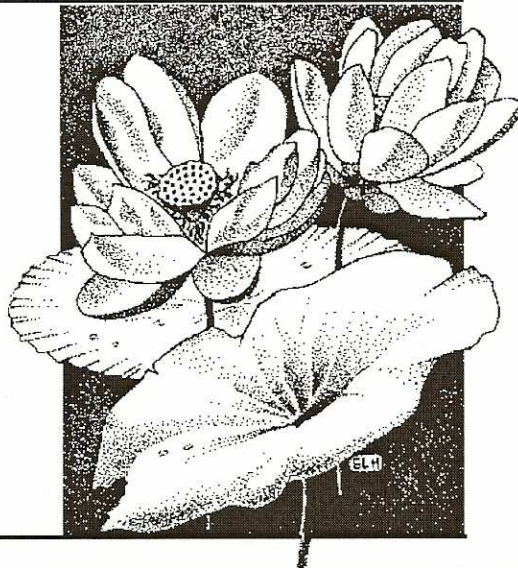


Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



**April
2007**

Meeting Notes:

February 2007 and March 2007

Due to a severe winter storm, our February meeting was cancelled. Several items of business were discussed at the start of the March meeting:

Causeway Project: Vivienne Heydorn gave a brief update and informed us that a firm's proposal has been accepted. (See Vivienne's article on page 6 of this newsletter.)

Lakeshore Secondary Plan: Peter Black announced that the Community Information sessions would be held Wed. April 4 in Port Dover (a change of date) and Thurs. April 5 in Port Rowan.

Wildlife Festival: Tara Crewe reported that the booth was very busy with children enjoying "hands-on" activities and, in general, was well received by visitors to the festival. (See page 6 article.)

Marsh Monitoring: Tara also mentioned that the Volunteer Orientation & Training session for the Marsh Monitoring Program would be held Sat., Mar 24. at BSC Headquarters.

Arthur Langdon's passing was announced by Peter Carson. See page 4 for photos of Arthur and tributes to him.

Baillie Birdathoner: Michael McMillan will act as the NFN Birdathoner in 2007.

Lotus Articles; Anne Davidson requested possible pro/con articles for nuclear power in Norfolk or evidence of other environmental "changes" in Norfolk such as "Global warming", etc.. Please contact her if you feel you can contribute. She also reminded members to send in their John Miles stories.

Recent Sightings: By the Mar 13 meeting, spring arrivals included American Robin, Turkey Vulture, Great Blue Heron, Killdeer, numerous Tundra Swans and two of our snowbirds, Harry and Joan Barrett. A rare visitor was the Ross' Goose at Long Point and there was also a report that 2 Bald Eagle nests contained eggs.

March Speaker:

Our March speaker was Cyril Crocker, a seasoned bird bander and raptor aficionado at Hawk Cliff.

The Hawk Cliff Raptor Birding Station, on the north shore of Lake Erie near Port Stanley, is one of the most important and spectacular raptor migration routes in the world. Over 100,000 hawks fly over on a good day in September. Cyril described how mist nets are used to capture and band raptors as they fly south each fall, and explained the importance of the information collected for the Canadian Wildlife Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Cyril commenced by saying that "Birds of Prey" is a misnomer for raptors. Most bird species are birds of prey - warblers and many other songbirds prey on worms and insects. It is our emotional reaction to seeing birds, which we attract to our feeders for our enjoyment, taken as prey that causes raptors to be considered the "bad guys". In fact, this is merely another instance of weeding out the weak. Cyril reminded us that we cannot pick and choose our avian visitors; if we have birds, we will have hawks.

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Cyril Crocker at NFN

Photo by: Anne Davidson

Hawk Cliff is ideally situated for capturing and banding

hawks due to the prevailing winds and the proximity of the lake, which stops raptors from moving southward because the air masses over the lake are cool; hawks remain over land to soar in the thermals and preserve energy. Wind direction plays an important part in being able to see hawks in migration. NW winds, often present from mid-Sept. to mid-Oct. carry the birds to the lake edge and improve chances of seeing them. SW or W winds make viewing and capturing more difficult as the birds spread inland over a wider area.

