

Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



APRIL 2017



CUBA AL NATURAL

Report by: Inga Hinnerichsen
Photos by group members as noted



Valle de Viñales at sunrise Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen

THE TRIP

We started planning this trip two years ago. Bernie Solymár and his friends at Authentic Cuba Travel had put together an outline for a group trip to Cuba to explore the nature of this island nation. It was a 12-day adventure specifically custom-tailored for Ontario naturalists. Right down our alley! Several people were interested and excited about this opportunity, but regardless of our recruiting efforts we couldn't get enough participants to sign-up. Despite our disappointment we decided to try again. A year later, the enthusiasm spread by word of mouth and 19 people were committed to travel to Cuba.

THE GUIDES

We were met at the Jose Marti airport in Havana by our Cuban Guide par excellence: Onelio. He's a telecommunications engineer by training, but he makes a lot more money as a tour guide. His wife is a doctor. As all Cubans, they get paid in Cuban Pesos, which are worth 1/25 of the Convertible Pesos, the currency used by visitors. "It's complicated!" says Onelio.

Roberto, our bus driver, navigated the tour bus of Chinese origin through incredibly narrow passages and bumpy dirt roads with great skill.

Continued on page 2...



THE GROUP: In the old Russian truck (from left): Inga , Florinda, Mirek, Mary, Joyce, our local guide and Anne. Standing in front (from Left): Larry, Kathy, Dolf, Dennis, Debbie, Jane, Phyllis, Scott, Wayne, Nancy, Sue and Ken. Kneeling in front: Bernie and our tour guide Onelio. Photo: Phyllis Milne

THE CITIES

During our 12-day stay we had the opportunity to soak in the culture and atmosphere of a few Cuban cities starting with Havana. The beautiful Spanish colonial architecture of the old city centre is sadly crumbling because of lack of funds and some TLC. Cienfuegos on the south side of the island is a newer city with a deep harbour that replaced the harbour of the nearby city of Trinidad, which fell into disrepair when the sugar freight from the area was redirected through Cienfuegos. Tourism is again breathing new life into the old city of Trinidad. The last town we visited is Viñales in the west end of Cuba, another popular tourist destination with new privately owned eating establishments.

THE NATURE RESERVES

The main focus of our visit was, of course, to explore the nature of Cuba. Numerous nature reserves have been established to protect and preserve fragile environments with rare and endangered endemic species. The visitor centres at the reserves greeted us with a welcome cocktail, a Mojito, Piña Colada or a ginger-based Tincila (m-m good) and a very knowledgeable local guide to show us around.

We got our first taste of Cuban nature in the Alturas de Banao, the mountains above Trinidad.

April 2017

A hike in the forest offered a variety of birds, among others the Cuban Green Woodpecker, the Red-legged Thrush and the national bird of Cuba, the Trogon. It is a red, white and blue bird, the colours of the Cuban flag. Exotic plants and trees included the once abundant, highly valued Cuban Mahogany, which was harvested almost to extinction for the furniture trade. The flowers of the Hibiscus tree are often collected by locals for brewing a tea, a treatment of common colds and other maladies. Herbal medicine is widely used as pharmaceutical products are hard to come by.



A refreshing swim completed our day Photo: Larry Monczka

Continued on page 3...

Norfolk Field Naturalists



Barbecued pork for lunch Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen

Topes de Collantes, another mountain reserve, was only accessible by old Russian 6-wheel-drive trucks which took us to see more breathtaking views, lush forest and birds. Brilliant Cuban Emerald Hummingbirds darted in and out of the flowering shrubs, a Grey Lizard Cuckoo perched in a tree top. Unfamiliar bird calls rang out in the forest. Orchids and bromeliads were just beginning to flower. Introduced tree ferns from New Zealand were shading the paths. A scrumptious lunch consisting of barbecued pork, rice and beans with a cabbage salad was waiting for us at the Hacienda Codina, once an old Spanish coffee plantation.



Flowering Bromeliad and Orchid
Photos: Inga Hinnerichsen / Bernie Solymár

The next day was overcast with intermittent rain, which failed to dampen our enthusiasm as we met our next guide, Orlando, at the Refugio Bermeja. He knew exactly where to find birds. In no time we saw a flock of Cuban Parakeets, a Cuban Screech

Owl (poking its head out of a palm stump) and the tiniest of all birds, the Bee Hummingbird, plus many more. A couple of Jutias were huddled together in a small tree trying to keep dry. Also called Cuban Tree Rats, a cat-size rodent, they are endangered because the Cubans hunt them for food.

