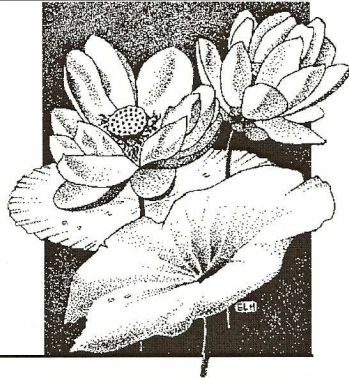


Lotus

NEWSLETTER
of the
NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



October 2011



We're Almost 50!

Hope you all had a great summer! NFN is inching closer to its 50th Anniversary in 2012 and some very special programming has been planned for the 2011-2012 season. - top-notch speakers and some awesome outings, including several day trips outside of Norfolk County.

Be sure to mark your calendar for the

Special! Event!
NFN BioBlitz on Saturday, May 26.

It is explained in your 2011-2012 brochure.

Watch for announcements in Lotus and on the web site of other upcoming

Special! Events!
such as the Spirit Walk and Cocktail Social.

2012's going to be an exciting year for the NFN!

2011 Long Point Butterfly Count

Adam and Matt Timpf

The 20th Long Point Butterfly Count was held on Saturday July 2nd. All groups commented on the scarcity of butterflies this year and this is reflected by the totals.

We had to hunt for every one of the 44 species made up of 1421 individuals. Our averages since 1992 are 48.5 species and 2512 individuals.

No new species were added, although there was a "White Admiral" type subspecies of the Red-spotted Admiral. I guess we are old-fashioned by calling them Red-spotted Purples.

Highlights

1 Juvenal's Duskywing - 1st since 2001
4 Peck's Skipper - 1st since 2005
48 Silvery Checkerspot - 2nd highest
53 Edward's Hairstreaks - 3rd highest
9 Tawny Emperor - 3rd highest and 9th year in a row

Lowlights

44 species - 3rd lowest (43 in both 2002 and 1998)
1421 individuals - 3rd lowest (1340 in 1992, and 1095 in 2002)
9 Great Spangled Fritillary - 2nd lowest
0 American Copper - last miss was 2002
0 Long Dash - 2nd miss ever (last year too)
0 Little Glassywing - last miss was 1998

Thanks to all the participants and to Mary Gartshore and Peter Carson for hosting the wrap-up. Hope to see you all again next year.

NFN Donation for property purchase

At the September 2011 meeting, which included the Annual General meeting, the NFN Board obtained membership approval to donate \$30,000 to the Long Point Basin Land Trust. This was done to assist the LPBLT with the purchase of 80 acres of Carolinian countryside near the Lake Erie Shore which will become the Turkey Point Watershed Reserve. It will restore and protect a diversity of natural habitats including oak savanna and protect native species at risk such as American Badger, Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, etc.

Hummingbird Demo

Julia Tiller

Early one July morning, visitors arrive for a hummingbird banding demo at David Okines' home in St. Williams. Adults and children gather in a circle. Some have nets in hopes of catching butterflies afterwards.

On the front lawn, David (working under a license), has a table of tools ready to go. The banding equipment is very simple: metal bands, a ruler for measuring wing length, banding pliers, a book for recording data, and an electronic scale for weighing the birds. They weigh just 2.8–3.4 grams. Soft cloth bags are used to hold them. The metal bands identify where birds are banded. David uses a non-toxic whiteout fluid to make small dots on the birds' heads which identify already banded birds and will last for about one month before wearing off.

Two feeders in the garden in front of the living room window lure the birds. These feeders are enclosed in by traps: one is a net, the other a cage. David operates the traps from the comfort of his living room. It's effective, and David can easily replace the nets when needed.

For this year's demo, David bands eight birds. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are the smallest bird in Ontario and David is one of just a handful of people in Ontario licensed to band them. The small creatures almost disappear in his hands. Each bird's age, sex, and weight is recorded. Dave explains how to age and sex them and how to measure the amount of fat under their feathers, which can be seen as yellow deposits under their skin. One bird was given a drink of sugar water by hand before returning it to the wild. Though they appear lean at this time of year, the birds are now busily feeding to provide the energy needed to raise their young and to build up the energy needed for the flight back down south.