Cyril showed photos of the blinds, strings with lures, and nets he uses to capture raptors; usually, it is young, inexperienced birds that are caught. Placed in vented cans of appropriate sizes they wait calmly for banding; most are caught, banded and released within 10 minutes to minimize stress. A number of us were surprised that bare hands are used when handling the raptors. Interestingly, the only bloodied hand that appeared in all the photos was holding not a raptor but a Northern Shrike

The close-up photos of the eagles were especially striking. One showed Cyril's hand holding a Golden Eagle claw nearly the same size as his hand, even with the talons clenched. Bald Eagle behaviour was also a surprise - when being held, they do not struggle and fight, they go limp and have to be supported for a photo. Hawk Cliff operates from September 1 to December 31. In fall, the hawks migrate westward along the north shore of the great lakes, making south-western Ontario and Michigan ideal study grounds. In spring, they come up via Niagara and the activity is heavy at Beamer on the escarpment.

There has been a drop in the number banded in the past three years; that may be showing an effect of global warming. The birds may be passing through, thousands of feet high, riding on the thermals (warm pockets of air heated by the sun that rise from the ground) and therefore not being captured and banded.

In addition to counts being an important part of migration monitoring, the bands themselves are playing a greater role each year in helping to identify where birds go or have come from. Recapture of a banded bird, in conjunction with the data maintained from banding records, gives information previously unknown about routes and distances travelled, some of it very surprising.

The Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association Meeting January 31, 2007

by Anne Wynia

The Annual General meeting was another success and the membership is the largest of any woodlot owners group we know at plus or minus 300. There were 22 displays by various organizations and businesses related to forest health, conservation, trail clubs, wood uses, and Bird Studies Canada and Norfolk Field Naturalists. Following a short AGM, presentations were made by two informative speakers.

Steve Bowers , Coordinator for Huron County Stewardship Council spoke about "Making a case for sustainable management of private woodlots". His talk was based on a study of several farm woodlots most of which have been in the family for several generations. He outlined how best forestry practices are economically sound and over time are often more profitable than agricultural crops. Data was gathered from detailed records of harvested crops and timber harvests. A healthy forest remained with basal area figures indicative of good forest management.

In all cases cited, harvesting generated more revenue than growing crops. There were other benefits as well including aesthetics and recreation. Well managed woodlots also provide shelter, water retention, wildlife habitat, temperature modification and carbon sequestration. In conclusion Steve emphasized the importance of joining a woodlot owners association, utilizing experts, employing qualified tree markers and loggers, being familiar with the forest on the property and planning for the long term future.



Audrey Heagy, Anne Wynia and Dolf Wynia at the NFN booth

Photo by: Tony Boerkamp

Linda Tucker who is the Forest Health Technician for South Western Ontario was the **Keynote Speaker**. She updated members on a number of forest invasive insect species. These species have been introduced primarily by wood shipping containers used for imported goods but are also spread by transporting firewood. The list seems to be ever increasing. Linda talked about Emerald Ash Borer, Asian Long horned Beetle, Pine shoot Beetle, Gypsy Moth, Hickory Leaf Roller, Hickory Bark Beetle, Fall Webworm and the Wood Wasp. Her excellent photographs illustrated their appearance, evidence of their presents, and specific marks left on the bark, twigs, leaves and roots etc.

Her presentation was professional, informative and well received. She will be missed as she is moving on to new adventures in Utah, U.S.A. There were numerous door prizes donated and won by happy members. The evening was enjoyable with opportunities to meet with exhibitors and other members.

**In Memorium
David George (Dave) Gaunt
1953 - 2007**



Dave Gaunt was a long time Scouter and a great leader of the 1st Vittoria Scout Group. At the district Lynn Valley area level, he was the Trainer, Organizer and Staff Co-ordinator for many scouting activities. He was noted for his love of outdoor life and the challenges it brought. Activities such as camping, boating, skiing, hiking were some of his favourites. He was excellent at debating the pros and cons of

any subject and was always willing to pitch in and help scouting in any capacity. He was awarded Scouting's Good Service Medal in 2004.

Dave was a beloved family man who cherished his wife Adele and two boys, Michael and Brian. His family also became very active with the Norfolk Field Naturalists (NFN's). Dave and Adele led the Junior Naturalists while Michael and Brian joined in. Dave's involvement with scouting made organizing the Junior Nats a natural fit and the group flourished under the guidance of Dave and Adele. Dave also became NFN Treasurer and helped organize their finances using an easy to understand accounting program.

