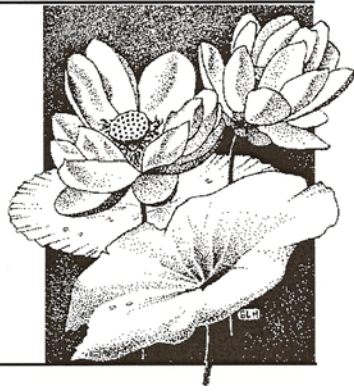


Lotus

NEWSLETTER
of the
NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



OCTOBER 2016



THE BRUCE BECKONED

ONTARIO NATURE'S 85TH ANNUAL GATHERING

Story and photos by: Inga Hinnerichsen (or as noted)



Yellow Lady's-slipper



Piping Plover

Photo: Len Gricevicius

Ontario Nature celebrated its 85th anniversary combined with its Annual Gathering on the weekend of June 3, 4 and 5, 2016. The organisation was founded in 1931, then called the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. Today Ontario Nature has over 150 member groups, such as Norfolk Field Naturalists, all throughout this province. Together we share the love of nature and continue to work towards preserving natural areas, flora and fauna for future generations.

The NFN participated with a small delegation: Bernie Solymár, Len Gricevicius, Diane Salter, Karin Jonasson, David Curry and Inga Hinnerichsen. On the way we stopped at Sauble Beach to observe a few rare Piping Plovers that

were nesting on the beach. Sadly, later news told us that none of the nests this year were successful. Some were destroyed by high water and waves, others fell prey to gulls and other predators. All participants, Ontario Nature and member club delegates, numbering well over 100, were staying at Evergreen Resort, a family-owned facility on the shores of Lake Huron. The resort features a rambling main lodge with a spacious lounge and dining room overlooking the bay, a games room, tennis court and heated swimming pool provide recreational opportunities for guests. Small cabins and a campsites are scattered in the surrounding woods.

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Norfolk Field Naturalists

Ontario Nature had gone to great lengths organizing the weekend. Beside the AGM there were a variety of activities, lectures and outings to choose from: Early Morning Birding, Exploring Forests and Wildflowers, Herpetofauna, Spiders and various natural environments in the area. You could also choose from a variety of indoor presentations on many interesting topics. The Evergreen Resort provided a wide range of breakfast choices, a scrumptious snack buffet and tasty dinners. We got bag lunches to take along on our outings.



Leopard Frogs in the alvar wetlands

The Bruce Peninsula is the northern extension of the Niagara escarpment. The following are excerpts from Wikipedia dealing with the ecological characteristics, geography and geology of this formation.

*The **Niagara Escarpment** stretches 725 kilometres from Lake Ontario to the tip of the Bruce Peninsula between Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. The Niagara Escarpment represents the largest contiguous stretch of primarily forested land in south-central Ontario. It includes the greatest topographic variability in southern Ontario, with habitats ranging over more than 430 metres in elevations and including Great Lakes coastlines, cliff edges, talus slopes, wetlands, woodlands, rare limestone alvar pavements, oak savannahs, conifer swamps and many others. These habitats collectively boast the highest level of species diversity among Canadian biosphere reserves, including more than 300 bird species, 55 mammals, 36 reptiles and amphibians, 90 fish and 100 varieties of special interest flora.*



A group of naturalists crossing a limestone alvar

One day we had the opportunity to visit one of NCC's properties in the area. This weekend also coincided with the Bruce Peninsula Orchid Fest. Our group participated in a guided tour of the local environment famous for these exotic flowers and many other species typical for the alvars.



The rare Lakeside Daisy



Gaywings and Ram's-head Lady's-slipper



Limestone is a sedimentary rock, composed mainly of skeletal fragments of marine organisms such as coral, forams and molluscs. Its major materials are the minerals calcite and aragonite, which are different crystal forms of calcium carbonate (CaCO_3).



