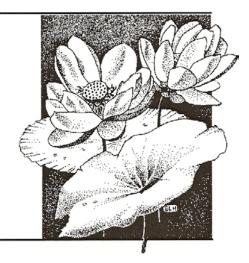
JUNE 2012



NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS





THE BAILLIE BIRDATHON

COUNTS RECORD NUMBER OF SPECIES

Mike McMillan, Official Birdathoner

(Editor's note: the following are edited excerpts of Mike's detailed recount of the 24-hour Birdathon)

I was again privileged to join Ricky Dunn, David Hussell and their son Jeremy. We began our birdathon at 4.30pm on May 11 with a walk around the BSC property. Visible on the bay were Ruddy Duck, Redheads, a Bufflehead, a Canvasback and some Scaup. In the air we saw a Great Blue Heron, a Cooper's Hawk, a Turkey Vulture and all of Barn, Tree and Bank Swallows. We also spotted several other common species.

We continued to the old Port Rowan sewage lagoon to observe several shorebirds
At Mud Creek I managed to spot a Baltimore Oriole, a male Orchard Oriole, a Chickadee, a Meadowlark, a Brown Thrasher and a flock of Cedar Waxwings.

On Front Road west of Port Rowan we stopped at two freshly dug ponds. There were a Green-winged Teal, a Semi-palmated Plover and a Short-billed Dowitcher scrounging in the mud along the shore.

Near the Big Creek bridge we saw a Roughwing Swallow, a Song Sparrow and a Downy Woodpecker. Jeremy spotted a beautiful male Scarlet Tanager perched in a tree.

We headed to Old Cut adding a Brown-headed Cowbird and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet to our total as well as half a dozen Warblers and the Blue-headed Vireo.

On our walk along the dike by Big Creek Marsh we had a good look at a diving Pied-billed Grebe, a pair of American Coots, a couple of Swamp Sparrows in the cattails, a single Cormorant and a flock of Wood ducks flying overhead. We also heard several noisy Marsh Wrens and a Sandhill Crane in the distance.

By now it was after 9 pm and getting fairly dark. At the BSC property we were successful, sighting an American Woodcock. On the sand road north of the Forestry Station we heard the familiar, tiresomely repeated call of the Eastern Whip-poorwill.



Bobolink

(Baillie Birdathon - continued)

By 5.30 the next morning, at the marsh near the entrance to the Provincial Park at Long Point, we heard a Least Bittern. Shortly after, on our way to Backus Woods, a Northern Harrier was flying low over the fields. Just before the woods, David spotted a Horned Lark in a ploughed field.

Inside Backus Woods we saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, an American Redstart, a Bay-breasted Warbler, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a Cerulean Warbler and a Prothonotary Warbler. Most of the birds were high in the trees. A Hooded Merganser and babies were swimming in a large pool. We also heard the following birds: a Northern Waterthrush, an Ovenbird, a Red-eyed Vireo, a Great Crested Flycatcher, and a Woodthrush. Leaving the woods we tallied a Vesper Sparrow, a White-crowned Sparrow and an Eastern Bluebird.

At Highway 24 and East Quarter Line Road. (Ricky and David call it Kestrel Corners) we spotted an American Kestrel on a wire. Nearby three Wild Turkeys scratched in a ploughed field.

Another trip to Old Cut netted a few more migrants we were missing. Heading back we saw a Kingbird, a Bonaparte's Gull, two Caspian Terns and several Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Looking through a scope, we could make out the white head and tail of a Bald Eagle sitting on its nest.

Our travels east along Erie's shore produced several more species for our list. In Port Ryerse a Kingfisher perched on a branch above the creek and two Red-breasted Mergansers bobbed up and down in the lake. At the mostly drained Silver Lake in Port Dover we found a Northern Shoveler, a Lesser Yellowlegs, two Blue-winged Teal, and a female Ring-necked Duck.

