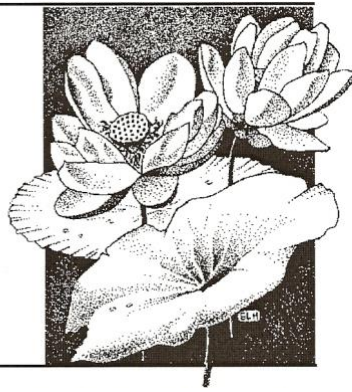


Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



DECEMBER 2020



Berries are for the Birds

Article by Inga Hinnerichsen
(Photos by Inga)

The last of the fall flowers have withered. Only dry brown stems remain of their former glory... but not all is lost yet. There are still lots of protein rich seed packets left at the ends of many stems. They not only ensure the new plants germinating in the spring, but also provide nutrition for many overwintering birds and small mammals in our area. By now most of the insect eating migratory birds have left on their annual trek south. A few hardy (foolhardy?) individuals are sticking it out for the winter. A handful of Robins always ignore the call of the south, but their normal ground foraging will be rudely interrupted by frost and a blanket of the



Wild Cherries

white stuff. What to do? The smaller seed-eaters will soon polish off the remaining plant seeds on the old stems. That leaves a variety of berries that tend to stick to the shrubs much longer. These energy-packed little bundles are favourites not just for birds, but also many small mammals. Birds with strong, sturdy beaks and rodents with their sharp

incisors will easily break up the hard stones and nuts inside the fruit. Many varieties of berries never get a chance to ripen before they are devoured by birds and critters with a sweet tooth. Some of these early treats are the fruits of the Nannyberry bush, the Alternate Leaf Dogwood, Mulberry, Elder Berry, Service Berry and Black Cherry. All of these grow on our property, but I never get to see the berries ripen before they are gone. Some cultivated varieties are also fair game. We have a couple of cherry and plum trees that produce lovely flowers in the spring. It always looks promising with small green fruit developing, but they too, are gone in no time. I gave up on my strawberry patch a couple of years ago. Regardless of trying to protect the plants with netting and chicken wire cages, which managed to keep the birds out, the squirrels still managed to get in. After a paltry handful of strawberries, most of which already had been nibbled on, I had enough. You win some, you lose some.



Winter Berries on My Burning Bush

cont'd. p.2

I have a Burning Bush at my front porch. I love the bright pink leaves that only remain for a few days. When they're gone the small red berries become available for Cardinals and other small birds. One year I had Eastern Blue Birds feasting on the fruit right outside my dining room window.

Next come the Riparian Grape, Sassafras, Wild Cherry and Virginia Creeper. You can see evidence of the birds' dinners as dark blue blotches on your deck railing or front steps.



Virginia Creeper Fruit

Some species persist into fall and winter. Perhaps the berries aren't the tastiest, but in a pinch, when everything else fails, they provide sustenance in the bleak months. A few of them, the Russian Olive, the Asian Bittersweet and the Multi-flora Rose, are introduced invasive plants. Many winter birds feed on their fruit and, unfortunately, enable them to spread out with seeds in their droppings. The white berries on the Poison Ivy seems not to cause any ill effects in the birds that eat them. Even the Spice Bush fruits seem to find their ways onto the menus of the birds. In the past, people used to collect the berries, dry them and ground them to be used as flavoring of more bland foods. The Multi-flora Rose bright red clusters of small berries make a very beautiful accent for your holiday table centre piece... just make sure they go out in your garbage when they've done their job. Mine go out into the fire pit.

Don't forget to supplement the diets of our winter birds with bird seed, peanuts and suet

cakes. It'll make life a little easier for our feathered friends in the winter months.

Here's a recipe for how to make your own **suet cakes**:

- This recipe makes 3 suet cake trays, 4 if you add the optional birdseed.
- First, you need to buy 3 - 4 of the commercially produced cakes. Save the square shallow plastic trays after the birds have polished off the nutritious treats. You also need a wire cage that holds the cake trays.

Ingredients:

- 1 packet of lard
- 1 bag of corn meal (750g)
- 3 - 4 tbsp peanut butter
- 1 cup sunflower, or other bird seed, of your choice (optional)

Instructions:

- Melt the lard and the peanut butter in a pot on the stove - the microwave oven also works well
 - Mix the corn meal (and bird seed) with the melted lard
 - Scoop the mixture into the cake trays and let cool and harden.
 - I like to wrap the trays in cling wrap so they can be stacked
 - Store in a cool place, protected from thieving mice, until you serve them to the hungry birds.
- A few extra cakes make a very nice Christmas gift for your birding friends!



A Jumble of Multi-flora Rose Berries

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BIRDS

Birds Canada

Attached is a chart outlining eastern birds in their winter plumage.

Join Project FeederWatch.



Watch A Picky Jay and a Piggy Jay

Early in this video from the Ontario FeederWatch cam, a choosy Blue Jay tries out several whole peanuts before deciding on one to abscond with. A minute later, we see a totally different tactic as a jay overstuffs its already-bulging throat with peanut pieces. It's a lively, snowy late fall morning in Ontario.