Top: A crack in the limestone with ferns
Bottom: Moss and Lichens on alvar pavement, the pitted surface etched by acidic water over millennia

About 10% of sedimentary rocks are limestones. The solubility of limestone in water and weak acid solutions leads to many erosional landforms. These include limestone pavements, pot holes, cenotes, caves and gorges. Such erosion landscapes are known as karsts, in which water erodes the limestone over thousands to millions of years. Most cave systems are through limestone bedrock. Bands of limestone emerge from the Earth's surface in often spectacular rocky outcrops and islands, such as the Niagara Escarpment. An **alvar** is a biological environment based on a limestone plain with thin or no soil and, as a result, sparse grassland vegetation. Often flooded in the spring, and affected by drought in midsummer, alvars support a distinctive group of prairie-like plants. Most alvars occur either in northern Europe or around the Great Lakes in North America.

This stressed habitat supports a community of rare plants and animals, including species more commonly found on prairie grasslands. Lichen and mosses are common species. Trees and bushes are absent or severely stunted. The primary cause of alvars is the shallow exposed bedrock. Flooding and drought add to the stress of the site and prevent many species from growing. Crevices in the limestone provide a distinctive habitat which is somewhat protected and may provide habitat for unusual ferns. Bare rock flats provide areas with extremely low competition that serve as refugia for weak competitors such as lichens and mosses. Depending on the depth of the soil coverage the Ontario alvars form tall grassy meadows, low grassy meadows, dry grassland, rock margin grassland and bare rock flats.

In North America, alvars provide habitat for birds such as bobolinks, eastern meadowlarks, upland sandpipers, eastern towhees, brown thrashers and loggerhead shrikes whose habitat is declining elsewhere. Rare plants include Kalm's Lobelia (*Lobelia kalmii*), Pringle's Aster, Juniper Sedge (*Carex juniperorum*), Lakeside Daisy (*Hymenoxys acaulis*), Ram's-head Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium arietinum*) and Dwarf Lake Iris (*Iris lacustris*). Also associated with alvars are rare butterflies and snails.

The use of the word "alvar" to refer to this type of environment originated in Scandinavia. The largest alvar in Europe is located on the Swedish island of Öland.

Dolostone or **dolomite rock** is a sedimentary carbonate rock that contains a high percentage of the mineral dolomite, $\text{CaMg}(\text{CO}_3)_2$. It is resistant to erosion and can either contain bedded layers or be unbedded. It is less soluble than limestone in weakly acidic groundwater, but it can still develop solution features over time. Dolostone can act as an oil and natural gas reservoir. An overlying layer of dolostone on top of limestone can act as a cap more resistant to erosion resulting in features such as Niagara falls.

Intrigued by the geology of the Niagara Escarpment? See Wikipedia for much more information.

COMPILED REPORT 1983 - 2016 PART 2

Story and photos by: George Pond (or as noted)

Editor's note: Due to the length of this chronicle of Birdathons over 33 years it is published in 2 parts. Part 1 was published in the Summer issue of Lotus.

We drove to a known Northern Goshawk nest (2009) and were not disappointed. The adults were soon screaming and dive-bombing us. We made a hasty retreat. "Keer, Keer'Keer" came the shrill scream of a Red-shouldered Hawk (1988). At the NCC properties on the East 1/4 Line Road we found Vesper, Grasshopper, Field, Song, and Savannah sparrows plus a Clay-coloured (2014) and a Lark Sparrow (2007), two more bonus birds.

A Tufted Titmouse at a feeder in Normandale was another bonus bird (2002). An elusive Kingfisher along Young's Creek at Port Ryerse was a welcome sight as was the large flock of Whimbrel and Ruddy Turnstones on the rocky point east of the harbour. It was here that we found a Red-headed Woodpecker to make a clean sweep of that family. There were Chimney Swifts over Port Dover. Common, Foresters and Caspian Terns, Ring-billed, Bonaparte's and Herring Gulls. An uncommon Great Black-backed Gull sat on the pier. People were feeding the Mallards and Black Ducks.