Passionate about cars, Dave loved working on them and solving mechanical problems. He enjoyed going to races, rallies and participating where he could. He will be remembered as a dedicated husband and father, a community spirited member of society and a man that viewed life in a balanced way. He was loved by everyone and will be greatly missed.

by Lynn Valley Scouter Harvey T. Mitchell and friend Peter Black

Many had never owned land before and had no idea of the short-term fertility which is inherent in the light sandy soils of the County. After much backbreaking work and a few short years of good harvests, many fields dried up and during windy dry periods, especially in the spring before the crops had had an opportunity to cover and protect the soil, the surface sands started to blow away.

Once the surface soil was gone, the lower layers had even less fertility and blew away even faster, covering adjacent fields that were still in production. This was the story in Norfolk and several other areas in Ontario. Farms were being abandoned and great hardships were encountered by many of the settlers.

A significant report was made to the Ontario Legislature in 1888 by R.W.Phipps pointing out the fallacy of letting people settle unsuitable lands. Through the efforts of Colonel Pratt, the local Member of the Provincial Legislature, Edmund Zavitz, a young forestry lecturer at the Ontario Agricultural College did a study and wrote "The Wastelands of Ontario". It recommended that the Provincial Government start a reforestation program and an educational program teaching farmers the value of woodlot management.

Walter McCall, a good friend of Colonel Pratt, ran a sawmill and furniture factory in St. Williams. He had noted the ever-poorer logs that he had to deal with at his mill trying to make the high quality furniture that he was known for. He had already started his own small nursery. Pratt arranged the optioning of some of the land McCall owned for a nursery site and convinced the Provincial Legislature to approve legislation, authorizing the Ontario Forestry Branch to grow and distribute tree seedlings for reforestation of the wastelands at no charge to Provincial landowners.

The new legislation was really the first conservation legislation in the Province that had a landscape wide impact on Southern Ontario. It was passed in 1908, the same year that the first seeds for new seedlings were sown on the St. Williams Forestry Station.

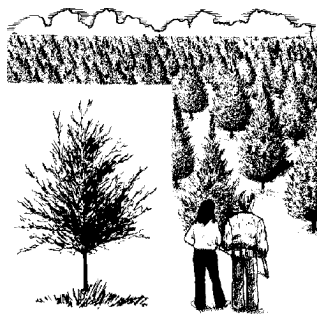
It is this significant Norfolk County initiative that the Canadian Forestry Association has recognized in awarding the County the title "Forest Capital of Canada for 2008". It is hoped that all heritage and conservation groups and any others in the County will organize one or more special events, recognizing and celebrating the values of the forests that we have all around us.

For further information : Dolf Wynia 519 875 3350
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Norfolk County, Forest Capital of Canada for 2008

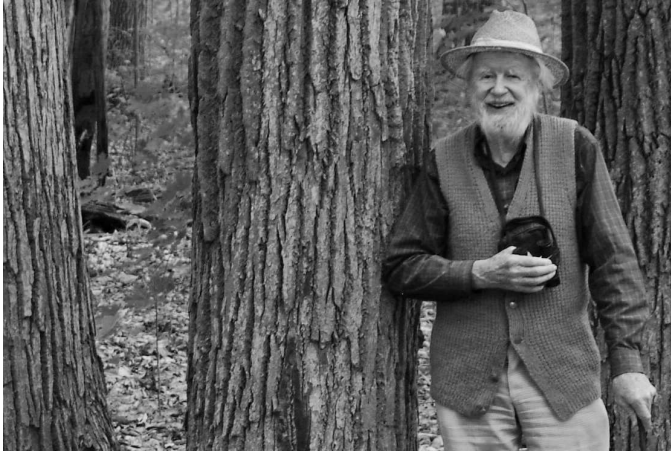
by Dolf Wynia

Few visitors to Norfolk will fail to notice the many woodlots and windbreaks that are part of almost every farm. Quite a large proportion of the woodlots are conifer plantations, some of them now well advanced to converting back to mixtures of deciduous tree species with a few white pines mixed in. In all, about 30% of our County land area is occupied by forests. A good portion is open to public visitation because they are owned by the Crown, the County or the Conservation Authority.



It was not always like that. In the mid 19th century, much of the land in Norfolk was being cleared by settlers who obtained the deed to their land by clearing a minimum acreage and building a house.

**In Memorium
Dr. Arthur Nicol Langford
1910 - 2007**



Arthur was the first person to sponsor old trees in Backus Woods . He is pictured in front of his three sponsored giant tulip trees, deep in the south block of Backus Woods.

