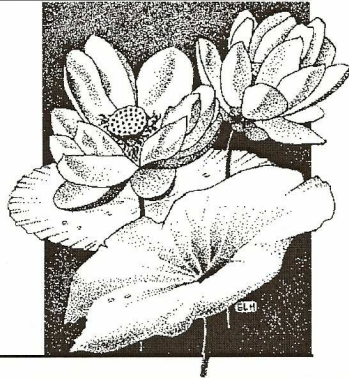


Lotus

NEWSLETTER
of the
NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



April 2010

Hazel and friend:



Photo credit: David Okines

Meeting Notes

February 2010 Meeting

Because your editor missed the February meeting, the speakers, Elisabeth van Stam and Hazel Wheeler provided the following outlines of their talks about their conservation projects.

Short-eared Owl

Hazel Wheeler

The Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) is classified as a species of Special Concern in Canada because of long-term population declines and loss or degradation of habitat. The Short-eared Owl generally inhabits grasslands, and will wander extensively within its breeding and wintering ranges hunting for food, which makes population monitoring very difficult. For this reason, little is known about Short-eared Owl population size, trends, and lifetime habitat requirements.

Bird Studies Canada has been working to address questions of distribution, habitat use, and movement by collecting winter Short-eared Owl sightings across Ontario, and physically tracking the birds using satellite telemetry. By collecting winter sightings we've been able to identify important winter habitat that can be targeted for future conservation activities. Satellite tracking has a larger scope, focusing on migratory movements, rather than winter habitat use. To date, BSC has deployed satellite transmitters on four short-ears in Haldimand County, and movements that we've seen so far suggest a possible link between their southern Ontario wintering grounds and the breeding grounds of northwestern Quebec. Great progress has been made, but we still have much to learn about these elusive birds, and you can help.

To contribute a Short-eared Owl sighting to our growing database, contact Hazel Wheeler hwheeler@birdscanada.org; 888-448-2473 x.165

Chimney Swift

Elisabeth van Stam

The Chimney Swift is a Threatened Species in Canada, and over the past 40 years has experienced an overall population decline of 95%. There are several suspected causes for this rapid and alarming decline, including a reduction in essential food and habitat resources. Bird Studies Canada has recently initiated Ontario SwiftWatch, a project that aims to identify important nest and roost sites, areas of concentration and occupancy, and trends in numbers over time. It will also facilitate the preparation of appropriate Chimney Swift recovery strategies. You can help researchers investigate Ontario's Chimney Swift population, and identify critical Chimney Swift habitats, by participation in this program. If you are interested in this please contact Elisabeth van Stam, at evanstam@birdscanada.org, 888-448-2473 x.173

(Ed. Note: I subsequently heard Elisabeth's talk at the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society AGM. Her movies of Chimney Swift roosts were fascinating and I was surprised to learn that swifts nest individually in chimneys and later congregate at the roost chimneys. I had always thought, mistakenly, that the roosts were also communal nesting sites.)

March 2010 Meeting

The World of Salamanders, Frogs and Toads

Colleen Dale

Spring was in the air and provided the perfect backdrop for the March 9th meeting as John Urquhart from ON Nature shared his knowledge about the fascinating lives of salamanders, frogs and toads. The presentation began with an introduction to the amphibian species found in Ontario and the key features to look for



Photo Credit: Diane Salter

in the field. John first reviewed salamanders and it is interesting to note that these animals are almost completely mute and use pheromones for communication (like attracting a mate).

Mole salamanders: have lungs and spend much of their time in underground burrows.

Spotted – dark body with two uneven rows of yellow and orange spots; 15-18 cm long

Blue-spotted – dark body with bluish-white spots on side of body and tail; 8-14 cm long

Jefferson – dark grey on back with a lighter belly; silver or blue specks on sides; hybridize with blue-spotted and only distinguished with genetic testing; 11-18 cm long

Lungless salamanders: no lungs and can be found under moist rotting logs.

Red back – two colour variations; one with a red stripe down back and the other ‘leadback’ has no red pigmentation

Four-toed – orange or red-brownish body with black dots on belly;

Next up were the frogs and toads. These animals use vocalizations to communicate with one another and as John discussed individual species he also played the calls for each.