Tim Horton's provided a very welcome pit stop and coffee break. East of Port Dover we followed the lake shore picking up Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Bufflehead, both Greater and Lesser Scaup, a very late Common Goldeneye and a lone Brant Goose (2001), another very welcome bonus.



We saw a flock of White-wing Scoters (1989), a Long-tailed Duck (1991), both rare birds in this part of Lake Erie, and Sanderlings (1995). With John Miles we found a Snow Goose (1993) and a Cattle Egret (1986). A pair of Willets (1983) standing on the rocky beach were unexpected as were the Little Gulls (1996) that were flying with a flock of Bonaparte's Gulls. Common Loons and even a Red-throated Loon (1992) were seen. A flock of beautiful Red Knots (2006) were another "Birdathon First". The Mockingbird (2001) often seen along the Stelco fence line was preening as we drove by. An Osprey sat in a tree (2007) and a Great Horned Owl (various) with young was on the nest in the Stelco property. We found the expected Black-crowned Night Herons and Cormorants at the Nanticoke harbour as well as a Great Egret (2012).

A huge flock of 500 or 600 birds that landed in the corn stubble of an unplowed field turned out to be Lapland Longspurs (1992) (George's photo Left), quite an amazing sight and so late in the year. Another very late sighting was a Rough-legged Hawk (1991). We found a Short-eared Owl (1997) at the Raptor Reserve near Fisherville.

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I had been watching a pair of Black-necked Stilts (2004) at the Jarvis Sewage and we found them with some difficulty. This pair eventually nested. They were the first confirmed breeding record of Black-necked Stilts for the province of Ontario. Unfortunately the nest was predated, probably by a racoon; however it was quite a Birdathon record. A Western Meadowlark (1996) serenaded us from a fence post.

One of our most productive stops is the Townsend Lagoons and they didn't disappoint. Ducks were abundant, Blue and Green-winged Teal, Shovelers, Northern Pintails, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Ruddy Ducks, a Trumpeter Swan (2003), an Eared Grebe (1994), a Red-necked Phalarope (2002), Wilson's Phalarope (various). Shelia Smith found an American Pipit (1999). Shorebirds were also abundant. They included a Pectoral Sandpiper (1996), a Stilt Sandpiper (1995), White-rumped Sandpipers (various) and a surprising Curlew Sandpiper (2006). A Peregrine Falcon (1997) was a highlight for some of us.



By 7 pm we were on our way back to Long Point. American Bitterns, Pied-billed Grebes, Coots, Moorhens, Virginia Rails, Soras, and even a King Rail (1999) clucked, honked, squealed and grunted from the dead cattails of winter past. Great Blue Herons, Sandhill Cranes, Black Terns, a Bald Eagle, a Northern Harrier and a Common Nighthawk (2002) flew overhead. Common Yellow Throat Warblers and Marsh Wrens sang from hidden perches.



A well camouflaged American Woodcock (Wikipedia)

In the Provincial Park we flushed a Common Snipe (2006) and watched American Woodcock with their weird mating dance. A Sedge Wren (1999) sang from the branch of an alder. Willow Flycatchers and Swamp Sparrows were common.

We left Long Point to go back to Simcoe for a few hours of shuteye, but stopped on the way in the St. Williams forest with Mary Gartshore where we heard Whip-poor-wills and a surprising Sawhet Owl calling (1995). It was still dark at 4.30am when we headed for Backus Woods and the Dawn Chorus... but that's where I started this report of our hypothetical 2016 Great Canadian Birdathon. We finished promptly at 10 am and five minutes later a Black Vulture flew over our heads, a bird that would have been another Birdathon first. Perhaps next year...

“And so I return again and again to tranquil waters and sweet smelling woodland glades. I listen and hear the sounds I have grown to know and understand. I look and see the beauty and the wonder of this world of nature. It is such a wonderful world, and it is mine, mine to enjoy and to share with all its countless inhabitants, be they flora or fauna. Mine to enjoy and to share, but never to destroy. Even as I pause in silent reflection my thoughts drift to an earlier time and place. I find myself remembering... an early may morning, a mirror smooth woodland pond, a symphony of birds.”