A long causeway took us out into the Zapata wetlands bordering on the Bay of Pigs. Shallow water on limestone flats with mangroves make it a paradise for waders and waterfowl. A complete bird list is posted at the end of this report. We donated old binoculars to a couple of our guides who will greatly benefit from these.



Cuban Screech Owl Photo: Larry Monczka

VALLE DE VIÑALES

On the way west we made a stop at Soroa for lunch and to see a famous orchid garden and a nearby waterfall. Our guide at the orchid gardens knew every species, about 250 of them, by their scientific names and could do the presentation in 4 languages. The Viñales valley is also known for the best cigars in the world. We got a glimpse of a small family-owned tobacco farm with their curing barns, different from the kilns in Norfolk County. The fields are ploughed with a yoke of oxen, a tractor - even if one was available - would compact the soil too much for the plants to thrive. The best cigars are rolled by hand, a good cigar roller can make about 150 cigars a day.

Continued on Page 4...

We had a most marvellous view over the Valle de Viñales, a UNESCO World Cultural Landscape Heritage Site, from our hotel. See the photo on the cover page. Limestone karst formations called Mogotes rise from the valley floor. Like a lot of weathered limestone, the mountains are riddled with caves. We explored a couple of them, Cueva de Santo Tomas extends over 45 km in seven levels with large cathedral-like rooms connected with narrow passages.



In the caves of Santo Tomas Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen

On the way back from the caves we passed a field with a few boys playing baseball - the Cuban national sport. They were using a stick for a bat. We all had brought useful gifts for our new Cuban friends and among other things, Bernie had brought a few baseball bats. Roberto stopped the bus and the boys were presented with a new, real bat. It was heartwarming to see first the disbelief, then the elation on their faces!



The new baseball bat Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen



A Kestrel at sunrise in Viñales Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen

One morning Bernie had arranged for us to go birding with a notable Cuban ornithologist, Arturo Kirkconnell, co-author of the field guide "Birds of Cuba". The outing turned out somewhat disappointing. Arturo was only focused on finding a Cuban Solitaire mostly ignoring other birds in the area. On our own we observed the Cuban Tody, a tiny colourful bird, many Loggerhead Kingbirds, a Stripe-headed Tanager and a Cuban Bullfinch among others. High in a pine top two West Indian Woodpeckers were going about their business annoying a Cuban Pygmy-Owl perching on a lower branch. We fetched Arturo to set up his scope to get a good view of the tiny owl. We never saw the Cuban Solitaire, only heard its beautiful song. In the evenings our group reviewed the activities of the day over a variety of rum cocktails - the local Cola plus lime makes a very enjoyable Cuba Libre.



A group session in progress: Bernie, Anne, (Dennis), Dolf, Debbie, Florinda and Mirek Photo: Mary Marsh

Continued on Page 5...

Debbie Lindeman's List of Birds of Cuba

February 17-28, 2017

*endemic or near-endemic ! lifer ^heard only

Helmeted Guineafowl !	Cuban Screech Owl !*
Greater Flamingo !	Cuban Pygmy Owl !*
White Ibis !	Antillean Palm Swift *
Roseate Spoonbill !	Cuban Emerald *
Green Heron	Bee Hummingbird !*
Cattle Egret	Cuban Trogon !*
Great Blue Heron	Belted Kingfisher
Great Egret	Cuban Tody !*
Reddish Egret!	West Indian Woodpecker !*
Tricolored Heron !	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Little Blue Heron !	Cuban Green Woodpecker !*
Snowy Egret	Northern Flicker
Magnificent Frigatebird	Cuban Pewee !*
American White Pelican	Loggerhead Kingbird !*
Brown Pelican	La Sagra's Flycatcher !*
Neotropic Cormorant !	White-eyed Vireo
Anhinga !	Cuban Crow !*
Turkey Vulture	Gray Catbird
American Kestrel	Northern Mockingbird
Osprey	Cuban Solitaire !*^
Common Black Hawk !	Red-legged Thrush !
Broad-winged Hawk	House Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Northern Parula
Purple Gallinule !	Yellow Warbler
Common Moorhen	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Limpkin !	Black-throated Green Warbler
Black-necked Stilt !	Yellow-throated Warbler !
Killdeer	Olive-capped Warbler !*
Northern Jacana !	Palm Warbler
Greater Yellowlegs	Black-and-white Warbler
Lesser Yellowlegs	American Redstart
Spotted Sandpiper	Worm-eating Warbler !
Black Skimmer !	Ovenbird
Rock Dove	Louisiana Waterthrush !
Eurasian Collared Dove	Common Yellowthroat
Mourning Dove	Black-cowled Oriole !
White-winged Dove	Cuban Blackbird !*
Common Ground Dove	Greater Antillean Grackle *
Blue-headed Quail-Dove !*	Cuban Bullfinch !*
Cuban Parakeet !*	Yellow-faced Grassquit !
Cuban Parrot !*	Red-legged Honeycreeper !
Great Lizard Cuckoo !*	Stripe-headed Tanager !*
Smooth-billed Ani	Indigo Bunting