Just before our time was up, in a nearby field, we spotted two birds we thought we were not going to see: a Savannah Sparrow and a Bobolink.

The excellent weather combined with the excellent birders I was with helped me identify 129 species - a new record! Some more money still has to come in, but once that happens, we will easily surpass \$4,500, which will go to help bird conservation across the country. Tax receipts will be issued by Bird Studies Canada later in the summer. Thank you to all Baillie Birdathon supporters!

Baillie Birdathon - complete list of birds

Pied-billed Grebe Doub-crest. Cormorant Least Bittern Great Blue Heron Turkey Vulture Mute Swan Canada Goose Wood Duck American Widgeon Mallard Blue-winged Teal Northern Shoveler Gadwall Green-winged Teal Canvasback Redhead Ring-necked Duck Lesser Scaup Bufflehead Hooded Merganser Red-br.Merganser Ruddy Duck Northern Harrier Sharp-shinned Hawk Cooper's Hawk Broad-winged Hawk Red-tailed Hawk Bald Eagle American Kestrel Wild Turkey American Coot Sandhill Crane Semipalmeated Plover Killdeer **Greater Yellowlegs** Lesser Yellowlegs Spotted Sandpiper Ruddy Turnstone Least Sandpiper Dunlin Short-billed Dowitcher American Woodcock

Bonaparte's Gull

Ring-billed Gull Herring Gull Caspian Tern Common Tern Black Tern Rock Pigeon Mourning Dove E. Whip-poor-will Chimney Swift Rub.-th. Hummingbird Belted Kingfisher Red-bell.Woodpecker Yell.-bell. Sapsucker Downy Woodpecker Northern Flicker Eastern Wood-Pewee Least Flycatcher Eastern Phoebe Gr. Crest. Flycatcher Eastern Kingbird Warbling Vireo Red-eyed Vireo Blue Jay American Crow Horned Lark Purple Martin Tree Swallow N. Rgh.-wing Swallow Bank Swallow Cliff Swallow Barn Swallow Black-cap Chickadee House Wren Marsh Wren Ruby-crowned Kinglet Bl.gray Gnatcatcher Eastern Bluebird Veerv Swainson's Thrush Wood Thrush American Robin Gray Catbird Brown Thrasher

Cedar Waxwing European Starling Northern Parula Yellow Warbler Chest.-sided Warbler Magnolia Warbler Cape May Warbler Bl.-thr. Blue Warbler Yell.-rumped Warbler Bl.-thr. Geen Warbler Palm Warbler Bay-breasted Warbler Cerulean Warbler Bl.-and- Wh. Warbler American Redstart Prothonotary Warbler Ovenbird N. Waterthrush Common Yellowthroat **Hooded Warbler** Scarlet Tanager Eastern Towhee Chipping Sparrow Field Sparrow Vesper Sparrow Savannah Sparrow Grasshopper Sparrow Song Sparrow Swamp Sparrow Wh.-crown. Sparrow Northern Cardinal Rose-br. Grosbeak Indigo Bunting **Bobolink** Red-winged Blackbird Eastern Meadowlark Common Grackle Br.-headed Cowbird Orchard Oriole **Baltimore Oriole** House Finch American Goldfinch House Sparrow



NFN BioBlitz a success despite dreary weather

Bernie Solymár, President, NFN



Audrey Kathy Larry Alan

At 6.00 am on the cool, overcast and dreary morning of Saturday, June 2nd, two groups of hardy naturalists set forth into the St. Williams Conservation Reserve's Nursery Tract and Turkey Point Tract to record as many bird species, by sight and song, as possible in a four hour period. They comprised the first of five groups that would hike the 2 tracts during the day as part of the Norfolk Field Naturalist's first annual BioBlitz.