Tree frogs: display adaptations suitable for an arboreal life

Spring peeper – dark X on back, call is a high pitched peeping

Grey treefrog – highly variable in colour; changes colour to camouflage with surroundings

Western chorus – 3 dark stripes down back; call sounds like a finger running down a comb

True frogs: vary greatly in size and distribution and have smooth, moist skin with powerful legs

Bullfrog – large frog; no dorsolateral line on back; call sounds like the roar of a bull

Pickereel – dark, square spots on body; call sounds like someone snoring

Green – dorsolateral line running down body; call is like a strum of a banjo

Wood – black face mask; call is a duck-like quack

Toads: only two species in Ontario and identification can be tricky between species

American - 1-2 bumps/spot on body; call is a long, high pitched trill

Fowlers - 3-4 bumps/spot on body; call sounds like a crying baby

The second half of the presentation focused on the new Ontario Herpetofaunal Atlas that ON Nature is participating in. The program is based on the highly successful concept of the breeding bird atlas and the objective is to compile a comprehensive database of Ontario’s amphibian and reptile abundance and distribution. Currently, 18 out of 24 Ontario reptile species are listed as ‘at-risk’ and declines are due to habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, road mortality, human persecution, illegal collection and pollution.

The success of the atlas program greatly depends on volunteers to send in their reptile and amphibian sightings, whether it is a common or uncommon species. John stressed that all observations are important and should be reported. To participate in the program, volunteers need to: 1) find an amphibian or reptile and 2) report your observation via an online form or print off a data card and send in the mail.

In order to fill out the form correctly, participants will need to provide key information including: contact info of participant, identification verification (photo or description), location with accuracy and date of sighting. Additional information is always appreciated such as habitat, species behaviour, time, male/female or anything else of importance that was observed. Sightings are not only visual, but can be vocalizations (frogs and toads), road kill and even eggs.

If you plan to participate in the atlas this year, please follow these important guidelines: do not wear bug spray and touch animals, take photos instead of handling (especially with species at risk), have permission from landowner to enter onto private land and always leave everything just as you found it!

To find more information about the Ontario Herpetofaunal Atlas or to report your sighting, visit the ON Nature website at:

www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofaunal_atlas.php

Winter Tree I.D. Outing

Anne Wynia (Article and Photo)

Saturday Feb. 20 was the kind of day everyone likes to be out - a beautiful, sunny, zero degree, wind-still day. Perfect for a walk in Backus Woods. With the ideal weather we expected a large turn out for this event but we had to compete with the Vancouver Winter Olympics. As a result about 25 enthusiastic, interested visitors attended – a comfortable size for a field trip.



Dolf started with various twig samples to illustrate his talk of identifying trees in winter, which was a good review of some deciduous and conifer species. A quick reminder that ash and maple have opposite branching while most other deciduous trees have alternate branching. He demonstrated the difference between spruce and pine, hemlock, and cedars. Passing around tagged twigs was helpful to all.

Outside, Dolf indicated different features of tree bark as well as the shape and branching to further clarify or confirm identification. Some of the highlights were a very large Cotton Wood, huge old Beech and many towering majestic Tulip Trees.

Tom Bradstreet who attended the walk was able to add his helpful comments since he was involved with a tree inventory of Backus Woods during the summer of 2009. With the sun shining, the tops of the trees were quite visible. We followed the creeek north from the mill where some tree marking had been done for demonstration purposes and then continued north to the Charles Sauriol property. Two interesting observations were a butternut tree, unfortunately near death, (butternuts are threatened) and Dolf's favourite hackberry tree which he has been watching grow for twenty-five years from a seedling to about eight inch trunk diameter.

I believe everyone enjoyed the outing and what they learned. We are pleased that three new members joined NFN.

Delhi and District Fair & Share

Anne Davidson

The Delhi District Fair & Share on Sunday, April 25th, is promoting community service, special interest, hobby club and social club groups - to show the many interesting things that the community has to offer and to help the groups gain new members.

Diane Salter and I will be present to represent NFN and the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society (OEBS). Other groups that will be present are the Master Gardeners, the Tobacco Museum, the Kinsmen, the multi-cultural group, a flying club, etc. It's an event for the whole family. There will be handouts, give-aways and some draws, etc.

Why don't you join us at the Delhi District Scondary School on April 25th between 1 and 4 p.m.? Admission is free but donations of non-perishable food items for the Delhi Sharing Pantry would be greatly appreciated.

