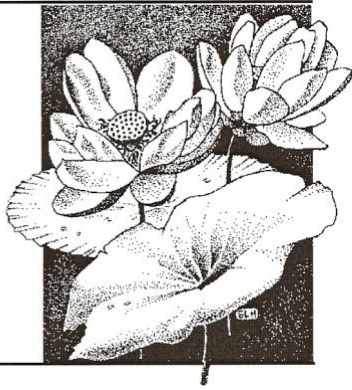


Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



APRIL 2019



A Hidden Gem — The Gadwall

By Kyle Horner — www.onewordbirds.com (With permission)

If you ever find yourself (as I frequently do) perusing the list of one-word-birds, you may notice that some families of birds are better represented than others. There are no one-word owls, for example, or woodpeckers. You won't find any gulls or penguins on the list either. What you *will* find, though, is a disproportionate number of ducks.

One member of the duck family – the Mallard – may actually be the most commonly encountered one-word-bird in the entire world. Our familiar green-headed friend is in fine company too, with cousins including the Garganey, the Redhead, the Canvasback, the Smew and the undeniably adorable Bufflehead. But why does this single group of birds merit so many more mononyms than others?

The answer, I think, lies in who names birds, and it seems likely to me that different groups of birds have been named by different groups of people. Take, for example, the gulls. These ubiquitous, mostly-identical, oft-maligned birds have never held any importance in the eyes of most people, and as such there has never been a need for the lay person to distinguish one from the other. For this reason, most people simply call them all 'seagulls' in complete ignorance of the fact that there are dozens of unique species¹. The scientific community, then, is free to dream up some typically unimaginative monikers without pressure from the masses.

Ducks, on the other hand, *do* have importance to humans owing mostly to the fact that they are delicious. Their tasty flesh makes people want to

hunt them, and hunters have historically created easy, memorable names for the species they shoot. There's a certain elegant simplicity to names like Redhead and Canvasback, and in the hunter's vernacular they are complemented by others including Bluebill (for Lesser Scaup), Sprig (for Northern Pintail), Spooney (for Northern Shoveler), Sawbill (for Common Merganser), Skunkhead (for Surf Scoter) and even Greenhead (for our friendly, everyday Mallard).

Many of these colloquial names have disappeared over the years, giving way to the biologist's inclination towards standardization and consistency. Some have persisted though, and many of our extant one-word ducks are colourful and charismatic. All but one, really. And yes, that is the one I am intent on blabbering on about today. It may seem overly humble or humdrum to you, but in my mind, it's practically a runaway model: the *Gadwall*.



Gadwall

Photo from Wikipedia
cont'd. p.2

I must concede that in the bright and boldly-patterned world of waterfowl, the *Gadwall* doesn't exactly stand out at first glance. It is so dull, in fact, that it has become a bit of a running joke in my small circle of friends. The joke arose roughly like this:

I was once birding a particularly sweet waterfowl spot with a few friends, including a guy we'll call Kevin (his name is actually Kevin). While eyeing the ducks with a scope I paused on our first *Gadwall* of the day and I asked if anyone else would like to have a look. A few took me up on my offer, but Kevin declined. When I asked him if he wasn't a fan of the *Gadwall* he responded, "It's not much of a duck, really." I put up some resistance on the *Gadwall's* behalf until, using an analogy with beer to drive home his point, Kevin boldly stated "The *Gadwall* is the Coors Light of ducks."²

Now I may have dropped the argument at that point (or many points later, who can remember?), but in the years following I have made it a small mission of mine to ensure that Kevin pays dearly for his cruel and unnecessary slight on this noble bird. Indeed, we can scarcely pass within a mile of one without me reminding him of that fateful day and calling his character deeply into question. Even now, probably ten years on, I am thoughtlessly implicating him by name for the world to see³. I don't even feel bad about it.

At this point I probably should admit that I had may never have thought twice about the *Gadwall* before that day. But injustices of any sort should not go unmet, and it was the callousness of the attack that presented this little duck to me in a new light.

If you've never been fortunate enough to lay eyes on a *Gadwall* before, allow me to paint you a picture. The male *Gadwall* is an absolute symphony in gray. His head is gray, his back is gray, his sides are gray, his belly is gray, and his tail is also gray. The gray has a faint mottled pattern in which different shades of gray contrast slightly with each other. Oh, and the bill is also gray. The female is brown, but basically all female ducks are brown so we can hardly fault her for that.

The discerning observer will note that the male does possess three distinctive colourful field marks. First, the feathers on his hind end are black. Second, there are some white feathers in his wing which are sometimes visible. Thirdly, some of the feathers on his back edge over the border from gray into brown territory, making for some very lovely, if indeed subtle, contrast. His feet are also yellow, but since they're almost always underwater, that's not really important.

