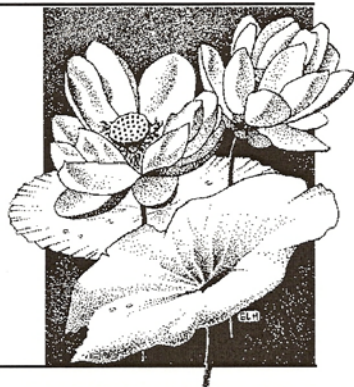


Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



SUMMER 2016



THE GREAT CANADIAN BIRDATHON

COMPILED REPORT 1983 - 2016

PART 1

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 going to be published in 2 parts. Look for Part 2 in the October Lotus.

Our plans were complete. Food was packed and ready, compliments of the Blue Elephant restaurant. Coffee and tea were in the thermoses. Bruce and Ann Falls were ready and we were to meet Steve Wilcox, Ricky Dunn and Jeremy Hussell at the Old Cut banding station in 3 hours to start our 2016 Great Canadian Birdathon. Everyone except I was ready as a last minute problem forced me to the hospital emergency room. Fortunately I had done a Birdathon a week earlier with friends from the Norfolk Field Naturalists. We identified a group total of 122 birds, reasonably respectable for the 12 hours we spent, but I was so looking forward to what I consider my official Birdathon with my usual team. Their total was 139, not bad considering the strange spring migration this year. My problem, a man's problem, has kept me home for a while; time to go over all my past "Birdathon letters and lists" and compile a composite list of all birds identified over those many Birdathons. If only we could identify all these birds in one year!

My first Birdathon records go back to 1983. Catherine Shaw, Harry Barrett and I represented the Norfolk Field Naturalists and identified 119 birds (a learning experience for me and by far my best day ever at that time, thanks to Catherine and Harry). We saw a Henslow Sparrow, an incredibly rare bird, that day with mobs of other birders on Lighthouse Crescent. I was such a novice to birding that it didn't strike me as anything unusual. I've never seen one since. Since then I have done many Birdathons, sometimes three in a year, with a multitude of people including Norfolk Field Naturalists members Betty Chanyi, Anne Wynia, Peggy McArthur, Alan McEown, Shelia Smith, Mike McMillan, Arthur Langford, Richard Dowson, Floyd Dieter, Cathy Pickard, my brother Wilf and his son Scott, Mary Gartshore, Peter Carson, my late wife Shirley and John, Steven and Jamie Miles. It was in May of 1995 that Shirley and I teamed up with Bruce and Ann Falls, birding friends from Toronto, to be joined by Steve Wilcox in 1999. Since then I have considered these as my "Official" Birdathons. Over the years we have seen several rarities which are indicated in brackets by year.



Henslow's Sparrow (photo: Dominic Sherony / Wikipedia)

Here then is my hypothetical "Dream Birdathon" for 2016, with thanks to my late mother Bell Pond, as I have plagiarized some of a script she wrote for one of my slide presentations years ago.

We will cover our usual areas from Long Point to Selkirk and include all the birds over the past 33 years identified during all the Birdathons in which I have participated. Rarities and unexpected birds are identified in brackets by year seen.

"The air was still; dawn was breaking and I stood motionless and silent at the side of a small woodland pond, transfixed by the sheer magic that once again surrounded me. The only sound, save for the sounds of nature, was the pounding of my heart - excited and expectant"

A Hooded Merganser exploded from the water and we heard the whistles of a pair of Wood ducks as they disappeared through the trees.

"I never dreamed that I would sense again the mystery, the magic, the wonder that I had felt the first time that I stood in this same secluded place, this place called Backus, and heard that beautiful, never to be forgotten symphony of song, known by birders as the "Dawn Chorus", the flute-like songs of a Wood Thrush, a Veery, the Robin-like songs of Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, the Rat-a tat-tat of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; now the "Weep-WeepWeep" of a Great Crested Flycatcher and the "Sweet-Sweet-Sweet-Sweet" song of a Prothonotary warbler. In the distance I heard the drumming of a Ruffed Grouse, and in my mind's eye I could see the bird on its favourite log, wings flapping in an age old mating ritual. "Peeee-a weeee" came the plaintive song of an Eastern Wood Pewee.