The recorded data on each bird is eventually entered into a program and then sent off to the CWS for putting into its database. As you can imagine, the bands used on the birds' legs are very small. It requires focus and concentration to slip the band onto the bird's delicate leg. However, Dave speaks of the many rewards of this passion. Some birds have come back to his garden for five or more years now.



David served his banding apprenticeship in Arizona which has an array of hummingbird species passing through on migration to and from South America and provides a wider banding experience than could be obtained locally. Arizona also has some of the largest backyard gardens which attract hummingbirds, with one place having over a hundred active feeders up at one time.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds arrive in Canada in early May and depart in September. Their migration path is swift and direct, and they boldly cross the Great Lakes even though there is no horizon in sight. Other species of hummingbirds can also be seen in western Canada, from Alberta to B.C. They are occasionally seen here in the east.

On a summer day, Dave can easily catch about ten hummingbirds in his yard and often bands over 60 there each summer. An evening spent at a productive neighbour's garden, can easily provide from 30 to 60 birds to band!

After each bird was banded, spectators could hold one in their hands for their release. They timidly lay still for a few moments and then, with a little encouragement, sped away.



Lynn Valley Trail Outing

Audrey Heagy; Photo by Alan McKeown

On August 21st a group of 10 naturalists met at 9:30 am at the Lynn Valley trail parking lot on the west side of Blueline Road, just north of the intersection with St. John's Road. Trip leaders were Audrey Heagy and Alan McKeown.

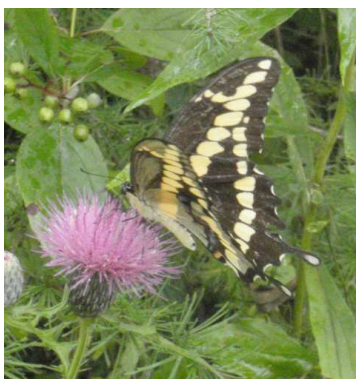
We headed south towards Port Dover, looking at wildflowers, shrubs and wildlife as we strolled along the well-maintained rail trail. The 10-km trail is used by many bicyclists as well as some walkers. We frequently had to step aside to let cyclists past (including some NFN members).

Wildflowers were delayed in blooming compared to previous years, presumably because of the combination of a cool spring followed by a hot dry summer. We didn't see any asters in bloom this year but the Joe-Pye-Weed was still in full bloom.

The dogwood shrubs along the trail had lots of fruit and we were able to identify several different species. The easiest to recognize was the pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) which is the only dogwood species found here with an alternate branching structure. The branches of pagoda dogwood often have a characteristic layered appearance which is quite attractive. The fruit of this species is clusters of dark blue berries on red stalks. All of the other dogwood shrub species have an opposite branching structure with leaves and branches occurring in symmetric pairs. The silky dogwood (*C. obliqua*) could be recognized by its opposite, drooping leaves and bluish-white berries. The berries on the gray dogwood (*C. racemosa*) and red osier dogwood (*C. stolonifera*) were white but these species are easily distinguished by their twig colour and structure, with gray dogwood having many dense gray branchlets, whereas, red osier has a more open structure and the twigs are typically bright red.

Many other species of shrubs and small trees along the trail, including staghorn sumac, juniper (aka red cedar), and the non-native European buckthorn, also have berries or fruit that provide food for birds. However, we didn't see many birds during our walk. Thanks to Marv Curry's sharp eyes, we all did get excellent looks at two species that are often hard to see – a Green Heron was perched high in a dead tree and a Black-billed Cuckoo also posed in the open on a tree branch before flying off into the underbrush.