A **bioblitz** is an intense period of biological surveying in an attempt to record all the living species within a designated area. Monroe Landon, a founder of the Norfolk Field Naturalists, traditionally organized a bioblitz with St. Williams as the gathering place from where teams of naturalists headed out to various natural areas in the County. This was followed by a supper at the Forestry Station. In the 2012 version, part of the club's 50th anniversary celebrations, participants had their choice of joining one of several guest "experts", including birders, herpetologists, botanists and entomologists.

The forecast high of only 17°C with cloudy conditions and 25-30 km/hr winds along with the 2° of rain the day before meant that the butterfly blitz had to be cancelled. One of our plant experts had to bow out due to illness requiring 11 participants to be re-slotted to other groups, and an executive decision was made to cancel the BBQ.

However, for the 19 participants, neither rain, nor wind, nor cancelled hikes were enough to dampen their enthusiasm. The early birders recorded a total of 38 species in the Nursery (Zavitz) Tract with leader Audrey Heagy. Meanwhile, Terri Groh and her group recorded 41 species in the Turkey Point Tract of the Conservation Reserve. Notable species included Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher and Pileated Woodpecker. A Northern Goshawk nest was also sighted.

Dr. Jane Bowles, noted botanist, professor, and arboretum curator of the Sherwood Fox Arboretum at Western University, helped her group of budding botanists identify a whopping 206 species of plants and ferns in the Turkey Point Tract. Unique and wonderfully named species observed included Carrion Flower. Yellow Mandarin, Black Snakeroot, Enchanted Nightshade, King Devil, and the ever present Poison Ivy. The most exciting find was a rare shrub called Drummond's Dogwood, which Dr. Bowles indicated was only found in several small localities in Ontario.

The last two "herpetofauna blitzes" were headed by Gregor Beck and Adam Timpf of the Long Point Basin Land Trust. With the cool conditions reptiles and amphibians were not very active. But Painted Turtles, a Snapping Turtle, a Garter Snake and 2 frog species were spotted. The highlight for Gregor's group was not actually in the Conservation Reserve, but on a nearby property, where they spotted 2 Eastern Hog-nosed Snakes, including a very young specimen. At the St. Williams Tract, Adam and his lone participant, Al Hull, also counted 15 species of butterflies and 9 species of dragonflies and damselflies. They also recorded an additional 15 species of birds that had not been recorded earlier in the morning.

At the end of the day, the organizers and weary participants deemed the event a success, despite the early spring like conditions. The rain a day earlier had been much needed by the land and local farmers alike. The sun that peaked out in the afternoon of the BioBlitz was very much appreciated. Mother Nature, of course, operates on her own schedule and as naturalists we accepted what she had to offer. We will share warm memories of, what hopefully will be, an old annual tradition made new!



Florinda Dr. Jane Bowles Mirek Barb Shirley Andre

SPRING AWAKENING:

SEARCHING FOR SALAMANDERS AND FROGS

Bernie Solymár, President, NFN

On April 14th the Norfolk Field Naturalists, in with the Long Point partnership Region Conservation Authority, hosted their annual Amazing Amphibians hike in Backus Woods. To start the evening I presented a short PowerPoint presentation on frogs and salamanders that might be encountered in the woods, accompanied by sound bytes of frog song for each species. Following that the approximately 30 participants drove to the Third Concession where we entered Backus Woods. Colleen led the hike to listen for and identify frog species, and to look for salamanders under logs.



Blue-spotted Salamander

Due to the cool evening temperatures frogs were not calling – except for the odd Chorus Frog and Spring Peeper. The song of the first species sounds very much like running your thumb over the teeth of a comb. Spring Peepers make the familiar "peep, peep" sound and Wood Frogs sound like a duck quacking. When you think about the fact that these 3 frog species overwinter under leaf litter and logs, and their bodies actually freeze solid, it's amazing to think that they become active in the spring and start calling before all the ice is even off the woodland ponds!