Now at this point you may be thinking that my interest in the *Gadwall* is more based in stubbornness than in genuine appreciation, and you may be at least partly correct. But I must not be the only one who enjoys this bird, because it has held on to its special name in a time when many other ducks have not.

Making that fact even more surprising is that the name, which has been in use since at least the mid-1600s, doesn't seem to mean anything. At least not anymore. I like to think that maybe it never did. Maybe it was the result of some ridiculous argument between a couple of duck hunters in the English countryside, with one making disparaging remarks and the other defiantly assigning a unique name in protest. If I have somehow unknowingly carried on a centuries-old tradition of raising hell over trivial, bird-related quarrels, my life would seem just about complete.

The next time you're strolling along the water, taking in the array of reds, blues and greens, remember that not all ducks are created equal. I urge you to take a moment to look beyond the rainbow for the little gray duck in the corner. He may not be bright, bold, or even beautiful, but the *Gadwall* deserves a little love too.

¹ Referring to a bird as a 'seagull' is a great way to get a free ornithology lecture, as no birder can resist vigorously correcting you on this clearly non-trivial error.

² I'm sorry if you happen to like Coors Light. Mostly I'm sorry that you haven't discovered beer.

³ Well, the ten people that read this.

SPRING QUIZ

All Photos from Wikipedia

Answers on Page 5



Prescribed Burn to Remove Phragmites Begins

By Ashley Taylor

Reprinted from Simcoe Reformer article
published on: March 19, 2019

The Ordnance Drive beach in Turkey Point went up in flames Tuesday afternoon as part of a prescribed burn to reduce invasive phragmites.

The Turkey Point Phragmites Action Alliance Committee, previously known as the Beach Restoration Committee, has been working on getting the phragmites removed for several years.

There are about 22 acres of land in Turkey Point covered in this invasive plant, which makes it difficult for other plants or animals to occupy the space.

Darlene Vandepoele, co-chair of the Turkey Point Phragmites Action Alliance Committee, credits Norfolk Mayor Kristal Chopp for pushing for the prescribed burn.

“It is because of her perseverance of this issue that the burning has begun on this beach,” Vandepoele said.

The success rate of burnings such as this is around 97 per cent when the three steps of removal are followed. The plants were sprayed with Roundup in October 2018, rolled earlier this month, and the burning began on Tuesday.

“I remember telling my husband if we don’t try it’s never going to happen,” Vandepoele said while standing in front of the flames on Ordnance Drive.



Ontario Park Burn Specialists work to remove the phragmites in Turkey Point on Tuesday afternoon.

Bird Studies Canada

Citizen Scientists Volunteers Report Feeling Happy and Connected to Nature

In Fall of 2018, Bird Studies Canada invited volunteers from across the country to participate in a research study being conducted by Dr. Lisa Nisbet, Environmental Psychology Researcher, Trent University. Over 500 people completed a survey that inquired about wellbeing, connection to the natural environment and experiences as Citizen Scientists (collecting and contributing information about birds or other species to add to scientific knowledge).

For preliminary results, go to birdscanada.org/news/citizen-scientists-volunteers-report-feeling-happy-and-connected-to-nature

Species in Focus

Yellow-Legged Meadowhawk Dragonfly



Female

Flight Season: End of July to end of October

Habitat: Ponds, slow streams

Range: This species has two separate populations in North America. One is found from Ontario east to Nova Scotia, extending south into the U.S. to Texas and Florida. The other population occurs in British Columbia, Washington, and Idaho. In Idaho, it is found in the northern half of the state.

Field Notes: One of the easier Meadowhawks to identify. Their legs lack black markings (may be yellowish or dark brown but not black). The female has a triangular scoop on the lower end of her abdomen.

They rest on bushes and tall grass or bask on rocks to absorb heat early in the day. This is a small dragonfly, with length of $1 \frac{3}{16}$ to $1 \frac{3}{8}$ inches (30 to 35 mm). The wings are mostly clear but have a small patch of yellowish to orange clouding at the base of each hindwing. Mature males are brownish black on the face and thorax and have a red abdomen, while immature males have a yellow thorax and a yellowish-brown abdomen. Females have a brown thorax and a brownish red abdomen.

Diet: Naiad — Naiads feed on a wide variety of aquatic insects, such as mosquito larvae, other aquatic fly larvae, mayfly larvae, and freshwater shrimp. They will also eat very small fish and tadpoles. Adult — The dragonfly will eat almost any soft-bodied flying insect including mosquitoes, flies, small moths, mayflies, and flying ants or termites.