Master Gardeners Invitation For Interested NFN Members

Norfolk County Master Gardeners

invite you to join us

7pm, Tuesday, April 20, 2010

At Eising Greenhouses & Garden Centre

814 Cockshutt Road, Simcoe

for a presentation on

'PUSHING THE ZONES'

with guest speaker

Kevin Kavanagh

Kevin is the owner of South Coast Gardens on the shores of Lake Erie, specializing in unusual plants that can grow in the warmer zones along the lake.

www.southcoastgardens.ca

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Everyone Welcome - Free Admission

Gardening questions answered

For further information please inquire at

norfolkmg@yahoo.com

Birdathoners raised \$8,217.60 For NFN in 2009

Audrey Heagy

In 2009, ten people participated in the Baillie Birdathon on behalf of the NFN. Due to their extraordinary birding and fund-raising efforts, they raised a total of \$18,435 and NFN received a cheque from Bird Studies Canada for \$8217.60.

NFN allocates 25% of our Birdathon revenues to be used for local land securement and protection projects. The other 75% is available to support other club projects and activities. Bird Studies Canada uses its share of Birdathon revenue to support its bird research, monitoring and conservation programs across Canada.

Many thanks to our 2009 Birdathoners: Betty Chanyi, Helen Godschalk, Peggy McArthur, Mike McMillan, George Pond, Shirley Rothery, Jeff and Darlene Sauder, Julia Wever, and Anne Wynia. A particular thank you to Mike McMillan for his outstanding efforts as NFN's official birdathoner (and for agreeing to continue in this role for 2010).

NFN New Members

We welcome:

Donna Francom
Stu Mackenzie
Ondrej Matusak
Clen & Angelle van Kleef

NFN receives funding for new displays

Audrey Heagy

Earlier this year the NFN was fortunate to receive support from the South West Community Adjustment Fund to improve our promotional displays. The grant funds were used to design and produce two attractive displays, and to purchase a projector and laptop computer unit. The portable displays will be used to promote NFN and our programs at many community events. The projector and laptop will be used at our regular meetings. The NFN acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada for funding this project. We'd also like thank Bernie Solymar who prepared the successful grant application and who has been providing free use of his equipment at our regular meetings and movie nights.

Harry Barrett Launches New Books

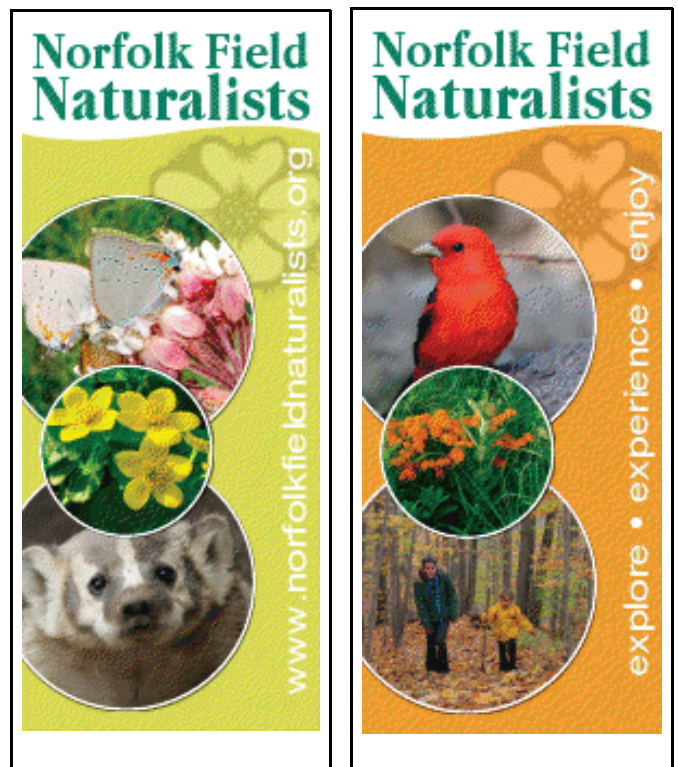
Anne Davidson

Harry Barrett, an NFN founder, NFN Honorary Director, and local Norfolk County author launched two new books at the Eva Brook Donly Museum in March in conjunction with its current art exhibition "The Selected Works of Vic Gibbons", a collection of more than 60 wildlife and wilderness works on display until April 17th. Both Harry and Vic Gibbons were at the Eva Brook Donly Museum on the afternoon of Sunday, April 11th to chat with visitors and sign books.

"The Nature of Norfolk" is a compilation of all the weekly Simcoe Reformer articles that Harry wrote about Norfolk's nature. "Alligators of the North" looks at the intriguing history of the Simcoe-made Alligator Steam Warming Tug that revolutionized the lumbering industry in North America between the 1890s and 1930s.