The musical, clear, sweet song of a Louisiana Waterthrush was joined by the loud "Teacher, Teacher, Teacher" song of an Ovenbird and the "To-whit-To-whit, To weeteoh" song of Norfolk's bird, the Hooded warbler. Red-eyed Vireos were abundant and the higher pitched, three syllabled, more metallic song of a Yellow-throated Vireo filtered through the leaves from somewhere high in the canopy. Overhead a Cerulean warbler sang his high musical buzz and at the back of the buttonwood swamp we could hear the loud emphatic song of a Northern Waterthrush. A Black-billed Cuckoo sat on a limb and "Cuk Cuk coooo" and the cry of a Pileated Woodpecker was followed by a "Drum-like" hammering, adding the necessary percussion to complete this incredible performance by some of Nature's feathered friends. It was a concert that no human orchestra could hope to equal.

We had started our annual birdathon the day before, at 10 am, at the Old Cut bird banding station on Long Point.

A major fallout of migrating birds the previous night, due to a sudden rain storm over Lake Erie (1991), had occurred and we were greeted with birds literally dripping from the trees. The bird banders were swamped and had to close the nets in order to catch up. A very late Junco (1999) was still hanging around the feeders. Warblers were abundant; Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black and White, Cape May, Yellow-rumped, Tennessee, Nashville, Black-throated Green, Chestnut-sided, Bay Breasted, Palm, Wilson's, Canada, Blackburnian, Mourning, Yellow, Northern Parula, and American Redstarts. A Kentucky Warbler was an exceptionally good find (1991) as was the Yellow-breasted Chat (1995).



Continued on page 3...

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo posed, completely in the open for several minutes. Four species of Vireos included Blue-headed and a Philadelphia. Orioles, Tanagers and Grosbeaks seemed to be everywhere. We found Least Flycatchers and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers and heard the "Fitz-pheh" song of a Willow Flycatcher. House Wrens and a Carolina Wren sang from unseen perches. A Ring-necked Pheasant (1984 & 87) called loudly from the swale and we saw it disappear in the long grasses. A very late migrating Hermit Thrush foraged for food along the fence row.

Someone told us about a Long-eared Owl nest close to the Old Prov. Pk. (1988); a bonus bird. The old park was good for Warbling Vireos, Swainson's and Grey-cheeked Thrushes, a Brown Thrasher, Catbirds, Cedar Waxwings, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers and a surprise White-eyed Vireo (1991). An Orange-Crowned warbler (1984) and an incredibly late Fox Sparrow (1986) were unexpected surprises.

We were on an incredible pace and had visions of breaking our record of 169 birds. Now it was time to head inland for "Target species" at known territories. We ticked off Mute Swans and a few ducks as we crossed the Long Point causeway but we would do this area later in the evening for ducks and marsh birds.

The wetlands at Bird Studies Canada headquarters produced Sora, Virginia Rail and a nesting Least Bittern (2015) as well as several species of shorebirds including Dunlin, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least and Semi-palmated Sandpipers and a number of other birds.



Bobolinks and an Eastern Meadowlark sang from a field on the Front road. Cliff swallows under the Port Royal Bridge completed our quest for swallows.

A Rusty Blackbird (2004) in the swamp on the "A" concession was a Birdathon first. An Eastern Screech Owl peered from a wood duck box in the same area. A Harris's sparrow (2015) at the Chanyi farm feeders was indeed a bonus. Jeremy spotted a Golden Plover (2015). We found a Golden-winged warbler and Alder Flycatcher at the Rowanwood sanctuary. We had seen them here in other years. A mile up the sand road we found the Summer Tanager (2002) that had been around for several days. We could hear the long, complex tingling trills of a Winter Wren (1989 & 96). In the "Coppen's Tract" Steve imitated a Barred owl (2010) and had an almost instant reply. Over the years we have had many exciting experiences with these great birds. Hairy, Downy and Red-bellied woodpeckers at Diane Salter's feeders left only Red-headed to be found. Besides the usual Indigo Buntings, Goldfinches, House Finches, nuthatches, Orioles, Hummingbirds etc she had several Pine Siskins (2000) that were still around. A Bob White Quail (2008) along the side of the road was obviously an escapee. Do we count it or not? A rare Worm-eating warbler had set up territory (2009), near a creek, on the east quarter line. Further north on this road, in a flooded field was an Eurasian Wigeon (2013). The Prairie warbler at a known territory in the St William's forest (2002) was singing from its favourite perch. Golden-crowned Kinglets, Pine warblers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Bluewinged warblers and Eastern Towhees were relatively easy to find. A Broad-winged Hawk soared overhead.