Total Species: 85 seen

Endemic or Near-endemic Species: 22

New to Life List: 40

Life List is now at 332 species



Photos: Cuban Trogon (Sue Olmstead), Hibiscus Tree Flower (Inga Hinnerichsen), Mimosa (Mary Marsh), Limpkin (Bernie Solymár), Palm Warbler (Inga Hinnerichsen), Gecko (Inga Hinnerichsen)

I could go on, but the limitation of pages in the Lotus only allows for so much. Cuba is an intriguing window into life 50 - 60 years ago with an unspoiled natural environment not found elsewhere in the Caribbean. In the near future a predicted influx of roughly 6 million American tourists per year will change all this.

WHITEY **THE ALBINO REDTAIL HAWK**

by Shelia Smith

Whitey was first noticed last year near the Mohawk Chapel in Brantford but disappeared in mid winter. This year, Whitey was first seen near the chapel in November but soon moved to what appears to be a territory across the river. Courtship behaviour has now been observed.

Whitey is revered by the local Aboriginal people and referred to as a Spirit Hawk. Jim Windle wrote quite an interesting piece in the Two Row Times. Because the bird seems settled, visits of a few people at a time probably won't matter. The bird is being monitored by local residents as are unfamiliar cars. Usually, Whitey can be seen from the road. If you want directions let me or Len Grincevicius know. Trespassing and following the bird are strongly discouraged.

One wag said, "Well, maybe now we'll get some pink redtails." :0)



Whitey

Photo: George Pond

IN MEMORIAM

On behalf of all of us at the Norfolk Field Naturalists we would like to convey our deepest condolences to the **Loughton Family** with regards to the passing of

Ruth Loughton

Ruth Loughton was a long time active member of the NFN and served as Secretary on the Board

We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to all those who made donations to the NFN in memory of Ruth Loughton

IN MEMORIAM

On behalf of all of us at the Norfolk Field Naturalists we would like to convey our deepest condolences to the **Harlow Family** with regards to the passing of

Jim Harlow



Jim Harlow was a long term member of the NFN and served as President of the organisation

Jim Harlow at the NFN 50th Anniversary Gala
Photo: Inga Hinnerichsen

RED BAY WEEKEND ON THE BRUCE PENINSULA

Friday, May 26 - Sunday May 28, 2017

Hosted by: South Peel Naturalist's Club

For accommodations and payments – contact: Evergreen Resort

139 Resort Road, South Bruce, ON N0H 1X0 Ph.: (519) 534-1868

or: reservations@evergreenresortredbay.ca

1 to 3 nights \$118.89/night plus 13% HST Seniors special (55+) \$110.00/night plus 13% HST

Rates include all meals and evening snacks.

Guided Nature Outings - Birding - Botany

Participant Fee - \$20 per person

For more information call Donna at (905) 815-0933

The Snapping Turtles win!

The Ontario Government has now banned the hunt of Snapping Turtles in Ontario thanks to overwhelming input from people like us - 5,635 signatures in total. Yay, go Turtles!!!

**Report poaching of turtles on Long Point to:
1-877-847-7667 or OPP**

Ontario Nature's 86th Annual Gathering June 2 - 4, 2017

at Kempenfelt Conference Centre, Innisfil

Enjoy a weekend reunion on Kempenfelt Bay along Lake Simcoe to celebrate another year of protecting wild species and wild spaces in Ontario.

Accommodations

The Kempenfelt Conference Centre is located just 45 minutes north of Toronto on beautiful Kempenfelt Bay, Lake Simcoe. The 20-acre property features 11,500-square-feet of meeting space, of private shoreline and an abundance of natural woodland.