Harry's books are available at all museums in Norfolk, the Book Factory in Simcoe, Tan-Mar in Port Dover, A Book Shoppe in Port Rowan and at Bird Studies Canada. The Nature of Norfolk is \$25 and Alligators of the North is \$35.

NEW NFN DISPLAY BANNERS



BAILLIE BIRDATHON



Dear NFN Member:

It is the time of year to start fund raising for the upcoming Baillie Birdathon. Again this year I have the honour of being the designated birder for the Norfolk Field Naturalists.

Last year, with the help of many club members, I managed to raise \$4060.00 and identified 108 species. My hope is to exceed both of these numbers this year.

To sponsor me is easy. You can choose to pledge a flat rate or on a per species identified basis. Pledges can be sent by mail (cheques made payable to Bird Studies Canada); in person at the April NFN meeting (pledge sheets will be available); or on a secure online donation page. The link to the Birdathon participant sponsor page is:

<http://www.birdscanada.org/support/birdathon/index.jsp?targetpg=donate&number=13002>

Pledges \$10.00 or greater will automatically receive a tax receipt and donations of \$35.00 or greater entitle sponsors to receive Bird Studies Canada's quarterly publication *Birdwatch Canada* for 1 year! For those who are interested in pledging on a per species basis, I will send you my species tally later in May.

What is the Baillie Birdathon?

Baillie Birdathon is the oldest sponsored bird count in North America. It involves fund raising for bird research and conservation. Over a 24-hour period in May, birders try to identify as many species as possible. The money raised benefits Bird Studies Canada: the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund; and participating migration monitoring stations and conservation organizations - **like the NFN, which will receive a portion of the money raised through this Birdathon.**

If you would like any further information regarding my Birdathon plans, you can email me at m.m.mcmillan@sympatico.ca Your support would be very much appreciated.

Mike McMillan

Yes, I'll sponsor Mike McMillan in the Baillie Birdathon for 2010

___\$.25/species ___\$0.50/species ___ \$1.00/species \$_____/ species or ___ flat rate

Payment by cheque (enclosed) Payable to "Bird Studies Canada"
You may postdate cheques until May15.

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Mail to: Mike McMillan, 91 Elmhurst Ave., Simcoe, ON N3Y 3G1

Backus Woods – Biodiversity in the Crown Jewel of Norfolk County

Bernie Solymár, EarthTramper Consulting Inc.

Backus Woods, owned by the Long Point Region Conservation Authority (LPRCA), is a truly unique and wonderful place. A Carolinian forest, it is a place where northern species, like Pileated Woodpecker and White Pine, mingle with more southern species, like Yellow-Billed Cuckoo and Southern Flying Squirrel - species which are at their most northern range limit in southern Canada. Intermingled with Carolinian plant species, such as Flowering Dogwood, Sweet Chestnut, Sassafras, Basswood, Black Gum and Butternut, are stands of Red Oak, Red Maple, and White Pine and stands of Beech and Sugar Maple. Tulip trees (30 metres - 100 feet tall) tower over the forest, while 400-year-old Black Gum trees can be found in the swamps of Backus. Backus Woods offers a complexity of habitats and a diversity of plants and animals considered to be amongst the highest in Canada.

In 1985 a management plan was developed for Backus Woods following an extensive inventory of all the plants and animals that live there. The plan recommended a “hands off” approach for a large portion of the 422 hectare woods to allow it to return to an “old growth” forest and also that, after 20 years, the inventory of plants and animals be repeated to see changes in the make-up of Backus Woods.

In 2009 my company received permission from the LPRCA, and funding from the Ministry of Natural Resources’ Species at Risk Fund, to conduct an ecological inventory of all the vegetation, birds, butterflies and dragonflies in Backus Woods. Helping us were LPRCA forestry technician Debbie Thain, and her crew, who located all the old quadrants (squares) used for the 1985 inventory by finding old stakes and recording the locations using hand-held GPS units. Tom Bradstreet of the Nature Conservancy of Canada identified all the tree species in the plots, and noted botanist Bill Draper inventoried all the woodland plants, including ferns and wildflowers. Jon McCracken and Stu McKenzie of Bird Studies Canada inventoried the breeding birds, and my student, Teija, and I surveyed the butterflies and dragonflies. A true team effort!

Our findings were exciting! In 1985 a total of 543 species of plants were recorded. In 2009 we found an additional 12 species. This was interesting as some people expected species richness to decrease as the woods were allowed to mature and less sunlight penetrated the forest floor. We think that most of the increased plant richness is probably from “edge

species” that have gradually moved in from the borders of the woods.