To be continued in the October Lotus including the total bird list



THE GREAT CANADIAN
BIRDATHON

Report #2

May 11, 2016

By: Michael McMillan

Photos by: George Pond

Shortly after 6:00am I drove out of my driveway and headed to downtown Simcoe. I was looking for a Pigeon. With few old barns left in the countryside pigeons can be difficult to find during Birdathon. A couple of trips around downtown Simcoe where Pigeons are often present yielded nothing. So I drove to Lake George. There, perched on top of the Carillon Tower was a Pigeon. After checking the lake and seeing a Mallard and Canada Goose I drove to George Pond's house to join George, Peggy McArthur, Al McEwan and Shelia Smith. Just off highway 3 on the western edge of Simcoe we stopped at an open grassy area where a grasshopper sparrow delivered his buzzy song from his perch on a dead weed. Somewhere nearby we could hear a field sparrow singing.

On our journey to Port Rowan to Bird Studies Canada we made a couple of stops. On concession 7 west of Turkey Point Road at a low, wet area we spotted a Common Yellowthroat, a Baltimore Oriole and a Yellow Warbler. Heard but not seen, were a Swamp Sparrow and a Warbling Vireo. In addition, a Loon flew by overhead.

Our second stop, one concession south of highway 24 near the St. Williams Road, was very productive. We saw a Gray Catbird a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, a Hairy Woodpecker a Black and White Warbler and a Blackburnian Warbler while hearing a Wood Thrush, a Pileated Woodpecker, a Flicker and a Bluewinged Warbler.

On highway 59 just before arriving at B.S.C., a Sandhill Crane was foraging in a field. At B.S.C. we met the remainder of our group - Diane Salter, Betty Chanyi and Anne Wynia. We scanned the wetland at B.S.C. and found a Least Sandpiper and a Lesser Yellowlegs. Meanwhile Tree Swallows circled around us catching insects and a Song Sparrow and pair of House Finches perched on a nearby bush. We moved on to the wetland at the old Port Rowan sewage lagoon. While looking at the only birds on the water - a few Buffleheads - a Great Blue Heron flew over. We traveled a bit west on Front Road to the Sinclair-Campbell Project. Across the road in a grassy field we spotted several Bobolinks. A male flew up out of the grass and then fluttered irregularly back down showing off his white and black plumage. Even the yellow on the back of his head was briefly visible. We backtracked and while driving to the dyke on the causeway spotted a Forster's Tern hovering and then diving to the water for fish. From the viewing stand at the dyke three Bald Eagles were visible standing in the distance on the dyke. To see three Eagles standing on the ground together was a rare sight. A solitary American Coot was swimming on the water and several active Barn Swallows were feeding nearby.

We moved on to Old Cut hoping for warblers and other songbirds and were rewarded with a Magnolia Warbler, a Black-throated Blue warbler, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Lincoln's Sparrow, a White-throated Sparrow and a Swainson's Thrush. A walk along nearby Lighthouse Crescent produced an Eastern Phoebe, an Eastern Kingbird, a Least Flycatcher, a Blue-headed Vireo, an American Redstart, a Veery and a House Wren. Suddenly, someone spotted a Green Heron flying toward the marsh. All the while a nearby Carolina Wren was singing heartily.

Continued on page 5...



BOBOLINK
George Pond

Our next stop was at the Old Provincial Park which was a good decision. The highlight of the day was here where two male Hooded Warblers in a thicket of small shrubs near some logs bounced, hopped and fluttered into view and out of view for a lengthy period of time providing many excellent views. Other birds seen in the park were a pair of Indigo Buntings, a Golden-crowned Kinglet, a Chestnut-sided Warbler, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, a Hermit Thrush and a White-crowned Sparrow.

We headed west on Front Road and under the bridge at Port Royal were many nesting Cliff Swallows. In a nearby tree a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was singing his familiar melodic song. It's like a Robin's song but mellower, like a Robin that has taken voice lessons.

By now it was past noon, so we stopped to enjoy a leisurely lunch on Diane Salter's front veranda. While eating we could keep an eye on Diane's numerous bird feeders and, with her house being beside Big Creek, there are always a good variety of birds. There were Pine Siskins, both a Red-breasted and a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Downy, a Hairy and a Red-bellied Woodpecker, Baltimore Orioles, an Orchard Oriole and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Also a Wood Duck flew by overhead. Following lunch we headed east on Front Road. During a quick stop overlooking the Turkey Point Marsh a Brown Thrasher flew across the road and landed in a field. At Port Ryerse a Red-headed Woodpecker was spotted high in a tree near the creek. On a rock in the lake were several Cormorants.