Go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXq_10YvPVs&utm_source=Cornell+Lab+eNews&utm_campaign=758da40403-Cornell-Lab-eNews-November-2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_47588b5758-758da40403-325249228

Species in Focus

Northern Saw-whet Owl

- A tiny owl with a catlike face, oversized head, and bright yellow eyes.
- These owls eat deer mice and other small rodents — up to two a night which is a lot for a bird 18-21 cm (7-8") tall.
- They breed in forests across southern Canada and the northern and western United States, extending through central Mexico. They prefer mature forest with an open understory for foraging, deciduous trees for nesting, dense conifers for roosting, and riverside habitat nearby.



Can You Hear the Difference Between These Saw-whet Owl Calls?

At this time of year, many move southward, making a large concentration especially in the region of the Great Lakes.

To hear their different calls, go to: https://www.audubon.org/news/can-you-hear-difference-between-these-saw-whet-owl-calls?ms=digital-eng-email-ea-x-engagement_20191103_20191103-owl-calls_%5baudience%5d&utm_source=ea&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=engagement_20191103_20191103-owl-calls&utm_content=%5baudience%5d&emci=bd27e840-1d28-eb11-9fb4-00155d03affc&emdi=afbc682c-3d28-eb11-9fb4-00155d03affc&ceid=3938524

Winter Hiking Safety Tips

When temperatures dip and snow blankets the ground, it can feel like our own winter wonderland. But winter hiking brings its own set of challenges. Here are a few important ways you can stay safe while hiking this winter.

Plan ahead

- Check weather conditions before heading out and be prepared for them to change.
- Choose a route that is familiar to you. When trails are covered in snow, it can be harder to find your way. Be extra attentive in looking for trail blazes.
- Avoid hiking alone. Bring a friend or two for safety and fun.



Photo by Casey Horner

Plan for earlier, shorter days

- Choose a shorter distance than you would normally cover in summer conditions. Snow and ice will slow your hiking speed.
- Nightfall arrives earlier in winter months. Start early in the day and plan to be off the trail before dark.
- Pack a flashlight or headlamp, with fresh batteries.

Wear and pack layers

- Staying dry is key to staying warm in the winter and layers will help you do both.

- Start with a good base layer, add a mid-layer, and then a shell on top. Cover your head, neck and hands. Add or remove layers to minimize sweating.
- Don't overdress at the beginning. You should feel slightly chilly before you start as you'll warm up when you hike. Pack a puffy jacket you can pull out when you stop for a snack.
- Avoid wearing cotton since it holds moisture. Opt for synthetics or wool. This goes for socks too.



Photo by Kelly Sikkema

Keep your footing with boots, icers & poles

- Wear sturdy, waterproof footwear with a good tread and use extra caution in icy conditions.
- Icers, or similar removable footwear traction devices, can help secure your footing and make it easier to walk and to balance on challenging terrain.
- Hiking poles can help with stability on ice and snow by acting like extra limbs. When not using hiking poles, carry them horizontally with the points facing forward.

Fuel your body and stay hydrated

- Hiking in the cold burns more calories, so bring extra snacks and drinks. Calorie-dense foods such as nuts and chocolate are great.
- Dehydration can be a common problem in winter. It's tempting not to drink as much when you're cold and it's not as easy to notice how much you are sweating. Make sure to bring and drink plenty of water.

Information from Bruce Trail Conservancy

Kayaking Down Big Creek

Contrary to popular belief, flatwater kayaking can be as interesting as white-water kayaking. This is especially true on Big Creek in Southern Ontario's Norfolk County. Big Creek is rightly called the Canadian Amazon as it winds its way through thick forest, while presenting paddlers with a natural obstacle course of fallen trees. Practice your limbo skills before you kayak on Big Creek, because this is a recreational kayak adventure like nothing else.

To see the video, go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/GoPaddle/videos/910304686166995>



Photo by Ontario's Southwest

Thank You!

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

Be One with the Leaf

By Thich Nhat Hanh
(Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist
monk, peace activist)

I asked the leaf whether it was frightened because it was autumn and the other leaves were falling. The leaf told me, "No. During the whole spring and summer I was completely alive. I worked hard to help nourish the tree, and now much of me is in the tree. I am not limited by this form. I am also the whole tree, and when I go back to the soil, I will continue to nourish the tree. So, I don't worry at all. As I leave this branch and float to the ground, I will wave to the tree and tell her, 'I will see you again very soon'."

That day there was a wind blowing and, after a while, I saw the leaf leave the branch and float down to the soil, dancing joyfully, because as it floated it saw itself already there in the tree. It was so happy. I bowed my head, knowing that I have a lot to learn from the leaf.