We did see dramatic decreases in 2 “at risk” species – American Chestnut, all but wiped out by a disease called Chestnut Blight, and Flowering Dogwood (our County’s floral emblem) due to invasion by an exotic disease called Dogwood Anthracnose. On the plus side populations of Butternut, Broad Beech Fern, Tulip Tree and Puttyroot either stayed the same or increased. In total we detected 19 plant species considered “at risk” or “rare”.

A total of 81 species of breeding birds were recorded in Backus Woods – an increase of 6 species from the last inventory in 1985. Numbers of some woodland species, like Wood Thrush, Veery, and Ruffed Grouse have decreased, while others, like Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Red-bellied Woodpecker have increased. Notably absent were any reports of Barred Owls or Whip-poor-wills. Backus Woods supports more species-at-risk birds than any other forest in southern Ontario. Breeding records in 2009 included Red-headed Woodpecker, Hooded Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush.

To survey butterflies and dragonflies we had to find open, sunny areas and ponds where these insects live – not an easy thing in the dense and shaded Backus Woods. So, we concentrated our efforts along the 3rd and 4th Concession, and at the mill pond on the Backus Heritage Conservation Area, just south of Backus Woods. We identified 31 species of butterflies and 23 species of dragonflies and damselflies. Some of the rare species we encountered were the Giant Swallowtail and Tawny Emperor butterflies, and the Lilypad Clubtail, a dragonfly. Monarch caterpillars and butterflies, now considered a species of “special concern” by the provincial government, were abundant in sunny areas where their host plant, milkweed, was plentiful.

We are thrilled with the results of our inventory. The number of species of plants, birds and insects continues to be amongst the highest in the province – and quite possibly in all of Canada. Backus Woods truly is the crown jewel of Norfolk County!

For 2010 we’ve applied for further funding to complete the Backus Woods inventory – this time the amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and some other insect families, will be surveyed. We are excited to get started and see what other treasures Backus Woods holds.

(Biosphere Matters: Submitted to PRGN for February 2010 edition)

“Conserving Carolinian Reptiles” Project Restores Habitat, Protects Species at Risk

Gregor Beck (Article and Photos)

The chilly days of March and April may seem a bit early for basking turtles and snakes but not so! Long Point Basin Land Trust (LPBLT) has already received several reports from volunteers of Garter Snakes, Painted Turtles and other reptiles warming themselves in the early spring sun. Interestingly, that is only a few months after the last report of active reptiles was submitted in the fall (Dekay’s Brownsnake, 24 November 2009). These records are just some of nearly 400 reptile observations received from dozens of volunteer observers since summer 2009.

LPBLT’s Conserving Carolinian Reptiles project involves a volunteer-based reptile atlas program, inland surveys and monitoring, public outreach and education, as well as constructing reptile habitats. In 2009, 60 volunteers and a dozen road monitors submitted turtle and snake sightings from across Norfolk, Elgin, Haldimand, and Brant Counties. They are contributing valuable information about reptile populations and distributions, including critical information about species at risk. The observations are helping LPBLT to develop effective conservation strategies tailored to our local area, as well as helping in larger efforts, as results are shared with Ontario Nature’s provincial herpetological atlas project. Information about reptile populations is vitally important since 12 of our region’s 19 native reptile species are now listed as being at risk. With the exception of Midland Painted Turtle, all turtle species in our area are classified as species at risk.

LPBLT’s project had a busy first year setting up monitoring protocols and systems, making presentations, attending public events, conducting landowner outreach, and completing numerous on-the-ground habitat creation projects. Prior to undertaking any habitat enhancements, LPBLT monitored potential project sites and consulted with reptile specialists and conservation partners. After careful review, 20 different reptile habitats were constructed at a dozen sites in Norfolk County between November 2009 and January 2010.

The goal is to create safe habitats for reptile species at risk. Each installation aims to replicate important nesting, sunning or over-wintering habitat in locations far from known threats, such as roads, development and intensively-used areas. The habitat projects include construction of turtle nesting sites, turtle basking sites, and snake hibernacula (i.e. over-wintering habitats). LPBLT also constructed and



installed snake nesting structures which aim to replicate the ecological function of large, rotting tree trunks which are used by many native species of egg-laying snake (e.g. Eastern Foxsnake and Gray Ratsnake). These decaying logs are an essential part of the ecosystem, and are prevalent in rare old-growth forests. LPBLT also improved habitat for Eastern Hog-nosed Snakes by thinning pine plantations and removing exotic Scots Pine from potential sunning and breeding locations.