Butterflies were also few and far between but we did see a few cabbage whites, a summer azure and a **giant swallowtail** was nectaring on a thistle flower beside the trail. We didn't see any monarchs. It seems this has not been a good year for monarch butterflies in this area, with fewer caterpillars and adults evident than during last year's big flight.



A walk or ride along the Lynn Valley trail during any season can yield some interesting sightings for those interested in natural history. The Lynn Valley Trail Association has produced a brochure that includes a trail map and membership information. Additional information, including a plant list prepared by Alan McKeown and Peggy McArthur, is available on their website, www.lynnvalleytrail.ca

Watershed Tour Friday August 26 2011

Shirley Rothery and Barb Hawke

Representing the NFN, we arrived at the Long Point Region Conservation Authority (LPRCA) Headquarters in Tillsonburg where we joined representatives of other groups for a day-long bus tour of the western half of the watershed. The purpose of this tour was to show the nature and variety of the projects that the LPRCA has been working on with various partners and land owners. Staff members described the objectives and conservation benefits of each project en route.

The Otter Creek watershed has a number of streams that in conjunction with the Norfolk sand plain create very steep ravines. Our first stop illustrated efforts to stop the erosion of farm land adjacent to such a ravine. To do this the Authority installed a retention pond that slows down the flow of water that then allows silt and excess fertilizer and other chemicals to fall out of the stream before it carries on. Wetlands and prairie habitat are nurtured at the site.

The second stop showed a reforestation project that helps to sequester carbon, improve linkages between natural areas and increases wildlife habitat. Native grasses, whose roots may go as deep as 12', and trees were planted at this site.

At our third stop we were introduced to Mary Anne and Grant Harvey whose goal was to create a more natural surrounding at their home, a place where they might attract Bobolinks. Prairie grasses and trees in clusters or pods were planted and although Bobolinks have not yet appeared, the Harveys have been thrilled with the increase of wildlife that has come to live with them. During our visit the Elgin Land Stewardship Council presented the Harveys with a plaque in recognition of their stewardship efforts.



Stop number four led us to Otter River Farm and Doug Dennis, owner and recipient of the 2010 Carolinian Canada Conservation Award. Doug's property is characterized by well managed forests, many ravines and scenic views stretching two miles along Big Otter Creek. During his guided walk along

one of the trails Doug pointed out the property's natural features and ecotourism facilities.

After lunching in Port Burwell we went to stop five in the beach area where we were told of the plans to bring the Ojibwa submarine to the port area where it will be made into a museum. Dredging, flood control, ice, and suitable placement must all be considered in realizing this long term plan. We then moved east along the beach to a municipal drain that empties across the beach and into the lake. The Otter Valley Naturalist Club explained their plans to return this site to a healthier natural condition by creating a settling pond at the drain and surrounding it with native plants, trees as well as a bridge over the exiting stream. The Naturalists will work to have this area serve as a teaching tool for local schools.

On our way again, we stopped briefly at a site where the course of South Otter Creek was changed to stop it from washing out the roadway on which we were stopped. Natural channel design principles were used to provide a more stable slope and embankment for the road. As we approached Big Creek, east of Messiah's Corners, a very successful wetland restoration area was pointed out. It has become a birding hotspot.

At our sixth stop, Backus Mill, thought to be the longest continually operating mill in Ontario and one of the few mills in Norfolk County not destroyed during the War of 1812; we had the rare treat of seeing the mill in operation. Over the next two years the mill will be prominently featured in the War of 1812 bicentennial celebrations.

Our final stop was The Rock Mill Conservation Area, where the mill is gone and the dam has been decommissioned. The site has been naturalized for the benefit of fish and wildlife. The dominant vegetation at the time of our visit was smartweed. It will be interesting to see this site change over time.

As we headed back, our attention was directed to a new development where, encouragingly, water management problems were anticipated and are being dealt with during development. Drainage ponds have been created where sediments can collect and nitrates break down.

