where six of us joined 4 members of the Toronto Ornithological Club and a writer from Oshawa on this wonderful action packed trip. Geoff's talk highlighted the rapid development of the eco-tourism industry in Colombia and explained how they have gone from a country run by FARCS, para-military and guerillas to a world leader in eco-tourism in less than 10 years. Over 500 species of birds, and zillions of butterflies, reptiles, mammals



and the like were observed as we explored the riches of Colombia.



Rufous-tailed Hummingbird

Nifty Nature Notes

Upcoming Butterfly Events in North Durham

photo and story by James Kamstra

Butterflies can be seen on the wing in meadows and marshes during the warm sunny days of spring and summer. Two butterfly events are happening and we are looking for eager participants: the Durham Butterfly Blitz on June 26th and the Sunderland Butterfly count will take place on Sunday July 3rd.

The Ontario Butterfly Atlas (http://www.ontarioinsects.org/atlas_online.htm) is a Citizen Science project that is currently documenting butterfly distribution across the province. The purpose of the Durham Butterfly Blitz is to document butterfly species in portions of Durham Region that have not yet been well covered by the atlas. Groups will be sent

out to different areas to search for and record these delicate winged wonders.

Meanwhile the Sunderland Butterfly Count is a group effort designed to document the number of butterflies within a designated 25 km diameter circle in North Durham (includes portions of Brock, Uxbridge and East Gwillimbury Townships). In 2015, 34 participants in 12 parties tallied 52 species and 4626 individual butterflies. Butterfly counts are becoming more popular with 32 held across Ontario last year, the most ever. Each year Sunderland has one of the highest species counts and boasts a high level of participation. In 2014, 62 species were counted, the highest ever on an Ontario butterfly count.



If you would like to participate in either the Butterfly Blitz or Sunderland Count (or both), please contact James Kamstra before the count dates at (905) 985-4497 or email at james.kamstra@aecom.com. Inexperienced counters will be put into parties with at least one expert. These are whole day events starting at 8:30 am. We break into parties of between 2 and 5 people and attempt to find all species and count individual butterflies in our respective areas. The day ends with a grand tally at a local restaurant.

Monarchs

photo by Kim Lendvay

Did you know that Monarchs have made a big come back? The area occupied in their wintering grounds is >3.5 times larger than last year. It is interesting that when assessing Monarch populations, areas are used rather than numbers. It is very hard to count them individually as they cluster on the conifer roost trees, so the area they occupy is used instead. In 2013, they covered 0.67 hectares (ha.), in 2014 1.13 ha. and in 2015 ~4 ha. But all is not totally rosy as they start their 5500 km.



northbound migration. Twenty years ago, the wintering area covered 18+ ha. People are encouraged to plant milkweed and other pollinator friendly plants and this is showing a positive impact, but don't stop now!

Grammatically Correct Birds?

A recent study Japanese study published in Nature Communications has found that the Japanese Great Tit seems to be able to put various sounds and calls in sequence so they have meaning similar to sentences we might construct. They found that these birds followed the general rules of syntax (i.e. forming words into a sentence to convey meaning) when communicating

with each other. Simply stated, if we said “trees to at nice look are”, it would have little meaning even though we know what each word means. But put them in sequence and the intent of the phrase becomes clear – “trees are nice to look at”. A bird might make 10 different sounds, each of which has some meaning to them. But placed in a correct sequence they might convey a different meaning. At home, we hear the familiar chickadee use various soft sounds, seemingly at random, but could they actually be speaking to each other: “here’s food”; “there’s a predator”; “time to go to our night roost”, “hey fill that feeder buddy”?

Sounds a little hard to believe – but think about it. Ever notice that when you fill your feeders, the chickadees always make a series of identical sounds? Or when the crows frequent your yard, they have a series of sounds to announce food, fear or predators? The authors of this article have made fascinating observations, which should make us think. If you want to read the entire article, here’s the link:

<http://www.nature.com/ncomms/2016/160308/ncomms10986/full/ncomms10986.html>

Great Canadian Backyard Bird Count

An amazing 5589 species were reported in the 2016 Great Backyard Bird Count – topping 50% of the world’s bird species for the first time!

Over 150,000 checklists were submitted and 149 countries participated. Despite the frigid weather, Canadians contributed an astounding 13,447 checklists. Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Québec exceeded their previous checklist records. The Canadian species

total was 245. To read more
<http://www.birdscanada.org/>



Step Outside Nature Guide

by Jay Thibert

Your involvement with North Durham Nature identifies you as a person that is curious about seasonal changes in our natural world. How would you like a guide that arrives in your in-box two or three times a month that is a compilation of seasonal happenings in our area?

That guide is called “**Step Outside - Your Guide to Nature’s Events**” and it is presented by Resources for Rethinking (www.R4R.ca). The guides detail specific floral and climatic events, which are often taking place just outside your door - though these may happen sooner or later depending on your location. The guide is aimed at

teachers and their students, but I have found that anyone that wants to learn about natural history will love these guides.

Here are the latest editions of the guide:

- [It's all in the Song: Understanding Bird Calls - Mid March 2016](#)
- [Spring Awakenings: Plants, Birds and Bugs - is now available on R4R.ca.](#)

The guide often provides links to other web sites for more in-depth learning. Each guide will become available as the seasons progress on the R4R website. You can also receive email notices of the latest Step Outside publications by signing up on the link provided. So, be a ‘student of nature’ and give this unique guide a try.

Quiz: Who am I?



I love the water and can quack like a duck, but I’m in trouble globally due to hybridization with Mallards!

I breed in northern sloughs and feed by tipping

up and reaching down for yummy aquatic plants. Who am I?

Answer to Quiz:

I'm an American Black Duck of course. Notice my silver wing linings and bright green beak and of course my black(ish) body.



And in closing, here's a coyote out for a stroll looking for din-din in Scugog!



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*Note: All photos and text in this newsletter
by Geoff Carpentier unless otherwise stated*

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