



President's Message

The carefree days of summer are behind us now. Autumn is a time of transition. Wildlife must take advantage of the still abundant food sources as they prepare to migrate or hibernate. The last of the plants are still flowering, particularly the asters and goldenrods and this is the time when many plants will spread their seeds before they die or go dormant. Trees and shrubs will display brilliant colours before dropping their leaves. This is a great time of year to get outdoors and open your eyes to this beauty.

The November meeting will follow a different approach. North Durham Nature will be partnering with Scugog Lake Stewards to hold the first “State of the Lake” forum. Lake Scugog is a special lake, partially created by raising the water levels with the dam at Lindsay. The waters are nutrient-rich from both natural and human causes resulting in abundant plant growth. Lake Scugog is blessed with extensive wetlands along much of its shoreline, which provides wildlife habitat and has allowed stretches of undeveloped shoreline to remain. Be sure to come out and learn more about the lake.

James Kamstra, President, North Durham Nature

Upcoming Events – Fall 2025

Upcoming Meetings

September 23, 2025 – Dave Ellis, Kawartha Naturalist & Photographer “Kawartha Lakes Wildlife”.

October 28, 2025 – May Matchim, Ontario Parks Biologist. “Introduction to Queer Ecology” Find out how common it is in nature.

November 26, 2024 – Special joint meeting with North Durham Nature and Scugog Lake Stewards. “State of the Lake – Birds and Aquatic Vegetation of Lake Scugog” by Mark Dorriesfield of NDN and Brett Tregunno of Kawartha Region Conservation Authority.

Memories of Alan Wells

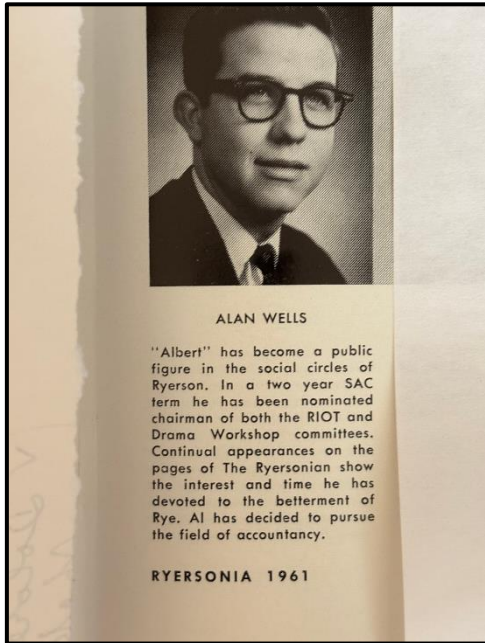
By Derek Connelly

I met Alan shortly after the Boy Scouts added bird houses into the new Uxbridge Countryside Preserve sometime after 2006. The young Scouts had had some difficulty constructing the boxes, and many required repair or complete reconstruction to meet the birds' needs. Alan was making bluebird bird houses for his own recently planted native meadow and offered to help. Over the years, Alan and I would add more bird houses along the town trails working with scouts, school groups and local residents. Alan (pictured below in lower left at the 2024 Christmas Bird count),



along with his wife Anne, participated in the annual Uxbridge Christmas Bird Count where he met a group of local nature-loving people. This group became the founding members of the North Durham Nature club (NDN), with Alan becoming our first president and treasurer in 2012.

Alan was well-suited to be our leader with his extensive background as an accountant and chair of various committees. His experience included Chief Administrative Officer for the Regional



Municipality of York, Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, and Councillor for Township of Uxbridge (1977 - 1980). He had also done consultancy work for municipal and provincial governments.

Alan helped shape the North Durham Nature constitution and financial structure that is still in place today.

Alan and Anne continued to go out on the Christmas Bird Counts, even hosting post-count dinners and tallies of two significant milestones: our tenth anniversary in 2014, and our twentieth anniversary in 2024.

Alan's soft voice, with a smile and chuckle, will be remembered as one who cared deeply for nature in both actions and support. Thank you, we will miss you, Alan.

The 3rd Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Update

By Geoff Carpentier, Co-Regional Coordinator, Durham, OBBA

The 3rd Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is rapidly winding down. Although the breeding season is essentially over, some species are still raising young (e.g. Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal and American Robin). And once they're done, we can still look for early winter nesting owls and used nests that escaped our attention thus far!

