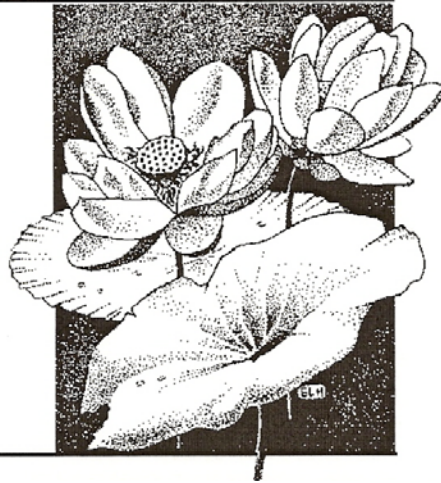
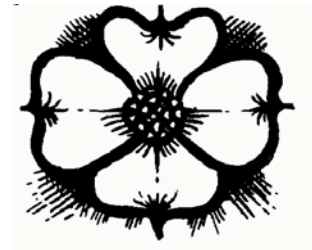


Lotus

NEWSLETTER
of the
NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



JUNE 2013



Birding in Cuba: A Once-in-a-Lifetime Experience

Story and photos by: **Bernie Solymár**

My first trip to Cuba was in 2004, as part of a group of Canadian agronomists studying sustainable agriculture methods in Cuba. I was so enthralled with the wonderful habitats and biodiversity of the island that I contacted Luis and Yane, the company's Cuban directors (now living in Toronto) to see about organizing nature-based tours. Eight years later, and several more visits as a tour leader, and I have thoroughly fallen for this tropical jewel that has been largely stalled in time for the past 50 years.

Away from the white sand beaches and opulent resorts, there are numerous natural parks and nature reserves, as well as other natural areas that lend themselves to once-in-a-lifetime birding and other nature-related activities. Canadians Graham Gibson and Margaret Atwood discovered several decades ago that birding in this largest tropical island in the Caribbean is an experience unlike any other, offering the chance to see 21 endemic species, 19 near-endemics (found only in Cuba and a small number of nearby Caribbean islands), and other tropical species in an area of the world that very few Canadians have ever seen in person.

On unique and personalized tours, highly trained and passionate Cuban guides will take you off the beaten path to see "life list" species like the threatened Bee Hummingbird and the vulnerable Fernandina's Flicker, and listen for the endangered Cuban Solitaire.

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Spoonbills



Cuban Pygmy Owl

BIRDING IN CUBA - continued from page 1

You'll have an opportunity to see Cuban Parrots, Great Lizard Cuckoos, Cuban Pygmy Owls, and the country's national bird, the patriotically coloured Cuban Trogon, along with over 200 other species – including many familiar “Canadian” species that are spending their winter in the forests, thickets, savannas and swamps of this diverse island.

Of course, when you go birding in Cuba, where you go can be as exciting as what you see while you are there. Comprehensive tours include exploring Havana, Cuba's capital, and visits to several UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, including Sierra del Rosario and its fascinating Las Terrazas eco-community, and the magnificent Zapata Swamp with its flamingos, spoonbills, pelicans and vast flocks of waterfowl. You'll also visit memorable sites like Soroa's Orchid Garden, La Guira National Park, and board Russian army jeeps to travel into the Las Escambray Mountains near Trinidad.

To learn more about discovering Cuba's nature and for unique birding opportunities visit www.authenticubatours.com.



Top: Bee Hummingbird and Fernandina's Flicker
Bottom: A group of birders in Cuba

Bats: Facts on the Fly

**Compiled from information published by:
Bat Conservation International**

Last October we had the opportunity to hear Lesley Hale from the Ministry of Natural Resources speak on the subject of Ontario's Bats: Conservation Issues and Monitoring Programs.

Leslie talked about two recent introductions of environmental threats to bats, wind turbines and white-nose syndrome (WNS) and outlined the conservation strategies for these fascinating night fliers.

Eight species of bats are found in this province. Some (those affected by white-nose syndrome) hibernate in caves while others migrate as far as the Gulf of Mexico for our winter.

Bats are the only mammals that can fly, some as fast as 35 km an hour. Some Ontario bats can live for 30 years, though most have much shorter lives. They usually have only one or two offspring in a year.

How do bats move around in the dark?

All bats can see, but some use a special sonar system called echolocation. These bats make high frequency calls and then listen for echoes to bounce from the object in front of them. They are able to form pictures in their brains from the reflected sounds just like we can interpret light with our eyes.

Why are bats important?

Bats play a critical role in Ontario's ecosystems as nocturnal insectivores eating thousands of insects a night. They are considered one of North America's most valuable species groups for agricultural pest control.

