



President's Message

The results of the last provincial election were disheartening to many of us but not unexpected. The Premier and his caucus may be in a difficult position with increasing demands for more housing and the rapid pace of development, but they seem to have given little regard to environmental considerations. Regulations that, in the past, provided at least a reasonable level of environmental protection, have been weakened. Now, with our economy under threat, even more pressures will arise, particularly in the GTA.

It will continue to be important for the public and organizations such as Ontario Nature to monitor what the government is up to regarding whether or not new environmental threats arise, and to show the government that this is not acceptable. The recent strong public outcry and mobilization over the proposed Greenbelt reduction shows the importance of people coming together.

On the positive side, we are entering spring, the time of year when nature awakens. Animals are coming out of hibernation and birds are returning from the south and delighting us with their courtship songs. There are so many reasons to get out into the natural world. North Durham Nature is offering a variety of outings to help you learn more of what is out there to see.

James Kamstra, President, North Durham Nature

Upcoming Events – October to November 2024

Upcoming Meetings

April 22, 2025 – John Sabeau, President of Pickering Historical Society - “Life of James Fothergill, First Canadian Ornithologist”

May 27, 2025 – Rob Willson - “Ants, Maybe Small but Mighty Important”

June 24, 2025 – James Kamstra - “Snakes, Scaly and Smooth”

Upcoming Outings

April 26, 2025 – Amphibian Breeding Frenzy with James Kamstra - Uxbridge Countryside Preserve - 7-9 p.m.

May 3, 2025 – Spring Ephemerals at North Walker Woods with Mark Dorriesfield – 1-3 p.m.

May 10, 2025 – World Migratory Bird Day with Bird Friendly Uxbridge – A Dawn Chorus at Secord Forest with Carly Davenport – 6 a.m.

May 20, 2025 – Morning bird walk – The hunt for Golden Winged and Hooded Warblers with Geoff Carpentier – Glen Major Forest 6th Concession Timbers Pit - 8-10 a.m.

June 8, 2025 - Happy Valley Forest with Mark Stabb - 1-3 p.m.

June 14, 2025 - Learn your Butterflies with James Kamstra and Mark Dorriesfield - East Duffins Headwaters, Glen Major 6th Concession - 1-3 p.m.

July 1, 2025 - Tricky Sparrows with Derek Connelly – location to be confirmed - 6am – 8:30 a.m.

Wow – Congrats to James and Derek!

By Carly Davenport

James Kamstra, recipient of a King Charles III Coronation Medal

James has been on North Durham Nature's Board of Directors for the past decade, serving as our President since 2022. Recently, he was honoured at Ottawa's Rideau Hall on February 20th, 2025, as a recipient of a King Charles III Coronation Medal. This award, commemorating the Royal Coronation last May, recognizes 30,000 Canadians who've made a significant contribution to Canada or to a particular province, territory, region or community of Canada, or have made an outstanding achievement abroad that brings credit to Canada.



The Governor General was allotted 100 medals with which she could personally recognize exemplary Canadians, and we are very proud to say that James was one of these recipients. Further, he was one of 52 recipients whom Governor General Mary Simon personally pinned the medal on!



James' award was in the 'Nature and Environment' category, and he was recognized for his contribution to the protection and conservation of Canada's endangered biodiversity as a field biologist and environmental consultant specializing in species identification and inventory.

For those who may not be familiar, James has previously been involved with the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO), which looks at the population levels of various wildlife and determines which

species need special protection.

If you get the chance, get out in the field with James and experience first-hand his enthusiasm and wealth of knowledge about our native flora and fauna.

Derek Connelly to receive Stewardship Award at the 2025 Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society Annual General Meeting

You couldn't be a part of North Durham Nature without knowing Derek and knowing of his long-standing work with nest boxes in Uxbridge Township. It brings me great pleasure to inform our membership that he will receive a Stewardship Award from the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society, in March of 2025. Here is an excerpt of their writeup on Derek:

Derek Connelly is an avid naturalist from Uxbridge, ON. He is the compiler of the Uxbridge Christmas Bird Count and has served in various roles, including President and now Vice-president of the local naturalist group North Durham Nature, since 2013.