Photo by permission of LPRCA. Photo credit: Studio One, Simcoe.

Eulogy

As written and given by Mary Gartshore

Today I speak on behalf of all the naturalists and biologists lucky enough to have Arthur as a friend and colleague. Arthur's dedication, energy and quest for new knowledge will remain an inspiration to all of us. It may also account for his long and rich life that we are gathered here today to honour. For each of us, our association with Arthur is a treasured collection of personal stories, some of which I would like to share. I would like to thank those who shared their stories with me and whom I have borrowed from.

Arthur contributed to Long Point Bird Observatory, now Bird Studies Canada, in many ways as former Executive Director (1983-84), and as a significant donor to the new building where he is honoured with a special stained glass illustration. Arthur did Birdathon for six or seven years to raise funds for Long Point Bird Observatory and the Norfolk Field Naturalists. An idea Arthur developed with Long Point Bird Observatory to increase club participation, was a sliding scale of greater funds back to clubs who raised more. For those who are not familiar, the object of Birdathon was to seek sponsors and then count bird species within a predetermined geographical area over 24 hours in May. The sponsored birder was required to see or hear each bird before it could be counted. I had the privilege and fun of being one of Arthur's bird dogs. Arthur was relentless in his pursuit of sponsors such that each bird observed was worth its weight in gold.

As many will know Arthur was a real stickler for rules. Grouse can be difficult to find sometimes on Birdathon and - just in case - we had one on a nest for Arthur. We arrived at the nest and with his face inches away, Arthur stared at the perfectly camouflaged bird and shook his head. Then raising one finger he turned and in his professorial manner declared how amazing camouflage could be. The grouse took this as a sign, stepped off the nest and thundered off.

"Did you hear it, Arthur? It just flew away."

"No and I didn't see it either - can't count it!"

It was a long day of birding and we gradually wore Arthur down until he finally agreed to include it - to be precise - a bird looked at, though not seen. During his Birdathoning years Arthur raised close to \$50,000 with almost \$12,000 raised in the banner year of 1988, the largest contribution ever by an independent Birdathoner.

Arthur was an avid squash player and even played on the morning of his 90th birthday. In fact, Arthur had a tradition of playing squash on his birthday but this fact was not revealed to his worthy opponent to avoid spoiling the game. Arthur's love of squash may have been more for his private amusement than the exercise it provided at least on some occasions. A colleague, Richard Knapton, challenged Arthur to a squash game. Shortly after the game Richard arrived back red-faced and voice strained with exertion.

"That Arthur ..." He declared. "...he toyed with me, just dribbling the ball into this corner and that. I must have run 10 miles to his 10 yards," and, in retrospect, "a triumph of skill and talent on Arthur's part."

Arthur taught at Bishop's University in Quebec from 1937 to 1975 a span of 38 years. He actually founded the biology department. Dr. Langford was affectionately known as "The Alg" by his students, though never to his face, because of his passion for algae. Dr. Langford's first year biology students had a hard time with up to a 50% failure rate on the Christmas exam. Arthur was strict and uncompromising with his classes. Students willing to apply themselves, though, were rewarded with Arthur's dedication to finding good summer jobs for them. An annual field trip for third year students to the Maine coast was a big highlight that resulted in students returning on the school bus with buckets full of marine biota to populate their saltwater aquariums. A Biological Exhibition was mounted by the Department every other year that drew throngs of local people and alumni and provided opportunities for students to plan and execute term projects or demonstrate their progress on their graduate projects; this was one of Dr. L's high points and it produced some excellent work on the part of his students. (Thanks to Jim Dougan and Roberta, Arthur's daughter and one of those students, for your insights)

A 1960s student recalls a touching story about his aspirations to be a biologist. Ian Juniper writes:

'I met Dr. Langford at Bishop's University. I was 33 years old and after having spent three years serving aboard deep sea tankers and more years working at various jobs, I encountered a team of biologists in a Quebec park and after talking with them decided that I had discovered my vocation. I had a meeting with the Dean of Arts who advised me to complete my high school and re-apply at Bishops which on the face of it was good advice. However, I did not wish to waste any more time and the Dean, realizing that I was not ready to go along with his advice and in order to convince me of the error of my ways, referred me to the Head of the Biology department for confirmation of his decision. He underestimated Dr. Langford, who, after a lengthy conversation with me, and also with my wife, stood up from behind his desk, came around in front and offered his hand which I clasped in hopefulness, looked me intently in the eyes and then nodded. With an emotional flood I realized that I was accepted.