Photo by Jan Grincevicius

Eastern Foxsnake

Info from NCC

The Eastern Foxsnake is a provincial and national species at risk whose status was elevated from threatened to endangered in April 2008. This status change came after the recognition of the increased threats due to habitat loss (development pressures) and mortality from road and boat traffic.

This species is also globally rare, existing only around the Great Lakes basin in southern Ontario, Michigan and Ohio. In fact, 70 percent of the entire species population is found in Ontario.

They are the second-largest snakes in Ontario and generally confined to shoreline areas around the Great Lakes.



Photo by Ryan Bolton

The two recognized sub-populations, Carolinian and Great Lakes/St. Lawrence, face other similar challenges to species survival, including illegal wildlife trade.

The Great Lakes/St. Lawrence population is known for its amazing long-distance swimmers, especially in Georgian Bay. This population is therefore also at risk of being killed by boats whose drivers don't see these smooth swimmers in the water.

The Carolinian population, on the other hand, faces higher road mortality threats as a result of the higher road densities in Ontario's far south, where the snakes like to bask and absorb the radiant heat from pavement. Eastern foxsnakes' colouring makes them hard to see on the road and they may go unnoticed or be mistaken for fallen tree limbs by even the most diligent of drivers.

The eastern foxsnake is non-venomous but its defensive strategy of vibrating its tail in leaves to simulate the sound of a rattlesnake is so successful that many people mistake it for the venomous eastern massasauga and kill it in fear.

These snakes grow up to one metre long. These snakes actively hunt for prey and are constrictors, squeezing their prey to death. Young eastern foxsnakes will eat frogs and insects, but rodents and bird eggs are the preferred choice for adults.

Females reach maturity around five years of age and only breed every two years. Females lay eggs in rotting logs in late summer and one to two months later the young emerge. When temperatures drop in the fall, eastern foxsnakes find local, communal overwintering sites called hibernacula where they remain until spring.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

The Board of Directors haven't met since August. It was decided that any issues possibly arising would be dealt with by email exchange and/or phone calls.

In the meantime, The AGM went off without a hitch, in a different format than usual. As you remember, NFN members were asked to send in proxy votes, which then were presented by four members in good standing at the meeting. The AGM was hosted by Anita and Steve Buehner at their Bonnieheath Estate Winery in one of their spacious outbuildings. Present were most of the Directors and four members not on the Board. Quorum was declared with well over 30 proxy votes received. The formalities were processed in due course, including the nominations for the 2020 - 2021 Board of Directors. You have the listings of the new Board of Directors in the Annual Report, which was sent to all earlier.

Later, it was decided to further cancel all events at least until the end of spring 2021. The Vittoria Community Centre has also been reserved as an emergency medical facility until then. Len has notified our guest speakers of this decision and has reserved them for future speaking engagements. We did two small experimental field outings this fall. You may remember the notice for Forest Bathing and the request to pre-register for these events. It worked out quite well. We had three participants the first day and four on the second. The outing became a combination of Forest Bathing and Nature Walk. We might consider this smaller format for some field outings later... Stay tuned!



On behalf of the NFN Board of Directors, I'd like to extend our warmest Christmas Greetings to all NFN Members and Best Wishes for 2021. May the New Year bring brighter times for all of us.



Merry Christmas! Card by Inga Hinnerichsen



BRIEFS

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

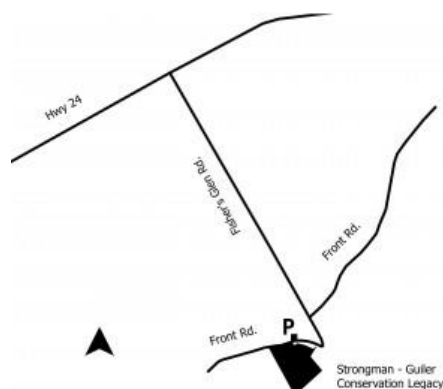
Upcoming NFN Events

All events are postponed until further notice.



The Strongman-Gulier Nature Reserve is a beautiful 52-acre site along Fisher's Creek. It includes Carolinian woodlands, deep ravines, 1400 feet of shoreline and impressive bluffs and beaches.

The different types of habitat found here link terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems along Fisher's Creek; and create a wildlife corridor from the shoreline to areas such as Spooky Hollow Nature Reserve, Fisher's Glen Conservation Area and Turkey Point Provincial Park. The reserve protects woodlands, red cedar savanna, cold-water fish habitat, coastal beaches and active sand bluffs, as well as habitat for species at risk and other flora and fauna.



NFN Meetings

Norfolk Field Naturalist meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from September to May.

Meetings take place at the **Vittoria Community Centre, 35 Oakes Blvd., Vittoria**. The meetings are free and visitors are always welcome. Doors open at 7:15 pm, programs begin at 7:30 pm.

POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

NFN Mailing Address

**Norfolk Field Naturalists
PO Box 995, Simcoe, ON
N3Y 5B3**

Next Lotus Issue:

February 2021

Input deadline:

Friday, January 22, 2020

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

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