This tour gave us an appreciation of some of the many things to consider when managing a watershed

Creatures of the Night Hike

Anne Wynia

What a beautiful evening on Sept. 3, 2011 to meet at the Wild Turkey Release site just north of the 4th concession on the Charles Sauriol property to look and listen to Creatures of the Night. Bernie Solymar and Colleen Dale were our knowledgeable guides who gave an informative introduction to what thirty-one of us who had gathered there might hear or see in Backus Woods now owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

As it was still light (the carpathian time of day) we observed dragonflies skimming about seeking food. Apparently they can catch small insects to feed. Green Darners and Skimmers migrate south at this time of year, some as far as the Gulf of Mexico and like the Monarch butterflies new ones are hatched and they find their way back here in the spring.

Bernie played a recording of sounds of various crickets and katydids which as the light faded we were able to listen to in the fields around us - the chirping of the Field Crickets, the trilling of the Carolina Ground Crickets and the "ch ch ch...ch ch ch" of the Common True Katydid, a native Carolinian species. Orthoptera include crickets, katydids and grasshoppers many of which are native to the Carolinian Life Zone.

On the edge of the forest overlooking the field to the east where Bernie played a recording of the Screech Owl we soon heard little Screech Owls answering the call. First one and then another and then five in different directions from the trees on the edge of the field. We listened and looked as we walked quietly along the trail into the woods.



Bernie had made a mixture of fermented banana brown sugar and beer which he spread in a patch on the trunk of a large Beech tree prior to our walk to attract moths and insects. Underwing or Catacola moth were having a tasty feed when we arrived. I expect more moths were attracted to this after we were gone. .

Bernie had also done his best to attract Southern Flying Squirrels by hanging a bucket of sunflower seeds but unfortunately we did not see any. Often if you can find a hollow tree they will come out when you tap on it with a stick. They may have been watching us with their sensitive nocturnal vision. Also we were hoping to see or hear a Great Horned Owl who may have quietly been observing and listening.

We wondered back to the shelter where we had started to check what insects had been attracted to the Black light (which actually looks white) insect trap beside a hanging white sheet where there were many tiny insects and a few moths. This is well known to be a good way to attract moths and insects if you are interested in seeing them at night. Any light will do. All enjoyed the dusk and darkness along the walk and were thankful the predicted storm did not come until about 3a.m.

Thanks to Bernie and Coleen for organizing this outing.

Baillie Birdathon 2011

George Pond (Article and Photos)

The sun had not yet risen. It was a magical time of day and we were in a magical place, deep in Norfolk County's Backus Woods. A Winter Wren sang its long and complex tinkling song. An unseen Wood Thrush sang his beautiful flutelike song. It was soon joined by the breezy descending voice of a Veery. Now the Robin-like songs of Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks drifted through the leaves of the giant Maples, White Pine, Tulip and other trees that surrounded us and towered over our heads. In the distance a Pileated Woodpecker noisily drilled for insects on a decaying dead tree. Overhead a **Cerulean Warbler** sang his high musical buzz song and I remembered the beautiful blue back, white wing bars and brilliant white throat of a banded bird I had photographed a week earlier.



At the back of the buttonwood pond in front of us we could hear the loud, emphatic song of a Northern Waterthrush. Now the high, clear, metallic "Sweet, Sweet, Sweet, Sweet" song of a **Prothonotary Warbler** echoed over the quiet waters of the pond. Prothonotary warblers are rare in Ontario and we are lucky that they occasionally choose Norfolk to raise their young.



Steve pointed out the short, slow three-syllabled, burry song of a Yellow-throated Vireo, an uncommon bird here in Norfolk County. It seemed to take several seconds between each phrase of its song. Red-eyed Vireos were common. Further up the trail the lazy, husky, musical buzz of a Black-throated blue Warbler suggested that another breeding territory had been staked out.

Now we heard the loud and emphatic "To-wit, To-wit, To-weet, Tee-oh" song of a **Hooded Warbler**, Norfolk's chosen bird; and there on a very thin branch of a sapling, not ten feet away, we watched the bird as it announced it's chosen plot of ground.