He has been monitoring nest boxes in Lafarge's Regan Uxbridge Pit since 2014. Over the past 10 years, he has recorded fledging 874 Tree Swallows, 328 Eastern Bluebirds and 29 Black-capped Chickadees. As part of the quarry restoration project, trees were planted, and now these have grown up, and the habitat has become less suitable for breeding grassland birds. We want to recognize Derek's hard work and dedication to this decade-long monitoring program and are pleased to award him the 2024 Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society Stewardship Award.



Atlassing for Common Ravens

Text and photos by Carly Davenport

An exciting bird that I love watching at this time of year is the Common Raven or *Corvus corax*. It is a large, beautiful and incredibly intelligent bird, but may not be particularly sought after by listers. We are quickly approaching their safe dates for reporting breeding evidence to the



Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, which is between March 15th and May 21st for our mixed wood ecozone.

Ravens are one of the most widespread birds worldwide, found across North America, Europe, Asia and even North Africa. They are extreme habitat generalists and can be found in all terrestrial biomes except tropical rain forests. In Southern Ontario, ravens have been returning to their former range, co-existing with humans, and adapting to urban environments. Despite our familiarity with this bird, we still have huge gaps in our knowledge of its life history.

From radio-tagging, we know that they are generally resident, non-migratory species.

In many areas breeders remain throughout the year if there is enough food. In terms of natal dispersal, and breeding site fidelity, we know very little. We believe they are monogamous, but again, there is surprisingly limited information in the literature on this.

What we, as observers of nature, can watch for right now are the exciting acrobatic flight shows these birds put on, with dives, rolls and soaring displays. There are some reports that say this is post or pre-copulatory behaviour, but it can also occur in larger assemblies of non-breeding birds. Displaying and courtship occur throughout the year, and there is little information on when exactly pairs form, but displays are certainly at their highest intensity in January and February.

It is safe to report the probable breeding code 'D' if you observe a pair of Common Ravens engaging in this tumbling flight display together at this time of year. And if you observe a pair in suitable habitat (anywhere here in Ontario), you can report the possible breeding code 'H'.

Their nest in Southern Ontario are generally in trees or tall towers, but cliffs, telephone poles, billboards, bridges, railroad trestles, oil derricks, windmills and abandoned buildings may also be used. They build a stick nest wedged into the crotch of a tree, with some canopy overhead. The height of the nest, as well as the height of the nest tree or support structure, are variable. Ravens will create a rough woven basket of sticks and line it with mud, twigs, sometimes deer fur, shredded bark, grass, rags or paper garbage. Some evidence says that nests are reused and

rebuilt year after year. Other published observations discuss nest sites rotating around a given territory with no explainable pattern.

If you are lucky enough to observe nest-building, you can report the confirmed breeding code 'NB'. If you observe an adult entering, occupying or leaving a nest site, you can report the confirmed breeding code 'AE'. 'NE' is for a nest containing eggs—look for about 4 or 5 greenish-blue mottled eggs and if you can see or hear the young in the nest, you can report 'NY'.

So, get out there and witness this spectacular bird to start your atlas year 5 off right! For more information, consult the Ontario Breeding Birds Atlas [Instructions for General Atlassing](#).

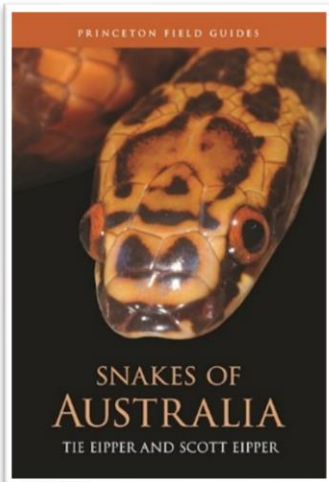


Book Reviews

By Geoff Carpentier

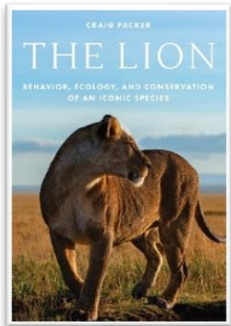
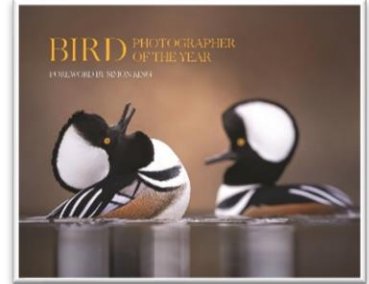
Snakes of Australia. Tie Ipper and Scott Eipper. 2025. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540. 364 pages. Hardcover. \$45.00 USD. ISBN: 978-0-691-26993-1.