The atlas doesn't quite divide Durham Region along geopolitical boundaries, so part of our area is in York, part in Toronto, part in Northumberland and part in the Kawarthas! In a nutshell, we did a huge amount of work and generated an incredible amount of data. Here's the summary:

6423 checklists, 157 atlasers, 27 squares, 61852 individual breeding records, 187 species, 3605 hours of effort, and 1002 point counts. Wow!



Now the data crunching begins, and the species reports will be written. Hopefully, early next year, the data will be published, and this will allow for comparisons between now and the previous two atlases (i.e. 1981-05 and 2001-05) to be made. There will be some disturbing news, but hopefully some optimistic news as well. Thank you to all who helped make this an incredible adventure.

A New Butterfly for North Durham

Text and photo by James Kamstra

Until recently, only two species of non-native butterflies could be found in Ontario or Canada: the Cabbage White and the European Skipper. These two are now among our most abundant butterflies. Then in 2005, a small number of European Common Blues (*Polymonotis icarus*) were discovered in a field near Mirabel Airport in Quebec. How they got there is unknown, but it is suspected that they came from a plane, since the location was near a large international airport. This species is very widespread in the Old World ranging across all of Europe and east to the Pacific Ocean in Russia and China, so there are many places from where they might have originated. European Common Blues were soon thereafter found in other locations in the vicinity of Montreal.



The first reported observations in Ontario were near Cornwall in 2012 and Toronto in 2020. On the Toronto butterfly count, 6 European Common Blues were tallied in 2020, 107 in 2021 and 1051 in 2024, which shows how fast the populations are growing. By searching photographic records on iNaturalist, it appears that the first reports in Durham Region were in 2022. The first observation that I am aware of was by Dave Worthington at the north end of Ajax on July 17, 2022. I documented the first observation in North Durham (i.e. Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge Townships) near Goodwood on June 14, 2024, soon followed by another record in the same general area by Jon Alsop on July

25, 2024. Then in 2025, European Common Blues appeared at Secord Conservation Area and near Crow's Pass Conservation Area. iNaturalist shows numerous records of this species in the southern part of Durham Region in 2025, so it is spreading rapidly. At this rate, it will likely occur across southern Ontario within a decade or so.

European Common Blue is an attractive butterfly. The male is uniformly aqua-marine blue above. The underside shows a series of black dots, each surrounded by a white ring, and a row of prominent orange dots around the border. The females also show this band of orange dots on the upper wings and therefore are easy to tell apart from our native blues. The preferred food plant of the European Common Blue's larvae is Birdsfoot Trefoil, a very abundant non-native plant that can be found in hayfields, meadows, roadsides and waste places. However, the blue has also

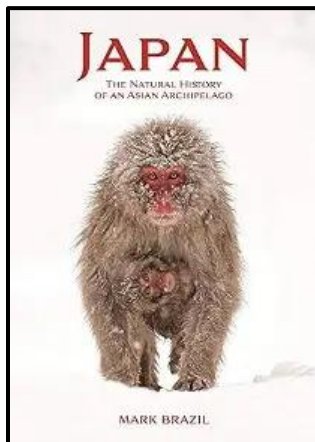
been reported to feed on other members of the legume family (*Fabaceae*) in Europe, including clovers, Black Medick and Tufted Vetch, all of which are common but not native to Ontario.

The impact that this new alien species will have is unknown. Often when non-native species become abundant, they outcompete native species. For example, the Asian Lady Beetle has virtually replaced all our native lady beetles in southern Ontario. During periods of peak abundance, the European Skipper can vastly outnumber all native skipper species combined, although it is not known if it has actually displaced any. Several species of native blues occur in North Durham, which are Summer Azure, Northern Azure, Silvery Blue and Eastern Tailed Blue. The larvae of the latter two also feed on legumes and therefore could be negatively affected by larval competition with this new arrival. In any case, European Common Blue is here to stay, and you are likely to encounter this butterfly sometime soon.

Book Reviews

By Geoff Carpentier

Japan – The Natural History of an Asian Archipelago. Mark Brazil 2022. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540. 384 pages. Hardcover. \$35.00 USD. ISBN: 978-0-691-17506-5.