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Bats - continued from page 2

How can you attract bats?

Bats have to find new roosts on their own. Existing evidence strongly suggests that lures or attractants (including bat guano) will not attract bats to a bat house. Bats investigate new roosting opportunities while foraging at night, and they are expert at detecting crevices, cracks, nooks and crannies that offer shelter from the elements and predators. Bat houses installed on buildings or poles are easier for bats to locate, have greater occupancy rates and are occupied two and a half times faster than those mounted on trees.

What is white-nose syndrome?

White-nose syndrome is a condition that has killed more than five million bats in eastern North America. It is dubbed "white-nose syndrome" because infected bats often have white fungus on their faces. The fungus grows on bats while they hibernate in caves and abandoned mines. It seems to irritate and cause bats to waken, speeding up their metabolism so they use their winter fat stores more quickly. They may leave hibernation sites and fly around outside, often in the daytime, when it's still winter and there are no food sources available. The bat will starve to death.

Right: This Big Brown Bat was found hiding behind some siding on a barn. After some photo ops he flew up into the attic of the barn - hopefully to find a cozy place to survive the winter. Photo: Bernie Solymár

What can you do?

Entering caves or abandoned mines may disturb hibernating bats and reduce their ability to survive the winter. There is also some evidence that people can spread the fungus that's linked to the WNS if they travel to different caves. To help curb the spread of the syndrome and minimize deaths, stay out of non-commercial caves and abandoned mines where bats may be present.

If you see bats flying during the daytime in winter, or you see dead bats, please, contact the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre at 1-866-673-4781, the Natural Resources Information Centre at 1-800-667-1940, or your local MNR office.

Don't touch bats, whether living or dead, as they can carry rabies.

For instructions how to build a bat house and more information go to: www.batcon.org



NFN needs your help - no experience required!
(only a healthy dose of enthusiasm)

**Attend 1 Directors' meeting a month, spend 3 - 4 hours a month helping with various tasks:
Report on Environment Issues, organize Field Events, Speaker Engagements, etc.
assisted by other Board Members**

Get involved with your club, it is a greatly rewarding experience!

For more information contact any Director - See the back page

KEY NOTE SPEECH
AT THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA
BY: JOHN RILEY
Senior Science Adviser for
Nature Conservancy of Canada
PART 3 - CONCLUSION

Editor's note: Due to its length this presentation is published in 3 parts in the February, April and June LOTUS issues. Maps, photographs and other illustrations, which were part of this presentation will be included in John Riley's book "The Once and Future Great Lakes Country" to be published this year.

Continued from the April issue of LOTUS:

E. J. Zavitz saw the situation more broadly. "In 1904," he wrote, "the municipal assessors' returns gave less than fifteen percent of woodland for all the settled townships" in southern Ontario. Two-thirds of what remained was lowland swamp, which meant that only 5 or 6 percent of uplands remained unbroken. Zavitz surveyed the moraines and sand plains that had formerly been oak and prairie, and under Native care even earlier. By then, modern farming and grazing had degraded them, and their reclamation was a social imperative. They could not, he wrote, "properly support social organizations such as schools and churches. The state cannot afford to allow citizens to live and develop under the enforced conditions existing in many of these waste areas."

Other Ontario "waste lands" needing assistance were the the Huron fringe, Huronia, the Thessalon sand plain, and the eastern Oak Ridges. The province could not do it alone and, in 1911, it passed the *Counties Reforestation Act*, asking local authorities to help. Zavitz's work led directly to the establishment of public tree nurseries in each of the "waste lands," beginning an Ontario tree-planting tradition that eventually stocked tens of thousands of acres of provincial forest, a hundred thousand acres of county forest, and many hundreds of thousands of acres of private and conservation-authority.

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His first project was 1500 acres in Norfolk, which he said, would have QUOTE "the dual aim of reforesting and improving that section which for years has been an eye-sore and general drawback in the progress of the district." He acknowledged that QUOTE "the scrub oak...gives protection to the soil and improves it by adding a leaf litter," but pines could do just as well, and yield some income. His tree planting included a "Scotch Pine Experimental Group," which imported it and set the stage for Ontario to have more serious infestations of Scots Pine than anywhere in North America. This was the temper of the time and, most importantly, they *acted*.

Today, Norfolk supports the largest forests in Ontario's deep south, and its largest concentration of threatened species, and now we are planting prairie and clearing some of the pine, to restore native habitats again.