Red-headed Woodpecker Photo: George Pond

Our day ended at the pier in Port Dover. Here on the breakwater were Ring-billed Gulls, an immature Herring Gull, a Bonaparte's Gull, several Caspian Terns and a Semi-palmated Plover.

My total for the day was 94 species, the lowest number I've had over the last few years. Subsequently, I learned that the cool weather in early May resulted in just a few pulses of migration. Ducks and shore birds in particular were scarce and warbler numbers were low even on days with good variety. This made for a challenging Birdathon.

I am thankful to have been able to do this Birdathon with such an excellent group of birders. Without their help I would never have identified as many species. As I write this I have collected \$4,444. There is still money to come in and I am hopeful the final total will exceed \$4,600. I wish to thank all of you, my sponsors, for raising this sum of money for bird research and conservation across the country. The receipts will be issued by Bird Studies Canada either by email or regular mail in the summer. Attached is a list of the birds I identified by either seeing or hearing them.

**Thank you for supporting me,
Mike**

(See Mike's Bird List on page 6)



YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER
GEORGE POND

BIRDATHON #2 ...continued from page 5

MIKE'S BIRD LIST

Date: May 11, 2016

Location: Long Point area

Number of species: 94

V - seen X - heard

V	Common Loon	V	Ruby-thr. Hummingbird	V	Golden-cr. Kinglet	V	Hooded Warbler
V	Double-cr. Cormorant	V	Red-hd. Woodpecker	V	Ruby-cr. Kinglet	V	Chipping Sparrow
V	Great Blue Heron	V	Red-bell. Woodpecker	V	Blue-gr. Gnatcatcher	X	Field Sparrow
V	Green Heron	V	Downy Woodpecker	V	Eastern Bluebird	V	Grasshopper Sparrow
V	Turkey Vulture	V	Hairy Woodpecker	V	Veery	V	Song Sparrow
V	Mute Swan	X	Northern Flicker	V	Swainson's Thrush	V	Lincoln's Sparrow
V	Canada Goose	X	Pileated Woodpecker	V	Hermit Thrush	X	Swamp Sparrow
V	Wood Duck	V	Least Flycatcher	X	Wood Thrush	V	White-thr. Sparrow
V	Mallard	V	Eastern Phoebe	V	American Robin	V	Wh.-crowned Sparrow
V	Bufflehead	V	Eastern Kingbird	V	Grey Catbird	V	Northern Cardinal
V	Bald Eagle	V	Blue-headed Vireo	V	Brown Thrasher	V	Rose-br. Grosbeak
V	American Coot	X	Warbling Vireo	V	Cedar Waxwing	V	Indigo Bunting
V	Sandhill Crane	X	Red-eyed Vireo	V	European Starling	V	Bobolink
V	Semipalmated Plover	V	Blue Jay	X	Blue-winged Warbler	V	Red-winged Blackbird
V	Killdeer	V	American Crow	V	Yellow Warbler	V	Common Grackle
V	Lesser Yellowlegs	V	Purple Martin	V	Chest.-sided Warbler	V	Brn.-headed Cowbird
V	Least Sandpiper	V	Tree Swallow	V	Magnolia Warbler	V	Orchard Oriole
V	Bonaparte's Gull	V	Cliff Swallow	V	Bl.-thr. Blue Warbler	V	Baltimore Oriole
V	Ring-billed Gull	V	Barn Swallow	V	Yel.-rumped Warbler	V	House Finch
V	Herring Gull	V	Black-capped Chickadee	X	Bl.-thr. Green Warbler	V	Pine Siskin
V	Caspian Tern	V	Red-br. Nuthatch	V	Blackburnian Warbler	V	American Goldfinch
V	Forsters Tern	V	White-br. Nuthatch	V	Bl.& Wh. Warbler	V	House Sparrow
V	Rock Pigeon	V	Carolina Wren	V	American Redstart		
V	Mourning Dove	V	House Wren	V	Common Yellowthroat		



Pileated Woodpecker Photo: George Pond

The Norfolk Field Naturalists

wish to recognize with gratitude
the following participants in

The Great Canadian Birdathon

for their fundraising efforts
on behalf of this organization:

**Betty Chanyi, Peggy McArthur, Mike
McMillan, George Pond, Lisa Timpf
and Anne Wynia.**

Thank you!

Thank You!