I vowed then and there that, as far as possible, I would not ever let this man down. So, I went on to graduate with a BSc. and later, again with his help, with an MSc. Dr. Langford was directly responsible for turning my life around for the better. I owed a huge debt to him. They don't make professors like him anymore.'

Arthur's other contributions at Bishop's included the securement of a local bog, the Johnsville Forest Bog, a place where Arthur took his students.

Arthur sat on numerous boards and committees locally in Norfolk County including Long Point World Biosphere Reserve Foundation, Long Point Region Conservation Authority, Norfolk Environmental Advisory Committee, Norfolk Field Naturalists and Long Point Basin Land Trust to name just a few.

Arthur was the founding President of Long Point Basin Land Trust created ten years ago, to protect natural land in the Long Point area in perpetuity. In honour of the memory of Arthur Langford, his abilities and love of people and nature, the Long Point Basin Land Trust will, in the near future, create the Arthur Langford Nature Reserve. In my mind's eye I picture this reserve as having and protecting all the little living things Arthur loved: the algae, the mushrooms, the lichens, the clubmosses, and the song birds. We hope that you will agree that this is a fitting legacy for our dear friend Arthur.



Darleen Degriek, Arthur Langford and Dawn Lang, three past presidents of NFN, at the celebration of Arthur's 95th birthday with his friends at NFN. Photo by: Peter J. Carson

Some Memories of Arthur

by Al Robinson

Pat and I met Arthur and Marjorie when we joined the NFN in 1985. We soon became good friends, and he often used to stop by our farm property to look at our garden and to see what fruit, vegetables, shrubs and trees we had planted.

Also, we belonged to several environmental organizations, and Jim Harlow and I would drive him to meetings and to Norfolk Township, Simcoe Council and Regional Council and Townsend, where he would make excellent presentations. Arthur was extremely knowledgeable, and was willing to pass it on to anyone interested. Going to a conference near Bracebridge, a 4-hour trip, I listened to his life experience and was completely satisfied to do so.

Arthur was in contact with many of his former students from Bishops University who were scattered all over, and several used to visit him regularly.

Pat and I accompanied Marjorie and him on a fall trip to Agawa Canyon. Arthur made all the arrangements for the ferry to Manitoulin where we studied rock formations, especially at Little Current (Pat and I learned a lot). After a memorable trip to the Canyon, we visited Elliot Lake and Science North in Sudbury. Then we went to the Wye Marsh near Midland, where a former student of Arthur's was the manager and gave us a complete tour and information on the recovery of the Trumpeter Swan, with many questions from Arthur.

In following years, we went on many of the NFN walks with Arthur, and to many fund-raising banquets for environmental organizations such as Long Point Biosphere, BSC and Long Point Foundation. On our 2005 Birdathon, Arthur, then almost 95, accompanied us (he was the official birder for NFN in prior years) and recorded 33 species in spite of his poor hearing and declining eyesight due to macular degeneration. He was very pleased with the day's birding.

In the last few years, Pat and I and several friends were taking him shopping and to specialists in Hamilton and London. Arthur will be missed at NFN for his insightful questions to speakers and his great interest in everything and everyone. He will always be fondly remembered by Pat and me and the members of NFN.

Winter Tree Identification Workshop & Hike

by Diane Salter

Over 40 people arrived at Backus Education Centre on Saturday, February 24 to learn how to identify trees in winter and to walk through the woods. Colleen Dale had lots of samples of branches identified on the tables when we arrived. We were instructed to first look at the twigs for opposite or alternate branching. Opposite are maples, ashes or dogwood, alternate are all the rest.

She gave us many helpful clues to aid in the identification of different bark.

- * beech, smooth grey bark resembling an elephant leg
- * white ash, mature bark has a diamond shaped pattern
- * tulip, intersecting rounded ridges, tall and straight trunk
- * shagbark hickory, long plates loose to look "shaggy"
- * white pine, soft needles in clusters of 5
- * hackberry, wart-like projections in stratified layers
- * yellow birch, thick, dull yellow, papery bark; usually 'stilted' because the tiny seeds germinate on rotting log or stump

After the workshop we all headed into the woods. It was a bright sunny crisp day, perfect for a winter walk. Many thanks to Colleen, Nick DeSerranno, Alicia Salyi and Lori Manary from the Long Point Conservation Authority who



helped everyone hone their new skills by pointing out the many trees we had learned about.