Although frogs were scarce, it was a very fruitful evening for finding salamanders – including Yellow Spotted, Blue Spotted/Jefferson Salamanders, Red Backed Salamanders, and even an Eastern Newt – which is quite rare in Backus Woods! Steve Wilcox also found some Blue-

spotted Salamander egg masses which were a hit, especially with the kids in attendance.

Like frogs, salamanders become active very early in the spring, well before even the first hardy hepaticas, trout lilies and trilliums emerge from the soil. For species like Yellow Spotted, Blue Spotted and Jefferson Salamanders (collectively known as mole salamanders), a warm couple of days and some rain will draw them from their underground burrows to the surface. From there they proceed en masse to nearby pools where they frantically mate in large tangles of swirling salamander bodies. For those that have gone out in the middle of the night with strong flashlights, it is an amazing sight to behold. When re-visiting the ponds 2 to 3 days later there is no evidence of any salamanders (they've all returned to the woods), but on underwater twigs and branches there are masses upon masses of salamander eggs contained in special jelly-like coverings. Depending on temperature these will hatch in 2 to 3 weeks into aquatic "larvae" with gills. These larvae feed on insects, worms and copepods for several months before leaving the water as adults in late summer, now with fully developed lungs.

After spending an hour in the woods, and with darkness approaching (and some rapidly tiring children), a satisfied group made their way back to their cars. Those last to leave were treated to the sounds of American Woodcocks ("bbbzzzzpppp") in the adjacent Charles Sauriol Tract. What a great finish to a great evening!



Wood Frog

Butterflies Galore, and It's Only May!

Bernie Solymár, President, NFN

Wow! To an entomologist this has been. and continues to be, one of the craziest Springs ever. Today I spent the majority of my day outside and saw...wait for it....my first Monarch of the year! That's a record for me! So was the Comma in Backus Woods on March 15th. So were the hundreds of Red Admirals flying everywhere on April 20th and 21st. Similar observations were made by butterfly watchers throughout Ontario, including as far away as Ottawa and Cochrane! Over the last few days, again the Red Admirals appeared on Dandelions and Eastern Red Bud blossoms in the front yard, at the oriole feeders, and even dead on the road - victims of passing vehicles. Painted Ladies, Black Swallowtails, Cabbage Whites, Clouded Sulfurs and Mourning Cloaks were seen fluttering all around.

I've talked to lots of people that have noticed the "pretty little red-and-black butterflies" that are everywhere right now. What many folks don't know is that the Red Admiral does not overwinter in Ontario. The large numbers we are seeing is the entomologists version of an "irruption" from the southeastern United States. These fast flying butterflies, members of the Nymphalidae family (also called brush-footed butterflies), are carried northward into the northeastern U.S., Ontario and Québec by strong southerly winds. Although the migration northward of this species occurs every Spring, why such large numbers this year is anyone's guess. Perhaps it is the result of a warm winter caused by the La Niña effect.

Everyone, of course, knows about the annual Monarch migration. Large numbers congregate each September along the north shore of Lake Erie before making their lengthy and perilous flight across the continental U.S. to the mountains of central Mexico, only to return (albeit several generations later) to Ontario the following Spring (normally late May and June). Red Admirals aren't quite that sophisticated as the journey is one way only. Our local population is killed off in the Fall by the first hard frosts. "Re-colonization" in the Spring is wholly dependent on wind patterns and jet streams that push the butterflies northward. And

this species is not limited to eastern North America. The Red Admiral is a cosmopolitan species with the same phenomenon occurring with a migration from North Africa into Europe every year.





Red Admiral Common Buckeye

Are there other butterflies that migrate?

Yes! Painted Ladies and the Common Buckeye are two other Ontario species that are "blown in" from more southern climes every year. So are several moth species like the Common Armyworm (seen some of those already!) and, later in the summer, the Corn Earworm, both notable agricultural pests. On the other hand, the Mourning Cloak overwinters as an adult butterfly under the bark of trees and in other sheltered areas. With the first few warm days of Spring they become active, fluttering gracefully though woodlots and open areas, much to the delight of anyone that spends time in the woods in the Spring. Still other species, like the Clouded Sulphur and Black Swallowtail overwinter in a chrysalis stage, emerging when davtime temperatures begin to moderate and plant growth has begun.