These Birdathons have all taken place from about the 8th May to the 27th May and all have been in the Long Point to Selkirk area along the shores of Lake Erie. Our routes have been fairly consistent, although some years we covered slightly more territory than others.

Continued on page 6...

Over the years we have ranged from about 110 birds to a high of 169 birds. The lower numbers were usually Birdathons done in one day from about 7am to 7 pm, the higher numbers were over two days beginning about 10am one day and finishing about 10am the next day with about 5 hours sleep at night. Certainly the composite list indicates that a 200 day total over this route should be possible and I expect that some of the younger, competent birders in the area, if they haven't already, will achieve such a number within a few years. Although I would have preferred to be birding, it's been fun putting this list together and I hope you enjoy it. My goal this year was to raise \$8,000, so far I am a little over \$7,000 but still have some usual donors that I have not heard from. Every dollar raised is steered towards bird related projects by Bird Studies Canada, Naturalists clubs like the Norfolk Field Naturalists and other conservation minded organizations.

Below is a complete list of all the birds identified during all the Birdathons that I have participated in over the past 33 years. I was surprised to find that it totals 241 species, much more than I anticipated.

GEORGE POND

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Common Loon | Ring-necked Pheasant | Ruby-throated Hummingbird | White-eyed Vireo | Brown-headed Cowbird |
| Horned Grebe | Sandhill Crane | Belted Kingfisher | Yellow-throated Vireo | Scarlet Tanager |
| Pied-billed Grebe | King Rail | Northern Flicker | Solitary Vireo | Northern Cardinal |
| Double-crested Cormorant | Virginia Rail | Pileated Woodpecker | Red-eyed Vireo | Rose-breasted Grosbeak |
| Great Blue Heron | Sora | Red-bellied Woodpecker | Philadelphia Vireo | Indigo Bunting |
| Green Heron | Common Moorhen | Red-headed Woodpecker | Warbling Vireo | Purple Finch |
| Cattle Egret | American Coot | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | Black-and-white Warbler | House Finch |
| Great Egret | Semipalmated Plover | Hairy Woodpecker | Golden-winged Warbler | Pine Siskin |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | Killdeer | Downy Woodpecker | Blue-winged Warbler | American Goldfinch |
| Least Bittern | American Golden Plover | Eastern Kingbird | Tennessee Warbler | Eastern Towhee |
| American Bittern | Black-bellied Plover | Great Crested Flycatcher | Orange-crowned Warbler | Savannah Sparrow |
| Mute Swan | Ruddy Turnstone | Eastern Phoebe | Nashville Warbler | Grasshopper Sparrow |
| Whistling Swan | American Woodcock | Yellow-bellied Flycatcher | Northern Parula | Henslow's Sparrow |
| Canada Goose | Common Snipe | Acadian Flycatcher | Yellow Warbler | Vesper Sparrow |
| Snow Goose | Whimbrel | Alder Flycatcher | Magnolia Warbler | Dark-eyed Junco |
| Mallard | Upland Sandpiper | Willow Flycatcher | Cape May Warbler | Tree Sparrow |
| Black Duck | Spotted Sandpiper | Least Flycatcher | Black-throated Blue Warbler | Chipping Sparrow |
| Gadwall | Solitary Sandpiper | Eastern Wood Pewee | Yellow-rumped Warbler | Field Sparrow |
| Pintail | Greater Yellowlegs | Horned Lark | Black-thr Green Warbler | White-crowned Sparrow |