Winter Tree Identification Hike

Photo by: Alicia Salyi

The Long Point Causeway Revitalization Project

by Vivienne Heydorn

In October of last year, a meeting of interested citizens and stakeholders was held at Bird Studies Canada, Port Rowan, to discuss the future of the Long Point Causeway. A discussion was held to draft terms of reference for a feasibility study to identify and investigate options to address the issues. The two main issues were felt to be the biological and hydrological impacts of the Causeway, namely the high incidence of road-kill and the premature aging of the marsh as a result of it being cut off from the bay and therefore unable to benefit from seasonal flushings, made all the more necessary by the silt build-up from the Big Creek Canal.

According to a study conducted in the U.S., Long Point Causeway has the fifth highest animal mortality rate of all the highways in North America, more than a little disconcerting and embarrassing for the World Biosphere Reserve through which it runs.

This statistic is not so surprising when we consider an average of roughly 2,500 vehicles per day use the Causeway during the summer, peaking at 8,000 vehicles per day on busy weekends (P. Ashley). However, over 10,000 animal mortalities a year - turtles, frogs, snakes and birds, as well as mammals, an estimated 3% of which are intentional mortalities - are too many to overlook. Not only that, but of the 26 reptile species in Ontario, 18 are on the endangered species list. What's more, the Long Point area is home to 7 of Ontario's 8 turtle species and 12 of Ontario's 17 snake species, some of which are found exclusively at Long Point.

The Long Point World Biosphere Reserve Foundation (LPWBRF), in the guise of their representative Paula Jongerden, agreed to act as project lead and banker for the ad hoc Steering Committee which was struck under the umbrella of the LPWBRF at the next meeting, held in late October. It was felt that for this project to be successful, the Steering Committee would need to be broad-based and would need to incorporate community input into the proposal. To this end, one of the requirements of proposals submitted was a public meeting in the summer of 2007 when cottagers as well as any other interested members of the public could attend, which will take place on Saturday, August 18, 2007. In addition, it was agreed that the emphases of the feasibility study should be economic, biological and hydrological.

The Steering Committee was sub-divided into three parts: a Funding Committee; a Communications Committee, and a Technical Review Panel.

The Funding Committee is responsible for raising \$10,000 of the \$40,000 to be made available to pay the firm submitting the winning proposal for the feasibility study. This \$10,000 (of which NFN has promised \$2,000) will be matched by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) to make \$20,000 of non-government funding, which will then hopefully be matched by government agencies to provide the \$40,000 needed. Most of this funding has already been promised.

The Communications Committee has set up a website to keep the public informed of the Steering Committee's progress, and has submitted updates which have been published in the Port Rowan Good News. The website can be visited at www.longpointbiosphere.org Members of the Steering Committee have also met with Mayor Travale, who was supportive of the project and have also informed The Hon. Diane Finley.

The Technical Review Panel has studied in depth the five excellent proposals submitted by interested environmental and engineering firms and has selected a winning firm.

Ecoplans of Kitchener and Mississauga submitted the winning proposal and have already met with members of the Steering Committee and started work. One of their deliverables is to attend the Roads and Ecopassages Forum being held at the Toronto Zoo on March 21 and 22 of this year, and to submit a report to the Steering Committee in April. We have been fortunate enough to have been invited to present two papers on the Causeway issue at this forum. Paul Ashley and Scott Gillingwater will each be presenting and then taking part in a one hour case study of the Long Point Causeway issue with input from a panel of experts from across North America along with audience participation.

The Steering Committee will continue to meet and work with Ecoplans whose Feasibility Study is due to be completed and submitted to the Steering Committee by the end of 2007. There will be both long and short term recommendations, and the end result, which will be submitted to N.C.C. by the Steering Committee, promises to be of benefit to everyone, especially the wildlife.