Why is this good? Because we are again acting to define the nature we want to have around us in the future, based on our best appreciation of our busy past and our possible futures. Make no doubt about it. In the face of more than two centuries of land clearing, fencing, plowing and planting, and in the face of the non-native and invasive species now dominating the biomass of what is around us, and in the face of more-of-the-same, as well as climate warming and rabid urban demands on the land, **THE NATURE WE HAVE A CENTURY FROM NOW IS THE NATURE THAT WE NOW DEFINE, SET ASIDE, DESIGN, GROW AND STEWARD.** If I want oak, I had better plant it. If I want wild lupines, I better plant them.



Re-forested field

Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen

KEY NOTE SPEECH

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Fortunately, this is now the temper of OUR times. If we want Turkey, Greater Canada Goose, or Trumpeter Swans back, then we bring them back. If we want prairies and oak savanna, then we do it. Humans are no longer the passive beneficiaries and victims of Nature's vicissitudes. We now dominate our settled landscapes almost totally. Most of us are fans of Charles Darwin, and I will end by reflecting on the most salient corollary of

Darwin's great code of natural selection. That is that Nature is always changing, and is always moving forward full steam. In fact, NATURE CAN NEVER REPEAT ITSELF. From this perspective, the massive changes that have occurred in the Nature around us are a mixed blessing, that should inform our future decisions. If nothing else, we should take from this a LIBERTY OF ACTION – such as exercised by Zavitz, for example – to do what we think is right for Nature, and help it on its way as actively as we can.

END OF KEY NOTE SPEECH



Photo: "Spring Hues" by Inga Hinnerichsen

FIELD TRIP TO THE NIAGARA GLEN

with Alan Ladd and Brian Calvert
Story by: Eleanor Chithalen

Saturday, April 27th dawned with glorious sunshine and warm temperatures. Alan Ladd anticipated a great turnout for his Niagara gorge hike, since he had invited a crew of Norfolk Field Naturalists, Horticulture Society members and "Discover Norfolk" walkers. Imagine his chagrin when only five locals had joined him in the Walmart parking lot by 9 a.m. We later concluded that all the horticulturalists were hard at their gardens, while the hikers and field naturalists prefer more of a challenge. This observation is borne out by the fact that Alan's previous Norfolk-to- Niagara trek last fall, in gale-force winds and torrential rain, was well-attended.

Atop the gorge in Niagara, we were joined by local expert Brian Calvert. As we descended, he immediately began an erudite explanation of the formation of Niagara's falls and gorge through the slow erosion of the hard Lockport Dolomite combined with the rapid erosion of the relatively soft layers beneath. Norfolk minds were distracted by the number of young people passing us on the stairs who were obviously prepared for a long stint of camping in the gorge, judging by the folded foam mattresses they were all carrying. Later it became abundantly clear that the mattresses provided a soft landing for the many rock-climbers (whole families of them) plying their hobby among the outcroppings within the gorge.

Alan noted the comparative scarcity of birds as we hiked along the trails following the Niagara River. Compensating for this, however, was the carpet of wildflowers we encountered throughout our hike.

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NIAGARA GLEN continued from page 5

Squirrel corn and Dutchman's Breeches (*dicentra canadensis* and *cullaria*), Trout Lily (*erythronium americanum*), Jack in the Pulpit (*arisaema triphyllum*), Bloodroot (*sanguinaria canadensis*) Trilliums (trillium...whew!) and a myriad of violet types were all at their peak. We are not sure how many were trampled by the rock-climbers in their enthusiasm, since the plants had found many footholds on all the popular rocky crags.

The ascent from the gorge was not as easy as the earlier descent, but following a bracing picnic lunch, Alan felt we were ready for another challenge to our middle-aged (provided we plan to survive to be over 130) bodies. This time we struggled down a steep decline through a series of kindly-meant but supremely obstructing railway ties, to the water at the great whirlpool. Alan commented that he used to invite people to wade there, but that recent drowning tragedies have brought him to a new respect for the power of the whirlpool.

By the time we had struggled back up through those expletive-deleted railway ties, we were all ready for home, feeling that we had experienced one of the world's great wonders in a most memorable way. Perhaps too, a nagging memory of the weediness of our home gardens began to creep back into our consciousness...but there are other days!



Path down to the Whirlpool
Photo: Google Earth by Ron Deans

**WINTER BIRDING
IN HALDIMAND COUNTY
Story and photos by Shelia Smith**

Editor's note: This article has been edited for length to fit the space allocation. This is a fond look back at one of our most popular winter outings.

The moon was sailing in and out of clouds and the wind was howling when I woke on January 20th. It was not a promising looking day to go on a hike to find birds but I'd signed up to go with the Norfolk Field Naturalists to see what we could find. "Well," I thought, "we probably won't see much but it will be an adventure."