| Green-winged Teal | Lesser Yellowlegs | Tree Swallow | Cerulean Warbler | White-throated Sparrow |
| Blue-winged Teal | Red Knot | Bank Swallow | Blackburnian Warbler | Fox Sparrow |
| American Wigeon | Pectoral Sandpiper | Rough-winged Swallow | Chestnut-sided Warbler | Lincoln's Sparrow |
| Northern Shoveler | White-rumped Sandpiper | Barn Swallow | Bay-breasted Warbler | Swamp Sparrow |
| Wood Duck | Least Sandpiper | Cliff Swallow | Blackpoll Warbler | Song Sparrow |
| Redhead | Dunlin | Purple Martin | Pine Warbler | Wild Turkey |
| Ring-necked Duck | Semipalmated Sandpiper | Blue Jay | Prairie Warbler | Prothonotary Warbler |
| Canvasback | Sanderling | Common Crow | Palm warbler | Eurasian Wigeon |
| Greater Scaup | Short-billed Dowicher | Black-capped Chickadee | Ovenbird | Curlew Sandpiper |
| Lesser Scaup | Stilt Sandpiper | White-breasted Nuthatch | Northern Waterthrush | Black-necked Stilt |
| Common Goldeneye | Wilson's Phalarope | Red-breasted Nuthatch | Louisiana Waterthrush | Summer Tanager |
| Bufflehead | Great Black-backed Gull | Brown creeper | Mourning Warbler | Red-necked Phalarope |
| Long-tailed Duck | Herring Gull | House Wren | Common Yellowthroat | Worm-eating Warbler |
| White-winged Scoter | Ring-billed Gull | Winter Wren | Yellow-breasted Chat | Red-throated Loon |
| Surf Scoter | Bonaparte's Gull | Carolina Wren | Wilson's Warbler | Western Meadowlark |
| Ruddy Duck | Little Gull | Long-billed Marsh Wren | Canada Warbler | Kentucky Warbler |
| Hooded Merganser | Forster's Tern | Short-billed Marsh Wren | American Redstart | Eared Grebe |
| Common Merganser | Common Tern | Northern Mockingbird | Bobolink | Northern Bobwhite |
| Red-breasted Merganser | Caspian Tern | Grey Catbird | Eastern Meadowlark | Trumpeter Swan |
| Turkey Vulture | Black Tern | Brown Thrasher | Red-winged Blackbird | Clay-coloured Sparrow |
| Goshawk | Rock Dove | American Robin | Orchard Oriole | Harris's Sparrow |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | Mourning Dove | Wood Thrush | Northern Oriole | Brant Goose |
| Cooper's Hawk | Yellow-billed Cuckoo | Hermit Thrush | Rusty Blackbird | Tufted Titmouse |
| Red-tailed Hawk | Black-billed Cuckoo | Swainson's Thrush | Common Grackle | |
| Red-shouldered Hawk | Screech Owl | Grey-cheeked Thrush | | |
| Broad-winged Hawk | Great Horned Owl | Veery | | |
| Rough-legged Hawk | Barred Owl | Eastern Bluebird | | |
| Bald Eagle | Long-eared Owl | Blue-grey Gnatcatcher | | |
| Northern Harrier | Short-eared Owl | Golden-crowned Kinglet | | |
| Osprey | Saw-whet Owl | Ruby-crowned Kinglet | | |
| Peregrine Falcon | Whip-poor-will | Water Pipit | | |
| American Kestrel | Common Night Hawk | Cedar Waxwing | | |
| Ruffed Grouse | Chimney Swift | European Starling | | |

Editor's note:
George has used an older version of the Birdathon checklist. Some bird names may still be in a previous format and rare or missing species have been added to the end of the list.

More endangered than pandas: 40 Canadian species at risk of global extinction

By: Dan Kraus

Earlier this month, a conservation success story resonated around the world. The Giant Panda, perhaps the preeminent poster species of nature conservation, was down-listed from a global status of endangered to vulnerable on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. The number of Red List species continues to climb around the world, and today sits at almost 24,000.