Simcoe Wildlife and Adventure Show

by Tara Crewe

The Norfolk Field Naturalists and Bird Studies Canada (BSC) again shared a booth at Simcoe's Wildlife and Adventure Show on March 10 and 11. The overall theme this year was "activities for kids", with the promotion of Long Point Bird Observatory and the Doug Tarry Young Ornithologists Workshop on the BSC side of the booth, and a Food Web Challenge on the NFN side of the booth. Mary Gartshore also supplied the skulls of a deer, coyote, fox and opossum, which together stimulated much interest and many questions from children and adults alike.



Overall, the Food Web Challenge turned out to be a great success in attracting children during down-time between wildlife shows. For this activity, pictures of animals, plants and insects from the Norfolk County area were laminated and placed on a display board with velcro. Children passing the booth were challenged to re-arrange the pictures, and with the help of arrows, show "what eats what?". On several occasions, the entire display board was rearranged by a couple of keen individuals, with each organism incorporated into a food web or chain. Jody Allair, Bird Studies Canada's Recruitment and Outreach Coordinator, was even asked by a local teacher to "take the show on the road".

Each child that participated in the activity was encouraged to fill out a ballot to win one of four prizes: a turkey stuffed animal, a scarlet tanager stuffed animal, an insects card game and a butterfly sticker book, all donated by the NFN and BSC. Winners were selected on Monday the 12th, and prizes should already be in the hands of their lucky winners.

We don't know what theme the NFN/BSC booth may take on at next years' Wildlife and Adventure Show, but we can only hope that it will be as great a success as this years'. Thanks to Jody Allair, Colleen Dale, and Stu Mackenzie, who helped organize the booth, and to all the volunteers who donated their time at the booth on Saturday and Sunday. We couldn't have done it without you!

Checking Your Birdhouses Is Not Always Uneventful

by Dennis Price

It was early February and the conditions were just what I had been waiting for. After a prolonged cold spell it was my opportunity to walk back into my property in North Walsingham. I was waiting to check out the bird houses way back in the swamps to see what had been nesting there and to change the bedding in the Wood Duck houses.

I missed a chance during the summer when the low lands had dried up for a short time. I guess I got too busy with other things, but, no problem, I could just walk back, in the dead of winter, and take care of this chore.

The afternoon was calm, sunny, and very inviting for a walk to explore nature. So, with my supplies in my backpack and a step stool in hand, I walked back in. First stop was to the field where I carefully stepped out onto the ice of the ponds. Just as I thought, the ice covering was like concrete. So I boldly walked over to the island to check out the three tree swallow houses.

The first house had a lot of remains of the nests of the Mud Dauber wasp which explains why last year I didn't see a lot of tree swallow activity at this house. I took out my trowel and cleaned out the house then pruning shears to prune back a couple of dogwoods that were going to overtake the house. Mental note- I should bring my canoe down in the summer to come over and apply some glyphosate to the dogwoods.

The second bird house also had a lot of wasps of a different variety. There were 3 paper nests and a great many wasps, now dormant. I wrapped one up in a tissue and put it in my pocket to try and identify later at home. The third house did have at least two bird nests built on top of each other. The top nest was characteristic of tree swallows. It had many large white feathers used in its construction. I cleaned this out also.

Next I headed into the forest where the swamps are. I walked out onto the ice to my first stop, a Wood Duck house. I used my step stool to reach the front entrance where a screwdriver was used to release the front face. As I raised the face up I was surprised by a grey morph Eastern Screech-Owl. He raised his head and then shrunk back down into the hollow of the nest in the wood chips. So I very quickly and quietly closed the front and screwed it in place. Hopefully he will find a mate for the nearing mating season. Well, I didn't get a chance to check for egg shells or change the bedding; another chore for the summer.

Then, I began checking the Prothonotary Warbler bird houses. As usual they were completely empty so I headed on over the ice to follow the swamps back to the larger area where more houses are located. I laid my backpack down and began my checks of the houses. Suddenly I felt the ice give way under my feet and a huge area began breaking up; down I went - in up to my knees before I could throw myself onto my back on the ice behind me and spread my arms and legs to distribute my weight. I was able to crawl to safety and, while still on my back, I raised my feet to drain my boots of ice water. It was probably about 3 feet deep there but I didn't want to get entirely soaked or it could be a dangerously long 1.5 km walk to the car. Frozen fingers are just about useless for manipulating keys into automobile door locks or ignitions.

I was surprised by how quickly my legs and feet seem to warm up- maybe the adrenalin was still strong. I thought that while I was all the way back there I might as well continue to check the houses. I guess the number 13 is not always unlucky. House number 13 had a loosely formed nest made of moss (see photo). This is the type of nest material that Prothonotaries use.