So, will all those Red Admirals that are "pushing through" survive to produce another generation? Well, that will depend on the weather over the next few weeks. A late frost could kill off many and, of course, some will fall victim to cars and predators. But chances are many will survive. Especially since their host plants, Stinging Nettle and Wood Nettle, are already growing robustly in southern Ontario.

I have a feeling that for us "buggers" it's going to be a banner year! Bring on the annual Butterfly Count. I'm betting on record numbers and species in 2012!

MOTHER'S DAY WITH MOTHER NATURE

Inga Hinnerichsen

Sunday, May 13th, dawned with heavy grey skies and a promise of showers, as was forecasted. Fortunately, as 2.00 pm approached, the clouds parted and the sun came out making it an ideal afternoon for our outing. The Norfolk Field Naturalists (NFN), partnering with Long Point Region Conservation Authority (LPRCA), hosted again the annual Mother's Day Wildflower Walk in the Backus Woods. This family-friendly event was guided by Fiona Street of LPRCA and Colleen Dale of NFN.





Silvery Lupine

Wild Blue Phlox

Near the Turkey-release cairn was our only sighting of a Silvery Lupine (Lupinus argenteus) in full bloom. These hardy legumes thrive in dry habitats reaching moisture deep down with their long roots. Colleen's group set out into the woods looking for more spring ephemerals along the trail. These early flowers take advantage of the light streaming down through the tree canopy, before the leaves emerge blocking out the sun. Some of the earliest ones had already flowered leaving only the green parts of the plant as evidence of their presence. Large patches of Trout-lily (Erythronium americanum) leaves were carpeting the forest floor. The mottling, from which they get their name, remained barely visible. A few fading Red Trilliums (Trillium erectum) persisted.

The next group of ephemerals were dotting the woods by the trail making our progress slow because we were stopping to examine each new species. Colleen told us that the Jack-in-the-Pulpit (Arisaema triphyllum) has separate male and female plants. An insect carrying pollen from the male flower into the female flower, depositing some of it on the stamen on the way, gets trapped in the

tubular lower portion of the spathe and perishes. Some botanists speculate that the Jack-in-the-Pulpit will eventually evolve into a "flesh-eating" plant, like the Pitcher-Plants (genus *Sarracenia*), being able to absorb nutrients of the decaying insect. The large white nodding flowers of the Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) were hiding under their umbrella-like leaves. But beware: despite it's delicious-sounding name the lovely May-apple is poisonous! A plant true to its name, is the Skunkcabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*). Try crushing one of its leaves and experience the pungent aroma so much like its namesake.

Half-way through our walk we met Fiona's group. Fiona handed out Bingo cards with pictures of wildflowers to the young aspiring botanists. Check off all plants as you identify them in the forest - Bingo!

Walking on, we learned the difference between the Two-leaf Miterwort (Mitella diphylla) and the Foamflower (Tiarella cordifolia, a.k.a. False Miterwort). the Solomon's-seal (Polygonatum biflorum) and the Feathery False Solomon's-seal (Maianthemum racemosum). Our list of lovelies goes on: Starflower (Trientalis borealis), Canada Mayflower (Maianthemum canadense), Crane's-bill (Geranium maculatum), Wild Blue Phlox (Phlox divaricata), etc. Other species were waiting, buds ready to burst - Virginia Waterleaf (Hydrophyllum virginianum) and Indian Cucumber-root (Medeola virginiana), among many. A walk in the Backus Wood any time is guaranteed to lift your spirits.