As the number of Canada's IUCN Red List species continues to grow, we find ourselves with 40 species that are now more endangered than the Giant Panda. Some of these species are marine mammals and fishes (such as fin whale or Atlantic bluefin tuna) that have large ranges, and recovery will require multi-national cooperation. But many of these species have all or large portions of their global range in Canada. Their endangerment the result of our actions. Their recovery our responsibility.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has an important role to play in protecting Canada's IUCN Red List species, particularly those in southern Canada that are most threatened by habitat loss. IUCN Red List species that have been assessed as critically endangered or endangered and that are found on NCC properties include:

American Eel, Blanding's Turtle, Boreal Felt Lichen, Copper Redhorse, Rusty Patched Bumble Bee, Spotted Turtle, Western Prairie Fringed Orchid, Whitebark Pine and Wood Turtle

For further info on these topics, and more, visit: www.ontarionature.org

The Board of Directors met on October 6 at the home of Cliff Skerratt, one of our new directors. At the time of publishing the Minutes of this meeting were not yet available. A report will be published in the December Lotus.



A Traveller's Guide to Feathers

Originally a Prairie-boy from Canada, Glen Chilton is a professor of biology at James Cook University in Australia, and author of the bestselling *The Curse of the Labrador Duck* and *The Attack of the Killer Rhododendrons*. Glen writes a weekly column concerning recent advances in the field of bird biology under the title *A Traveller's Guide to Feathers*; these can be found on his website: glenchilton.com. Each piece describes the highlights of a recently-published paper from a scholarly journal. Glen's writings are meant for bird enthusiasts who are curious about the latest advances in the field. The studies are global in scope, and consider birds of all types. From penguins on Bouvet Island to snake-eagles in Israel, *A Traveller's Guide to Feathers* provides all of the content with none of the jargon.

Glen Chilton, Ph.D.
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Thank You!

From Norfolk Field Naturalists to
Will Partridge
Guardian Computing
 For hosting our website

Welcome new Directors!

Ken Olmstead and Cliff Skerratt
 We are thrilled to have you on board

Upcoming NFN 2016 Fall/Winter Events

A Legend in Crisis

Tuesday, Nov. 8, 7:30-9:00 pm

Ron Casier of the Canadian Chestnut Council will be talking about its efforts to aid in the recovery of this legendary giant of the forest. The American Chestnut was once one of the most important timber and nut producing trees in the Carolinian Zone until it was nearly destroyed by an introduced pathogen.

Contact Len at **519-428-6796**.

Member's Night & Christmas Social

Tuesday, December 13, 2016

NFN Members are invited to bring up to 12 electronic photos or a short video of no more than 10 minutes of sightings or trips. - Don't forget to bring goodies to share!



Christmas Bird Counts

Data collected during these annual counts provides vital information on the distribution of winter bird populations

Sunday, December 18, 2016 -

Woodhouse Count

Contact: David Okines,
david.okines@gmail.com
519-586-9464

Wednesday, December 28, 2016 -

Fisherville Count

Contact: Linda Thrower,
linda1@295.ca 905-774-1230

NFN Meetings

Norfolk Field Naturalist meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from September to May.

Meetings take place at the **Simcoe Seniors Centre, 89 Pond Street.**

The meetings are free and visitors are always welcome. Doors open at 7:15 pm, programs begin at 7:30 pm.

NFN Mailing Address

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

Next Lotus issue:

December 2016

Input dead line:

Friday, Nov. 18, 2016

About the NFN

Norfolk Field Naturalists members participate in meetings and field outings, many of which are family-friendly. **Membership fees are \$20 Individual and \$30 Family.** Donations are eligible for income tax credits. Charitable registration # 11905869RR00001

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. Copies of the Lotus are available at meetings, by mail or by email and posted on the NFN web site. Articles published in the lotus reflect the views and opinions of the authors, but not necessarily those of the NFN.
www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

2016 - 2017 NFN Executive with contact & project information

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Christmas Bird Counts: (appointed)	David Okines - Woodhouse Count	519-586-9464	
	Linda Thrower - Fisherville Count	905-774-1230	

Honorary President: Al Robinson

Honorary Directors: Harry Barrett, Jim Harlow