Your greatest fear is now available in hardcover! Most people dread the thought of snakes, but few actually know much about them. They are much more varied and interesting than the average person thinks – from how they hunt, how venomous they are (or aren't), their bite and strength and even what they eat. This book is going to teach you a lot. Although it focuses on Australian snakes, it has implications beyond because as you learn about the vipers and constrictors of Australia, you will learn general things about these same groups of snakes in other parts of the world. The book begins with a statement to dispel some myths about snakes: vibrations repel snakes; only harmless snakes climb; snakes can outrun a person; chemicals and floral scents can repel snakes; and seasnakes can't bite – all of these are myths! From here the book goes into great detailed discussions about every species in OZ. The book is laid out like a typical field guide with 1000+ photos, maps and related information on all of the 240 species (and subspecies) of snakes to be found in Australia. This book is definitely worth the read.



Bird Photographer of the Year. Edited by Will Nicholls and Paul Sterry. 2024. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540. 256 pages. Hardcover. \$35.00 USD. ISBN: 978-0-691-26359-5.

Normally, I am not a fan of what I perceive as coffee table books, as this is what my first impression of this book was. However, once I received my review copy and started to thumb through the pages, I realized it was much more than just an amusing collection of pretty photos. This is a compilation of hundreds of ‘winning’ photos from around the world presented in a beautiful and inspiring format. But more than just a lot of photos, there are photographic tips embedded with many of them explaining how the photo was captured or even sometimes why. This is enhanced with details of the photographic equipment used and the camera settings that helped capture the image. If you are a photographer or just like really beautiful pictures this is a great book to own. I wasn’t aware of this before, but this is the ninth year this competition has been celebrated and the outcome published in book form.



The Lion: Behavior, Ecology and Conservation of an Iconic Species. Craig Packer. 2023. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540. 376 pages. Hardcover. \$39.95 USD. ISBN: 978-0-691-26359-5.

Ever wonder why male lions have manes, why lions are social, or why lions become man-eaters? This and a great deal more is offered in this book, by a renowned world expert on lions. Packer has studied lions for over 40 years and knows virtually everything about them. I will forewarn you, this book is not an easy read for it is presented in a textbook format. That said, if you truly want to learn about these animals this is a must-read book. For the casual reader, it might be a bit challenging, but like any scientific book, if it is absorbed over a series of sittings, it becomes not only palatable but enlightening! So, take a few days, sit back and work through this, chapter by chapter, to study these fascinating animals.



Nature Quiz – What am I?

by Geoff Carpentier

Well, this is an intriguing thing. Maybe a mushroom, although I don’t ever recall seeing anything like that. What about a wart of some kind? Maybe on a toad? Or is it an engorged tick from some animal’s hide? There’s no scale so not sure how big it is. Cannot tell if it’s plant or animal, but it may be a plant or a plant-like thing as I don’t see a head or eyes or legs. Do you? What do we know about it? I can tell you it’s local and it’s actually an animal believe it not. But what kind? Maybe one of the muffets (oops I mean Muppets) know something.

Nasty & Nice Nature News

Compiled by Geoff Carpentier

What should I do with that old t-shirt? This is a plaguing question that has troubled recyclers and landfill operators for years. The simple answer is, if it is not reusable and you cannot give it away, just throw it out. But is that the best solution? From a recycling perspective, researchers at the University of Delaware are trying to solve the underlying problem (beyond finding a market) and that is how to deal with blended fabrics used in most of our clothing. Wool and polyester are frequently utilized to make attractive and lasting clothing. These researchers are using microwaves and chemicals to break down the clothing to make it ready for reuse. They claim that in as little as 15 minutes they can break down any blend of materials. These by-products can then be turned back into new clothing, dyes, electronics and even tires! This technology may be a game changer, as we now discard about 83 million tons of clothing a year and less than 1% of this is recycled into new clothing. (Source: The Washington Post)