I know this book is not brand new, but it is recent, so I thought I'd present my thoughts on its content and style. When you read this review, I will be in Japan and will be ground-truthing some of its content (but not all as my stay there will be abbreviated). The book's layout, to me, is quite honestly confusing and highly repetitive. The text is rambling, and the subjects overlap so much that hard to keep track of what the author is saying. He is trying to divide the country, not into logical geographic separations, but rather seems intent on describing each island as if it were totally unique from the surrounding ones. This leads to him talking about the same wildlife on each major island as if he hadn't mentioned it elsewhere in the text. I can't comprehend how many times he told me about the Serow Deer or the Japanese Macaques, for example, citing the same set of facts about each of them as he had presented elsewhere in the book. Why he didn't take the northern part of Japan, north of the Blakiston Line (which has many natural history similarities to Russia), then all the central islands as an entity and finally the tropical oceanic islets in the south as his three dividing regions I don't know. That would have made so much more sense and made the book so much more readable. I will admit I read every word in the book, and it was painful. It is laid out like a textbook, but the font is so tiny and there is so much text, it was hard to stay focused. The pictures, although pretty, are quite small and often poorly contrasted, so the subject is often hard to define. All this said, if you can work your way through the challenges I've mentioned above, it is a fact-filled book that teaches you a great deal about the archipelago's natural history, geology and geography and various climate zones. Brazil provides a lot of excellent biological and botanical information about Japan's animals and plants. But again, it is so island-specific that it is overwhelming and repetitive.

[Editor's note: The Blakiston Line is a faunal boundary line drawn between two of the four largest islands of Japan, separating Hokkaidō in the north and the rest of Japan south of it. It can be compared with faunal boundary lines like the Wallace Line in Indonesia. Certain animal species can only be found north of Blakiston's Line, while certain other species can only be found south of it.]

Nature Quiz – What am I?

Photo and text by Geoff Carpentier

Well, this is intriguing ... kind of looks like some toes or is it a coral polyp or is it an aquatic organism, as I think I can see dirt and grit all over it and it seems to have some type of deformity to the left of the toes or whatever they are!?!?



Okay let's presume it's not a marine animal, as I do try to keep these subjects local (although I occasionally take liberties as witnessed in the last newsletter where I highlighted a subtropical species). So clearly not a reptile, but what about an amphibian or a mammal? Is it even an animal?

Hint: this was photographed in Durham Region near a roadway on a bright summer day. It is a carnivorous mammal that hunts day and night and has an affinity for wet habitats. Both terrestrial and fossorial (i.e. subterranean), it is an efficient predator of mostly insectivorous prey.

Nasty & Nice Nature News

Compiled by Geoff Carpentier

Radioactive Rhinos: The threat to rhinos plods along seemingly unabated. Poachers are bent on taking as many as they can until none are left. To offset this, the South African government is injecting the horns of live rhinos with a low-level dose of radioactive isotopes. The doses are reportedly harmless to the rhino, enforcement agents and the general public, but are easily detectable with currently available radiation detector instruments. Dubbed the Rhisotope Project, it may help save some rhinos and help catch poachers. (*Source: Associated Press*).

Australian Animal in the Limelight: An Ozzie photographer submitted a strange photo to a local photo contest earlier this year. The animal depicted was an Eastern Quoll – a native Tasmanian marsupial. The exciting part of the story is that for the first time a quoll has been shown to exhibit bio-fluorescence in its natural habitat. Across the globe many animals exhibit this property, including polar bears, moles, zebras, wombats, armadillos, spiders, some fish, amphibians, reptiles and even birds. The purpose of this trait is unclear at the moment, but scientists are trying to solve the mystery. (*Source: www.people.com*).

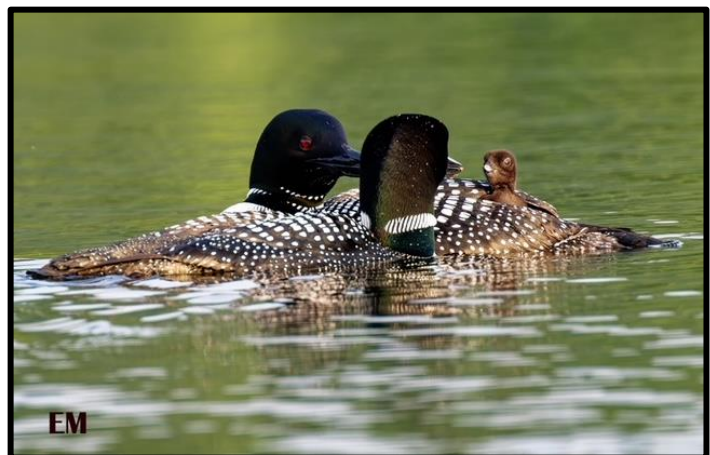
Will the fall colour show be as expected this year? As in recent years, the longer drier, hotter and prolonged summers may be negatively affecting the cycle of fall colour across Canada and the northern U.S. The underlying cause is unclear, but it may be that smoke from western and northern fires is causing trees to start the process of leaf fall earlier than normal and the various pigments associated with our colour spectacular may not be as enhanced as under normal conditions. Another hypothesis is that the ‘darker’ days may simulate fall conditions and the trees respond accordingly by reducing photosynthetic activity, thinking it’s time to prepare for winter. I guess time will tell, but hopefully we have a good show this year. (Source: *The Canadian Press*).