In the distance I could "feel" rather than "hear" the sound of a Ruffed Grouse as it "Drummed" on a log. We listened for, but failed to hear, the song of a Louisiana Waterthrush, another Southern Ontario specialty. The cat-like "mewing" of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a woodpecker more common in Northern Ontario, was a welcome addition to our list. As we left

Backus Woods a Yellow-billed Cuckoo called loudly and we could hear the soft “Buz-Buz” of a Blue-wing Warbler. It had indeed been a “magical” time in what I consider being “The Jewel of Norfolk”, Backus Woods, and I feel fortunate to still be able to enjoy the wonders that Nature so freely offers to us.

Five of us were doing our annual “Baillie Birdathon” to raise money for Bird Studies Canada and other “Nature” oriented organizations. Our friends Bruce and Ann Falls from Toronto, Steve Wilcox from Port Rowan, my wife Shirley and me have been doing the birdathon as a team now for many years. Steve is our “Expert Birder” and without him the four of us would identify far less birds than we do. His keen ears pick out the songs of distant birds that we would never hear and by moving closer to the sound we can usually make positive identification, either by sight or song.

I have lost the ability to hear high pitched sounds, which most birds have, and now use a specially developed “Bird Song Finder”, which reduces the pitch of a bird to a level that I can hear. It is a cumbersome device with ear-phones but a marvellous invention that has transformed the silent forest into a symphony of song.

We started our “Birdathon” at 10.20 AM on May 24 at Long Point’s Old cut banding station where we found several **warblers** including Blackburnian, Canada, American Redstart, Yellow, Common Yellow-throat, Northern Parula, **Magnolia** and Chestnut-sided.



Later at various places we would add Black-throated Blue and Green, Blackpoll, Nashville, Pine, and Ovenbird. This together with those found in Backus Woods gave us a 19 warbler day somewhat below our usual Birdathon total. Perhaps we were a little late for a good migration total. Between the Old Long Point Prov. Park and the banding lab we found several flycatchers, Least, Willow, Yellow-bellied,

Eastern Kingbird, Phoebe and Eastern Wood Pewee. Warbling, Blue-headed and Philadelphia Vireos, Chipping, Song and Swamp Sparrows, Cedar Waxwings, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet as well as House Wrens were also added in this area.

Steve joined us at Noon hour and we checked the bird feeders at our friend Diane Salter’s home located on Big Creek. Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, House and Gold Finches, Chickadees, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatches, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and **Indigo Buntings** were all present but we failed to find the Pine Siskins and Hairy Woodpeckers that had been regulars.



White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows must have migrated north. A drive over the sand road in the St Williams forest produced Red-breasted Nuthatches, A Brown Creeper, A Broad-Winged Hawk, Field Sparrows and Eastern Towhees. Steve heard Golden-crowned Kinglets. A Purple Finch sang from a distant tree.

On our way to the Townsend lagoons near Jarvis we found a Wild Turkey, Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and an American Kestrel.

Rock Pigeons, Mourning Doves, Starlings, Red-wing Blackbirds, Crows, Red-tailed Hawks, House Sparrows, Horned Larks, Cardinals, Blue Jays, Robins, Cowbirds, Grackles, Savannah Sparrows and other common birds were easy to add to our lists by simply driving from one place to another. A Screech Owl looked out from a Wood Duck box. Catbirds were everywhere.

Unfortunately the lagoons at Townsend were very high and there was little habitat for Shore birds but we did find Spotted and Least Sandpipers and a small flock of Dunlin. Ducks included Gadwall, Mallard, Wood, Ruddy, Ring-necked, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler, **Hooded Merganser** and Eurasian Wigeon. The Wigeon was a bonus bird as this was only the second or third time that we had seen one on Birdathon.



I had been watching a Great Horned Owl's nest east of Jarvis that my grand daughter Pilar had found, hoping that the young would still be around for our big day. However the wind storm a few weeks earlier had blown the nest out of the tree and I'm not sure that the young survived; A real pity as it seems that these birds are rapidly declining in this area. We never did see a Great Horned Owl.