From Norfolk Field Naturalists to

Will Partridge

Guardian Computing

For hosting our website

**Status Endangered:
the Spiny Softshell Turtle**

Earlier this spring, the Committee on the Status of the Endangered Wildlife in Canada increased the Spiny Softshell Turtle listing from threatened to endangered.

We are thankful for champions of endangered species like this such as Scott Gillingwater (*remember this NFN guest speaker?*) Scott just received the W.W.H. Gunn Conservation Award for his work to help protect and recover the Spiny Softshell Turtle over the past two decades.

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

**Ostrander Point Wind Project Lawsuit:
The Blandings Turtles win!**

Editor's note: You may recall that NFN donated \$1000 to Ostrander Point Appeal Fund to assist with legal fees in regard to their lawsuit. The following are excerpts from reports by Cheryl Anderson and Myrna Wood.

The Tribunal in the Ostrander Point ERT hearing has found that “the remedies proposed by Ostrander [Gilead] and the Director are not appropriate in the unique circumstances of this case.

The Tribunal decision says that no matter how important renewable energy is to our future it does not automatically override the public interest in protecting against other environmental harm such as the habitat of species at risk. This was the basis of PECFN’s appeal.

This decision not only protects the Blanding’s turtle but also the staging area for millions of migrating birds and bats and the Monarch butterflies. The proponent had thirty days to submit their appeal and today (July 6, 2016) was the deadline. As of 5 pm today no notice has come of that request to appeal.

This action has been described as a David versus Goliath battle. PECFN, a rural organization of about 60 members was up against the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and a large oil company-owned business. It is particularly wonderful to finally realize that the battle is over and that “David” has prevailed.

The NFN Board of Directors met twice since the April issue of Lotus, on April 26 and again on June 14. The following are highlights from these meetings.

Treasurer's Report: Barb Hourigan reported that there is over \$50,000.00 in the NFN bank account. No formal update will be issued until the April 30 Year End Calculation is completed.

Membership: Diane Salter noted that she has dropped from the membership list all past members who have not paid dues since 2013.

Speaker Program & Field events: The 2016-17 program has been finalized and sent to Jane Thomson for the brochure design.

Committees: Peter Carson reports that the LPCIP is awaiting news of a \$150,000.00 grant which would allow them to complete the final planned wet culvert. He also reports that signage in several languages will be required to deter fishermen from poaching turtles.

Bernie Solymár reminded members of the upcoming Rooted in Nature Festival (July 10th) NCEE is currently raising funds for property for an outdoor education centre.

Other Business: The NFN has purchased a new laptop computer to replace the old malfunctioning unit as well as a sound system after the Seniors Centre decided to disallow the use of their system in the hall by other groups.

Next Meeting: The AGM will be held on Tuesday, September 13, 2016, at 7.30 at the Simcoe Seniors Centre.



Upcoming NFN 2016 Summer/Fall Events

Norfolk Sand Plain Restoration Tour

Sunday, July 31, 4 pm to 7 pm
Tour restoration sites that represent different ages since completion. Meet at the dam parking lot just west of St. Williams Nursery on the north side of Hwy 24 to car pool.
Call Mary or Peter: 519-586-3985.

Sex and Song: Moths, Katyids & Crickets Saturday, Aug. 20, 7:30 - 10:30 pm

Learn about Lepidoptera and Orthoptera. The farm is at 316 Norfolk County Road 60 on the south side, 5.5 km west of Hwy 59.
Contact Mary or Peter: 519-586-3985.

Annual General Meeting & Speaker: South Africa Tuesday, Sept. 13, 7:30 pm.

Diane Stinson is a retired teacher from Simcoe. Presentation to include plants, animals, birds, natural areas and some of the history with a side trip to Victoria Falls.

Fascinating Fungi Sunday, October 2, 1 pm to 3 pm

Identify mushrooms and other fungi of all shapes and sizes. Meet at the 3rd Concession entrance to Backus Woods (by the Turkey Release sign). Dress appropriately for the weather.
Contact Inga at 519-875-5601.

Warbler Identification Tuesday, October 11, 7:30pm

Guest speaker: Sarah Rupert, the Interpretive Naturalist at Point Pelee National Park. She is a wonderful artist known as Pelee Girl. She uses her skills as an artist to make a complex variety of warblers easy to identify.

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:

**October 2016
Input dead line:
Friday, Sept. 16, 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

2015 - 2016 NFN Executive with contact & project information

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Christmas Bird Counts: (appointed) David Okines - Woodhouse Count 519-586-9464
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Honorary President: Al Robinson
Honorary Directors: Harry Barrett, Jim Harlow