Has a new species of hummingbird been hiding in plain sight? An article in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science has presented information about the South American Giant Hummingbird. Two distinct populations are known to exist – one migratory and the other not. New genetic work suggests that two species may be involved, according to the study. While the entire scientific community hasn't yet embraced the study and its conclusions (eBird still indicates that only one species is involved), time will tell if there really is a new species of hummer out there. (Source: Audubon Magazine)

Pangolins still under attack: A recent seizure of over two tons of pangolin scales was announced in Nigeria. This represents about 1100 animals in this critically endangered family of mammals. The organization responsible for detecting this illegal trafficking, the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC), assisted the Nigeria Customs Service in their enforcement and detection programs. Since 2021, they have conducted 16 operations, resulting in 35 arrests, 12 convictions, and the seizure of 21,582 tonnes of pangolin scales and 1.065 tons of elephant ivory since July 2021. (Source: The Good News Network)

Capibaras – the new star of Christmas! People are always looking for new and exciting gifts to give loved ones at Christmas. Apparently, the latest fad involves this large South American rodent. Items like slippers, robes, bath bombs, plush toys, T-shirts and even phone cases feature likenesses of these furry aquatic animals. It looks like former champions (e.g. owls, hedgehogs, foxes and sloths) are now out of favour with the fashion conscience crowd. Not to be outdone, however, highland cows and red pandas are also a popular topic. One that is a bit puzzling is the axolotl (a type of Mexican salamander), which has caught the eye of many. But why? Well, it was featured in the Minecraft video game and that says it all. Wow! (Source: Associated Press)

The 3rd Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Update

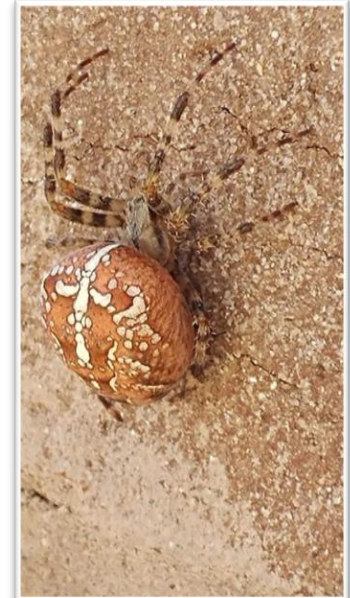


Goodness - here we go – the home stretch. This is year 5 of a 5-year study. Millions of bits of data have been collected over the years to help us understand the intricacies of our breeding birds but more importantly to see how they're faring over time, as it has been 40 years since the first study was undertaken. In the interim, have there been declines or increases? Has climate change shown impacts? If so, are they positive or negative? There are lots of exciting findings, but we're not done. If you're registered as an atlaser in Durham, I will be in touch via email to

offer suggestions where you can help. Or if you're ready to atlas already, just go on out there and do what you do!

Answers to Nature Quiz – What am I?

Well, we are actually looking at the abdomen of a spider. This Holarctic species can be found throughout Europe and much of North America. It is known as the European Garden Spider, Cross Orb Weaver, Diadem Spider, Orangie, Cross Spider and Crowned Orb Weaver. Part of a large family of spiders called Araneidae, over 3100 species are known worldwide. These are the spiders that make the large circular spider webs we see strung between meadow and forest plants. The female is the web builder and will occasionally have the male for dinner (so to speak) after mating. When hunting, she hides in the foliage near the web, with one foot touching a trigger line. When prey touches the web, she feels it, rushes out, injects a toxin into it, wraps it up for a later meal and retreats to hunt again. It has a strange defence mechanism: if threatened, it vibrates the web, faster and faster, until it becomes a bur, confusing predators. She then escapes from the dumbfounded predator.



Nature's Pretty Side!

River Otters

By Geoff Carpentier

This aquatic mammal is an efficient hunter of fish and other small game. Not afraid to travel, it can often be found considerable distances from water. But it does like to frolic as this photo of the tracks of a playful individual shows.



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