As is our custom we followed the Lake Erie shore line from east of Selkirk back to Long Point. The lake level was very high and we missed many birds that we usually find. We did, however, add Bonaparte's, Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, Whimbrel, Cormorants, Red-breasted Mergansers, Osprey, Cooper's Hawk, Semipalmated and White-rumped Sandpipers, Bluebirds and Northern Flicker. Several of these birds would not be found in the Long Point area; however we missed several others that we usually see. In retrospect we may have used up too much time for so few birds. A pit stop at Port Dover was good for Chimney Swifts. During the day we had found all the possible swallows including Tree, Barn, Cliff, Bank, Northern Rough-wing and Purple Martins.

We could scope the inner bay from the Port Rowan harbour and here we found Redheads, Canvasbacks, a Greater Scaup and Sandhill Cranes. An evening stroll on the Big Creek Dykes off the Long Point causeway produced Marsh Wrens, Moorhens, Coots, Pied-billed Grebes, Least and American Bitterns,

Black and Foresters Terns, Great Blue Herons; and in the Long Point Prov. Park we found displaying American Woodcock.

By this time it was dark and we headed back to Simcoe for some shut-eye, stopping on the way to listen for Whip-poor-wills, which we heard in the St Williams forest. We tried to call in a Barred Owl with no success. We got to Simcoe after 10PM, slept from 11 to 3.45 and were back on the road at 4.30 AM trying once again to call in the Barred Owl. A group of Ornithologists studying and banding Whip-poor-wills told us the Barred Owl had been calling most of the night, but for us it was silent and another usual bird was missed.

It was still dark when we headed for the Backus Woods. We left Backus and in a grassy meadow at the Gartshore/Carson property added Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows to our lists. From the side of the forest, a **Black-billed Cuckoo** sang its "coo-coo-coo-coo" song. A Brown Thrasher flew overhead, landed and sang from the top of a tree. We dropped Steve off at 9AM as he had work to do and as we still had a little over an hour left before our allotted 24 hours were up we checked the Lee Brown pond and found American Wigeon. Back at the banding station a Carolina Wren was singing and with the help of Stu Mackenzie both Gray-cheeked and Swainson's Thrushes were found. Our time was up.



Our final group tally was 142. Each of us had missed a few birds and we had all missed finding several birds that are generally found; Kingfisher, Bald Eagle, Caspian and Common Terns, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Common Mergansers, Black Ducks, Great Black-backed Gulls just to name a few. We all agreed though that it had been a successful hunt with near ideal weather conditions and great fellowship.

I have already turned in over \$7,000. and hope that we can increase that to more than \$9,000. and with any luck the 2011 Baillie Birdathon will exceed \$250,000. Thanks kindly for all your support over the years. Your donation will help to make the "Great Out-Of-Doors" just a little better for us and for future generations to come.

Next Meetings

Tuesday, November 8, 2011

**Backus Woods: A 50-Year Endeavour
To Secure Permanent Protection
Michael Bradstreet. NCC**

Tuesday, December 13, 2011

**Members' Christmas Social
Harry Barrett remembering 50 Years ago**

Upcoming NFN Events

2011 OUTINGS

**Sat. October 15 9 am - 4 pm
Field Trip to Niagara Glen
Alan Ladd 519-426-8504**



**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS
\$5 PARTICIPANT FEE
(waived for BSC members)**



**Sun. Dec. 18
Woodhouse Count
(Simcoe area)
David Okines 519-586-9464
davidokines@aol.com**

**Sat. Dec 31
Fisherville Count
(Haldimand County)
Linda Thrower 905-774-1230
giantindians@3web.net**

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.

Next issue of Lotus:

December 2011

Input cutoff date:

Wed. Nov. 30, 2011

Club Mailing Address

**Norfolk Field Naturalists
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N3Y 5B3**

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

2011 - 2012 NFN Directors with Contact and Project Information

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