Ecology: The naiads live in the debris of the bottoms of lakes and ponds. They do not actively pursue prey but wait for it to pass by, a strategy which affords them protection from other predators. The naiads emerge, or make the transition to adult dragonflies, at night. This species flies later in the fall than any other species. The adults of this species hunt flying insects from perches on rocks or bare branches.

Conservation: Populations are widespread, abundant, and secure.

Spring Quiz Answers (from page 3):

❶ Squirrel Corn, ❷ Compton's Tortoiseshell Butterfly, ❸ Spotted Salamander, ❹ Spring Peeper, ❺ Rue Anemone, ❻ Bonaparte's Gull, ❼ Redwing Blackbird, ❽ Mourning Cloak

Tree Ecology Hike on March 17th

More than 25 people showed up to learn from Brett Norman and share information.

Photos by Len Grincevicius



The **Spring** issue of the Ontario Nature magazine features articles on carnivorous plants, the American White Pelican and forest protection. It can be found at <https://view.publitas.com/ont-nature/spring-2019/page/1>

A blog titled **#GreenStepByStep – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle ... Refuse?** outlines ways to minimize the impact of packaging related to



takeaway food, e.g. clamshell packaging, paper napkins and plastic. The author took a first step in mitigating this waste by

exercising one of the more underrated Rs of the sustainability cycle: reduce. Or more accurately –*refuse*. Go to the blog at <https://ontarionature.org/reduce-reuse-recycle-refuse/>

To receive selected information by email, you can sign up:

ontarionature.org

Thank You!

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

The next BoD Meeting will be held on April 23, 2019. The report from this meeting will be in the Summer issue of the Lotus.

The Norfolk Field Naturalists
wishes to recognize, with gratitude,
the following participants in

The 2018

Great Canadian Birdathon

for their fundraising efforts on behalf of NFN:

Betty Chanyi, Peggy McArthur,

Mike McMillan, George Pond,

Lisa Timpf and Anne Wynia.

NFN received \$7,078.07

Thank you!

Welcome New NFN Members

2018 - 2019 Season

Gordon and Socorro Chinnick,
Carolyn Smith, Sandra Squeo
and Natalie Terdik

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



Nature Website

You may be interested in this website which contains almost daily posts full of bird photos, plant photos and short articles, including nature walk reports from Southern Ontario. There are great photos of winter tree and shrub buds for over 125 species. Go to: mileshearn.com

From Nature Canada

Eight Tips to Help Birds

1. Keep cats safe & save bird lives
2. Reduce window strikes
3. Avoid bird – vehicle collisions
4. Better consumer choices
5. Make your yard bird-friendly
6. Support your local nature group and conservation groups
7. Bird with a purpose: citizen science
8. Celebrate birds

For more information, go to: naturecanada.ca/cats-collisions/8-tips-to-help-birds/

Upcoming NFN Summer 2019 Events

Sunday, May 12, 1:00-3:00 p.m. Mother's Day Spring Wildflower Hike

Bring Mom and join us on a leisurely stroll through the south tract of Backus Woods. Colleen and Bernie will identify and discuss the diversity and natural history of spring ephemeral flowers along the wooded trail. We'll see Trout Lily, Red and White Trillium, Hepatica, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Wild Phlox and many other species. Meet at the Backus Woods parking lot on Concession 3 (by the Turkey Cairn). *Contact Bernie at 519-427-9969.*

Sunday, June 9, 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

In the early days of the Norfolk Field Naturalists, an early June Forestry Farm picnic was a tradition that we would like to re-establish. Let's meet at the Interpretive Centre (885 Hwy. 24 at Forestry Farm Road) at 11:00 a.m., go for a tour and then head back to the Centre for a picnic lunch. Please bring your own lunch, lawn chairs and insect repellent. *Contact Len at 519-428-6796.*

Wednesday, July 10, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Norfolk Sand Plain Restoration Tour

Mary Gartshore and Peter Carson will take participants to several restoration sites which represent various habitats and stages of maturity. Planning, execution and results will be discussed and illustrated. Insect repellent, long pants, cameras, binoculars and appropriate weather wear are suggested. Meet at the dam parking lot just west of St. Williams Nursery on the north side of Highway 24 to car pool. *Contact Mary or Peter at 519-586-3985.*

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 2019
Input dead line:
Friday, May 24, 2019**

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

2018 - 2019 NFN Executive with Contact and Project Information

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Director-at-large	vacant		
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Director-at-large	vacant		
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Christmas Bird Counts (appointed)	Adam Timpf - Woodhouse Count	429-4147	
	Linda Thrower - Fisherville Count	905-774-1230	
Honorary President:	George Pond		
Honorary Directors:	Anne and Dolf Wynia		