Was it a meteorite or volcanoes that killed all the dinosaurs? It is well known that a massive meteorite struck Earth about 66 million years ago. Coincident with that, volcanic eruptions before, during and after the collision affected the climate so drastically that the dinosaurs were in a weakened state as food, shelter and climatic conditions had changed. The meteorite was the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back’ so to speak. Studies out of McGill University in Montreal have shown that Earth’s temperatures were falling before the meteorite struck but the cause of the dinosaurs’ demise was unclear until recently, when it was learned that multiple eruptions in India over several hundreds of thousands of years changed the Earth’s climate drastically. The outcome wasn’t as sudden as one would expect following a space object colliding with Earth but rather it was protracted over many centuries. The meteorite was just the end of the story. The definitive answers are not yet confirmed but this new theory has a lot of validity founded in real science. (Source: *The Washington Post*).

Hold the ice! About 40 years ago, a massive iceberg broke away from the Antarctic Continent and drifted out to sea. En route, it jammed up against South Georgia and threatened many nesting penguins. Known as A23a, it was about 67 times the size of Greater London, England and weighed about a trillion tonnes. Today it is finally breaking apart but is still 1770 x 60 km in size. As it continues to fragment, large chunks, such as one that was about 400 sq. km., drift away from the main berg as it slowly succumbs to the sun’s warmth. (Source: *Agence France-Presse, a French international news agency*)

Loons and Chicks

Ed McDermot shared an experience we all would have loved to have experienced! Recently, he attended a workshop on Loons and Chicks, put on by Michael Bertelsen near Huntsville. He shared a wonderful gallery of images he thought we would enjoy! (All photos are by Ed)





Answers to Nature Quiz – What am I?

This is a Star-nosed Mole – well a close-up of its foot actually. These are strange creatures indeed with huge claws, minuscule eyes, and an odd fleshy appendage where the nose should be.



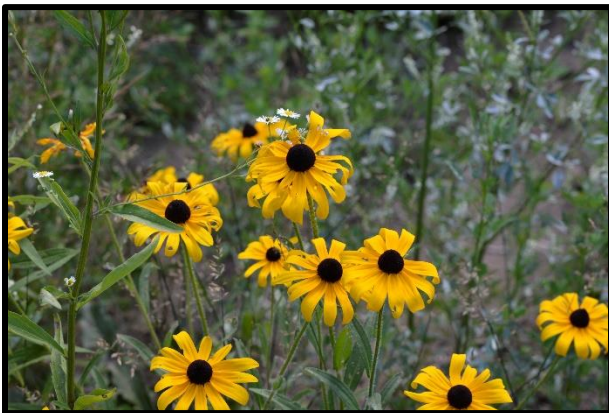
Well, it really is its nose! It is used to detect prey, as it is highly sensitive to touch and has over 250,000 sensory receptors. As such, it is surprisingly sensitive and helpful in finding food in a totally dark environment. Reportedly, it can detect food in about 0.2 seconds. When hunting underwater, these moles blow out air bubbles, hold them in place with their

tentacles, and then inhale the bubbles to detect the scent of potential prey. Prey consists primarily of small invertebrates it finds in its tunnels, but it will also eat other invertebrates in water or on land if it forages above ground. Small fish and molluscs will occasionally be taken. Finally, they are good swimmers and, to aid in their subterranean travels, have fur adapted to be smooth regardless of the direction the mole is travelling, which is helpful since they spend so much time underground in the tunnels they build. (*Note: Photo is from online freeware.*)

Nature's Pretty Side!

Celebrating some late season flowering plants

By Geoff Carpentier





Black-eyed Susan, Beggar's Tick, Deadly Nightshade, Viper's Bugloss, Echinacea, and Fringed Gentian



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