(Reference: National Wildlife Federation's Field Guide to Wildflowers of North America by David M. Brandenburg)



Brian Calvert (back), Ina, Peter, Kim & Giel Van Haren with Colleen Dale

A RECAP OF NFN SPRING OUTINGS & GUEST SPEAKERS

This spring brought with it not only April showers, but a variety of indoor and outdoor programmes. The guest speakers were a highlight at our two last well-attended meetings for the season.

On **April 10**, Dr. Jane Bowles spoke on the subject of "**The Buzz on Native Plants**" explaining why they are important to southern Ontario's biodiversity and how they benefit both wildlife and humans. She also agreed to be one of the expert guides on the BioBlitz later in June. See page 3 for details.

We rescheduled the regular meeting for May 22 in order to catch Ecologists Mary and John Theberge from Brittish Columbia on their travels through Ontario. Their presentation named " From Stardust to Ecosystems - the Symphony of Life" punctuated by outstanding slides held the rapt attention of the audience.

Cool and wet weather conditions caused our hawk watching excursion to Beamer Conservation Area on April 21 to be cancelled. A handful of hardy hawk fanciers ventured out anyway, but the low cloud cover didn't reveal any of the migrating raptors. This is a "Must re-do" for next spring!

Mother's Day, **May 13**, brought sunshine for the **Wildflower Walk in Backus Woods**. The outing was enjoyed by well over 30 participants. See page 6 for details.

The all-day **field trip to Elgin County on May 26** also had to be cancelled on short notice.

The much anticipated revival of the **BioBlitz** on **June 2** went ahead as scheduled despite of less-than-ideal weather. At the end of the day it was still deemed a success. See the detailed report on page 3. We are looking forward to the next BioBlitz in 2013!

Please, send any outing reports, or other articles of interest to the NFN membership to: daveinga@live.ca
Happy trails!

RECOGNITION OF MEMORIAL DONATIONS

On behalf of all of us at NFN we would like to extend our warmest gratitude with regards to the generous donations to NFN by

Marvin and Ruth Groves, Shirley and George Pond in memory of Joan Harlow as well as

Shirley Rothery in memory of Robert Salter

We would also like to express our deepest sympathy to the Harlow and Salter families



MEET THE NEW EDITOR!

Dear fellow NFN Members and Friends,

Let me introduce myself to those of you whose acquaintance I haven't yet had the pleasure of making. My name is Inga Hinnerichsen and I'm a recent new resident of lovely Norfolk County. My husband and I moved here less than two years ago from Calgary lured by the mild climate and the abundance of the natural world. We joined the NFN in order to meet people with similar interest to ours.

First, I boldly volunteered for the position of Director of Publicity. Jump into the deep end of the pool, head first! What I lack in expertise I make up in enthusiasm. Next, the NFN needed a new Editor for the Lotus newsletter to replace Anne Davidson, who's held this challenging job for many years. I now have some serious shoes to try to fill.

The bottom line is: Getting involved with your organisation is a highly rewarding experience. Looking forward to more great NFN events and any feedback from you.

With best regards,

Inga

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS

50th ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER

October 20, 2012, Port Rowan Community Centre
Social Hour at 6.00 pm, Dinner at 7.00 pm
Tickets \$25.00 per person - Cash Bar
For tickets call: Alan Ladd 519-426-8504



Upcoming NFN & other Summer Events

Long Point Butterfly Count

Saturday, July 7, 2012

This is a similar event to the Christmas Bird Count Contact Adam or Matt Timpf 519-586-9964

Nature's Calling!

presents the 3rd Annual

Butterfly & Dragonfly

Sunday, July 8, 2012 10:00 am to 3:00 pm Backus Heritage

Conservation Area

Contact: Colleen Dale 512-0240

Hummingbirds and Butterflies

Saturday, July 21 10:00 am to noon Hummingbird banding demonstration

273 Charlotteville Road 2 For more info call Audrey 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 on 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 2012
Input dead line:
Friday, October 5

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

2011 - 2012 NFN Board of Directors with contact & project information

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