So I joined the hike leaders, Audrey Heagey and David Okines along with about 20 members and friends of NFN on the Port Dover pier. We exchanged greetings and introductions. A lady, two boys and a dog were feeding the ducks and gulls

at the pier. This gave some of the beginning birders in our group a chance to see some common birds up close. Among the Mallards and American Black Ducks and the gulls was one special duck: a male Hooded Merganser. Mergansers have thin beaks equipped for grabbing and holding fish, so this bird was not interested in fast food. But there is a certain safety in numbers, even if they are not of your kind.

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Hooded Merganser

WINTER BIRDING continued from page 6

We left the pier and moved on to Silver Lake, or what's left of it, where Dave set up his scope to give everyone a closer view of some new birds. Both Dave and Audrey did an excellent job at helping people learn about some birds. Dave found a Great Blue Heron skulking in some reeds. The stop was brief as the wind never stopped.



Gulls at Port Dover pier



Rough-legged Hawk

We moved on, following the lakeshore east, identifying several kinds of waterfowl and gulls. There were Tundra Swans, which surprised many, but in fact, earlier in the week there were probably more than a thousand in the inner bay at Long Point. They have stayed over winter in years of open water, as have Scaup and Redhead ducks, which Dave explained enjoy a good meal of zebra mussels.

Small birds are always harder to find on a windy day but someone spotted a speck of blue in a sumac grove. Closer inspection turned up at least five Eastern Bluebirds. There were also House Sparrows and a few others braving the elements. I think it was where our convoy stopped to see the Bluebirds that I dropped a glove. It now has joined the company of all the stray articles of clothing we see on occasion along the roads...a lone shoe, a cap, a sock. Truly gone-with-the-wind. Audrey kindly gave me a pocket hand warmer.

We admired Bald Eagles, a Rough-legged Hawk tipping back and forth, teetering low over a field in the wind. One Red-tailed Hawk simply sat, temporarily grounded.

June 2013

The sky got brighter although wind and clouds continued to dance.

Later in the afternoon, willow twigs turned golden in the sun. Osier clumps in ditches glowed red and maroon. The colours of farm buildings were intensified. Looking out over the lake, we could see distant streamers of snow, which don't reach the surface, called virga. Waterfowl and gulls mostly sat tight on, or near, the lake. And one flock of gulls produced the best find of the day which Dave was able to show everyone. It was a Glaucous Gull, large, pale, lacking black wing tips. An Arctic species, they seldom get this far south.

We deserved, needed, a pit stop in Selkirk where it took us a little while to warm up with hot drinks. And then, still in a convoy, we followed Audrey and Dave into an area of Haldimand known for its wintering flocks of Short-eared Owls.

As the sun dropped, we stopped where shoulder-to-shoulder cedar trees along a fence line protected the fields from the wind. Audrey and Dave came down the line of cars to explain that the most recent owl sightings had been in this cedar hedge. At sunset, if we were lucky, they would fly out and start to hunt. But, it was a waiting game and there were no guarantees.

So we waited. And waited. The wind still howled. If there were any owls they were wiser than we were and stayed put in the dense cedars.

Finally, we gave up. Disappointed? Only a little. It was, after all, a winter adventure in good company.



David Okines with a bunch of cold winter birders

Upcoming Summer Events

Long Point Butterfly Count

Saturday, July 6, 2013
All day event

This event is similar to a Christmas Bird Count and it is part of a North America wide count. It involves identifying and counting local butterflies.

Contact: Adam Timpf,
519-586-9964 or
adam.timpf@gmail.com



**4th Annual
Butterfly & Dragonfly Festival**
Sunday, July 14, 2013
10 am to 3.00 pm

Backus Heritage Conservation Area

This Family Event includes hikes, live butterflies, face painting, kids' crafts, "Spread Your Wings" costume parade, ice cream, local musicians & storytelling and much more.

Bring a bagged lunch!

Admission:

\$3/Child, \$7/Adult, \$13/Carload
See also: info@naturescalling.ca

Hummingbirds and Butterflies

Saturday, July 27, 2013
10 am to Noon

Watch a Hummingbird banding demonstration and walk around the old field habitat observing birds and butterflies.

Location: 273 Charlotteville Road 2
2.2 km East of Forestry Farm Road
Bring binoculars and a butterfly net
Contact Audrey at 519.586.9464

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 at 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 2013
Input dead line:
Friday, September 27

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. Non-profit 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. 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

2012-2013 NFN Executive with contact & project information

		<u>All 519-</u>	
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Lotus Editor	(appointed)		

Butterfly Counts: (appointed) Adam Timpf 586-9964

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