Presentations - Workshops - Nature outings

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

Six New Groups Join the Nature Network

On February 25, we welcomed a record six new groups to the Nature Network. **The Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group, Land Over Landings, the Ontario Beekeepers' Association, Great Lakes Wildlife Research, Liberty Allotment Garden and the Leeds Grenville Stewardship Council** bring many years of conservation commitment and success to the network and we look forward to working with them to protect Ontario's wildlife and habitats.

Thank You!

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT Spring 2017

The next BoD Meeting will be held on April 25, 2017. The report from this meeting will be in the Summer issue of the Lotus.

You are invited to
Celebrate the Life of

HARRY B BARRETT

Sunday May 28, 2017, 1:00 to 5:00 pm
Education Centre,
Backus Heritage Conservation Area

1267 2nd Concession Road, R. R. # 1
Port Rowan, Ontario

Please share a memory of Harry B
Bring a story or a photo to Backus
or send a 30 - 60 second video clip
no later than May 21, 2017
to: ryanpropper@raineymedia.com



Photo: Ted Adams

Welcome New NFN Members

2016 - 2017 Season

Liv Monck-Whipp,
Marvin & Dianne Lefler

We look forward to meeting you and hope you will participate in and enjoy all the NFN indoor presentations and field outings.

Upcoming NFN 2017 Spring Events

Early Spring Hike at SWCR's Turkey Point Ravines.

**Saturday, April 22, 2017
9:30 am to Noon.**

The St. Williams Conservation Reserve is partially on the south side of Front Road. Meet on Turkey Point Road hill south of Front Road.

Park on road shoulder on west side.

Note: Moderately difficult hike

Contact Audrey at 519-586-9464.

Movie Night "Escarpment Blues" & NCEE Fund Raiser

Tuesday, May 9, 2017, 7:30-9:00 pm

Join us for popcorn and a movie:

Sarah Harmer's song Escarpment Blues has a great line which states "if we blow another hole in the escarpment the wild ones won't have anywhere to go".

Note: Doors will open at 6:30 for

Penny Auction Preview

Contact Len at 519-428-6796.

Mother's Day Spring Wildflower Hike in Backus Woods

Sunday, May 14, 1:00 to 3:00 pm.

Bring Mom and join us on a leisurely stroll through the south tract of Backus Woods to identify and learn about the diversity of spring flowers along the wooded trail

Meet at the Parking lot on

Concession Road 3.

Contact Bernie at 519-428-0706.

FIELD EVENT Spring Migrants in Backus Woods

Saturday, May 20, 7:30 to 9:30 am.

A local enthusiastic and knowledgeable birder will lead us on a bird-watching expedition in the South Tract of Backus Woods

Don't forget your binoculars!

Meet at the Parking lot on

Concession Road 3.

Contact Bernie at 519-428-0706.

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:

Summer 2017

Input dead line:

Friday, May 26, 2017

About the NFN

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

Guest speakers present programs on interesting and relevant natural history and conservation topics. Club members receive the Lotus newsletter with articles on local natural history and club activities. Copies of the Lotus are available at meetings, by mail or by email and posted on the NFN web site. Articles published in the Lotus reflect the views and opinions of the authors, but not necessarily those of the NFN.

www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

2016 - 2017 NFN Executive with contact & project information

		All 519-	
President	Inga Hinnerichsen	875-5601	daveinga@live.ca
Vice-President	Len Grincevicius	428-6796	portie_1989@eastlink.ca
Sanctuary	Peter Carson	586-3985	gartcar@kwic.com
Past President	Bernie Solymár	427-9969	solymar@nornet.on.ca
Treasurer	Barb Hourigan	583-1198	bbhourigan@yahoo.ca
Secretary	Eleanor Chithalen	582-4382	eleanor.chithalen@gmail.com
Director/ Membership	Diane Salter	586-7775	bigcreek@kwic.com
Director Speaker Program and Field Events	Len Grincevicius	428-6796	portie_1989@eastlink.ca
Director Publicity	David Curry	875-5601	david.curry@hotmail.com
Director Environment	Bernie Solymár	427-9969	solymar@nornet.on.ca
Director-at-large	Sue Olmstead	583-1436	ksolmstead@kwic.com
Director-at-large	Ken Olmstead	583-1436	ksolmstead@kwic.com
Director-at-large	Cliff Skerratt	582-0319	

Lotus Editor (appointed) Inga Hinnerichsen 875-5601 daveinga@live.ca

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 (deceased), Jim Harlow (deceased)