So it looks like there may have been one interested in the area. Strange, it did pick a house that had been sinking into the ground, instead of one where I had extended the post. Another job for the summer. (Later I showed the nest to Jon McCracken of Bird Studies Canada. His guess is that it was a 'dummy' nest made by a Prothonotary. I will have to spend more time down there this summer.)

Now I was excited to find more possible evidence of the Prothonotary so I walked back to another swamp with deeper water. As I walked out onto the ice, it began cracking under my feet. By now I was getting cold and figured that I had pushed my luck far enough. I didn't want to fall through again and possibly get my cellular phone wet. It was a long walk out so I decided to go before I got too cold.

As I was driving back home I began to think about the wasp in the tissue in my pocket, getting warmer and warmer and probably not pleased about being revived so early in the season. I began thinking about a way to transfer him to my fridge for study when I get home. I was also thinking how anyone checking out swamps on their property should be careful. I think that the trees must conduct the sun's heat into the water and any flow under the ice would not help at all.

The thought also occurred to me that sometimes you can do one thing to help nature out, such as put up birdhouses, and you end up providing help for more than the species you had in mind, be it birds or wasps or whatever. Isn't nature fascinating!

Editor's Corner:

Tributes to John Miles will be published in the **June** issue of Lotus. Please be sure to bring your notes and photos to the May meeting - or - send them to me before Friday, May 25.

We welcome your views on any of the current topics in Norfolk such as the possibility of expanding wind farms, the possibility of converting farms to capture solar energy, the recent Lakeshore Secondary plan information meetings etc., or your own interests. Send your comments and any photos you would like to have printed with your comments to:

anne.davidson@sympatico.ca

Upcoming NFN Outings

Sunday, Apr. 29/07 9am-noon Wildflower Walk at Rowanwood

Join Matt Brock, NFN's Sanctuary Director for a spring walk in Rowanwood, the club's Sanctuary. Wildflowers, birds and more. Contact Matt at 519-586-3283.



Family-friendly.

Sat. May 5/07 9am-noon Spring Bird Banding at Long Point

Join NFN's annual outing to the Long Point Bird Observatory's Old Cut Field Station to see bird banding and migration monitoring in action. Contact LPBO at 519-586-2885.



Family-friendly.

Sat. May 12/07 Baillie Birdathon

You can participate in the major annual fundraiser for NFN and Bird Studies Canada (BSC) by being a Birdathoner or sponsoring a Birdathoner. On May 12, BSC staff will lead Birdathoners to the birding hotspots. Contact BSC at 519-586-3531 or visit www.bsc-eoc.org.



Sat. May 15/07 7pm Evening Walk at Big Creek Marsh

Contact Audrey Heagy 519-586-9464

Family-friendly.



Sat. June 23/07 10am Canoeing on Big Creek

Contact Audrey Heagy at 519-586-9464



From the Board Minutes:

Payment of \$2,000.00 to the Long Point Biosphere, for the Causeway Revitalization Project, has been approved by the Board.

The Huron Fringe Birding Festival will be held at MacGregor Point Provincial Park from May 25 to June 3, 2007.

Email address: fompp@bmts.com

Web: www.friendsofmacgregor.org

Next NFN Meeting

Tue. May 8/07 7:30 pm

The Lives of Bats

**Brock Fenton
Professor of Biology
University of Western Ontario**

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. The doors open at 7:15 pm and the program begins at 7:30 pm.

Next issue of Lotus:

June 2007

Input cutoff date:

Fri. May 25 / 07

Club Mailing Address

Norfolk Field Naturalists
P.O.Box 995, Simcoe, ON
N3Y 5B3

About the NFN

Norfolk Field Naturalist members participate in the 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.

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.

Guest speakers present programs on interesting and relevant natural history and conservation topics, and the NFN has taken active roles in protecting local areas of significance by participating in planning exercises.

NFN members have raised funds to support protection and conservation of Backus Woods, the largest remaining stand of Carolinian forest in Canada. The NFN is also the steward of Rowanwood, the natural sanctuary for which club members helped raise funds.

A complete listing of Norfolk's flora and fauna, compiled by NFN members, can be found on the NFN website. Visit it at:

www.kwic.com/nfn

NFN Directors with Contact and Project Information

		all 519-	
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