Long Point Basin Land Trust is excited about the work undertaken in the project’s pilot year and looks forward to working with partners and volunteers in 2010. LPBLT extends its sincere thanks to the Norfolk Field Naturalists and club members for their active participation in the reptile reporting program. Please continue to report sightings of all turtle and snake sightings, including both at-risk and ‘common’ species. All information is helpful for understanding and conserving our region’s natural biodiversity. Celebrate 2010, the United Nations’ International Year of Biodiversity, by reporting your reptile sightings.

Visit LPBLT’s website to report your reptile sightings. If you need assistance with identifications or do not have access to the internet, please contact us for more information (519-718-2910). The website has additional project information (see special February 2010 issue of “ViewPoint” newsletter) as well as turtle and snake identification factsheets designed specifically for our local area. Thanks to everyone for the help and participation!

www.longpointlandtrust.ca

Next Meeting

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

Minstrels of the Deep: The Whales of Fundy

Erica Andrew, Retired Teacher

Upcoming NFN Outings

2010

Sun. Apr. 25 1:30 p.m.

**Wildflowers and Mosses
at Rowanwood**

Matt Brock / Allan Aubin
Matt Brock 519-586-7585 or
Audrey Heagy 519-586-9464

Sat. May 1 1:30 p.m.

**Ecological Restoration Site
Walkabout**

#338 Highway 24
Audrey Heagy 519-586-9464



Sat. May 15 All day

Baillie Birdathon

NFN's major annual
fundraiser

BSC 519-586-3531 or
www.bsc-eoc.org

Tues. June 8 7:00 p.m.

Big Creek Marsh Dike Walk

Audrey Heagy 519-586-9464

Sat. June 19 10 am - 2 pm

Lower Big Creek Paddle

Bring a canoe or kayak
Audrey Heagy 519-586-9464

NFN Meetings

Norfolk Field Naturalist meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from September to May. The election of Directors takes place at the September meeting.

Meetings take place at the Simcoe Seniors Centre on Pond Street. They are free and visitors are always welcome. Doors open at 7:15pm; program begins at 7:30pm.

About the NFN

Norfolk Field Naturalist members participate in meetings and frequent field outings, many of which are family-friendly. Membership fees, due in September, are \$20- Individual and \$30- Family; donations are eligible for income tax credits; Charitable Registration #119058691.

Guest speakers present programs on interesting and relevant natural history and conservation topics.

Club members receive the Lotus newsletter with articles on local natural history and club activities. It is published bi-monthly from October to June by volunteer club members. Copies of the Lotus are available at meetings but will be mailed (free of charge) to members if not picked up. Articles published in the Lotus reflect the views and opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NFN. Visit the NFN website at:

www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

Next issue of Lotus:

June 2010

Input cutoff date:

Fri. June 11, 2010

Club Mailing Address

Norfolk Field Naturalists
PO Box 995, Simcoe, ON
N3Y 5B3

2009 - 2010 NFN Directors with Contact and Project Information

President (+ Field Outings)	Audrey Heagy	586-9464	all 519- aheagy@bsc-eoc.org
Past Pres. + Natural Areas	Peter Carson	586-3985	gartcar@kwic.com
Vice-President	Tara Crewe	586-3531	x163 crewe@bsc-eoc.org
Treasurer	Lynda Kosalle	426-0826	kosalle@amtelecom.net
Secretary + Kids 4 Turtles	Elisabeth van Stam	586-7719	evanstam@bsc-eoc.org
Membership	Diane Salter	586-7775	bigcreek@kwic.com
Field Outings	(position currently vacant)		
Speaker Program	Bernt (Bernie) Solymar	426-7124	solymar@nornet.on.ca
Publicity	Nina Cameron	586-8785	ninac@execulink.com
Sanctuary	Matt Brock	586-7585	greenheron99@hotmail.com
Director + Causeway	Hazel Wheeler	586-3531	x165 hwheeler@bsc-eoc.org
Director + Workshops	Shirley Rothery	586-9535	shirleyrothery@hotmail.com
Director -at-large	Colleen Dale	428-0944	cdale22@yahoo.ca
Director -at-large	Talitha Hostetter	842-5920	thostetter@uniserve.com

Honorary President: Al Robinson **Honorary Directors:** Harry Barrett, Jim Harlow

Lotus Editor Anne Davidson 582-4382 birdyanne@gmail.com

Butterfly Counts Doug Timpf 586-9964 timpf@nornet.on.ca