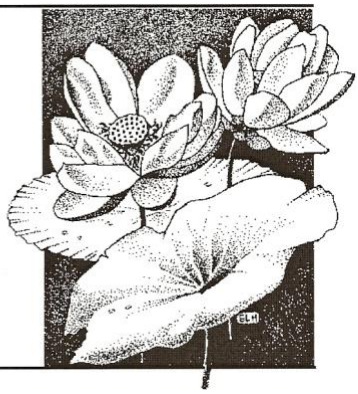
Lotus
NEWSLETTER
of the
NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



FEBRUARY 2022

Christmas Bird Count — Woodhouse
Report by Adam Timpf

These are the results of the 35th Woodhouse Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on Sunday, December 19th, 2021. The Woodhouse CBC is centred 7 km east of Simcoe, at the crossroads of Highway 3 and Cockshutt Road at Renton, and roughly covers from Port Dover to Waterford and just west of Simcoe to east of Jarvis. Conditions were pretty much ideal with temps just below freezing, little to no wind, clear skies, and a light dusting of snow on the ground. Thirty-one field birders covered the count area split between 17 groups, plus five feeder watchers.

We tallied 94 species on the day which ties last year's count as the third highest species total ever, and the highest since the record of 99 was set in 2006. There were three new species added to the count, with a long-staying Summer Tanager as the bird of the count. It was frequenting two suet feeders on the same street in Simcoe; a rare bird to see in Ontario, and even more exceptional for it to be around in winter. The two other new species added to the all-time list were probably somewhat overdue: a Greater White-fronted Goose at the park in the downtown Simcoe, and a Vesper Sparrow near Townsend. A Blue-winged Teal near Townsend is also a notable find as it's only the second one ever recorded during the Woodhouse CBC.

Summer Tanager (immature male) Photo by Josh Vandermeulen

All told we set new highs for 11 species, with waterfowl and woodpeckers being counted in higher-than-average numbers due to the warm start to winter and a beautiful count day. Ravens continue to expand into the area with a record setting 14 recorded. Even if some of these roaming corvids were double counted, there were surely more than the previous record high of three. Trumpeter Swans also saw a marked increase with 25 counted. This can likely be attributed to a growing breeding population near Waterford, and it will be interesting to see how their population grows.

Great Black-backed Gull was missed during the count day, although one was seen just before. Great-horned Owl was missed again which is hopefully due to bad luck and not a sign they are declining. The 3rd Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas which is underway now will help answer that question. Ruffed Grouse was also missed and that seems to be a tough bird to get on the count these days.

Lastly, I'd like to thank all the participants for their time and effort that they put into making this count a huge success each and every year. Each year is different and there are always interesting birds to be found! Next year's count is on Sunday, December 18th, 2022, and hopefully it will be as successful and enjoyable as this one.

Please see the full results below.

Total Species: 94
Average for the last 35 years: 85. Average for the last 10 years = 89.
Total Individuals: 15,093
Average over all 35 years: 25,079. (Average for the last 10 years = 20,224).

Cont'd. on p.2

New count highs:
25 Trumpeter Swan (9 in 2012, and 6 last year)
28 Northern Pintail (6 in 2009)
67 Hooded Merganser (41 in 2020)
26 Bald Eagle (17 in 2013)
19 Cooper's Hawk (18 in 2010)
6 Merlin (4 in 2014, 2020)
61 Red-bellied Woodpecker (ties high in 2017)
2 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (ties high in 2017)
27 Yellow-shafted Flicker (26 in 2020)
5 Pileated Woodpecker (ties high in 2010)
14 Common Raven (3 in 2019)
Low counts:
0 Great Black-backed Gull (first time missed in 35-year history)
0 Great-horned Owl (2nd year in a row with 0 recorded)

Hooded Mergansers **Photo by Len Grincevicius**

Common Loon	1	Rough-legged Hawk	3	Hermit Thrush	3
Horned Grebe	5	American Kestrel	16	American Robin	8
Double-crested Cormorant	1	Merlin	6	Northern Mockingbird	3
Great Blue Heron	3	Ring-necked Pheasant	1	European Starling	1989
Turkey Vulture	1	Wild Turkey	110	Cedar Waxwing	59
Mute Swan	3	Bonaparte's Gull	131	Myrtle Warbler	8
Trumpeter Swan	25	Ring-billed Gull	327	American Tree Sparrow	203
Tundra Swan	182	Herring Gull	48	Chipping Sparrow	3
Canada Goose	3949	Rock Pigeon	668	Field Sparrow	1
Cackling Goose	14	Mourning Dove	332	Fox Sparrow	1
Greater White-fronted Goose	1	Eastern Screech-Owl	6	Song Sparrow	37
Mallard	1002	Belted Kingfisher	7	Swamp Sparrow	29
American Black Duck	30	Red-bellied Woodpecker	61	White-throated Sparrow	41
Blue-winged Teal	1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2	White-crowned Sparrow	6
Gadwall	2	Downy Woodpecker	96	Vesper Sparrow	1
Northern Pintail	28	Hairy Woodpecker	22	Slate-colored Junco	819
Northern Shoveler	3	Yellow-shafted Flicker	27	Snow Bunting	2
American Green-winged Teal	1	Pileated Woodpecker	5	Northern Cardinal	146
Redhead	190	Northern Shrike	3	Summer Tanager	1
Ring-necked Duck	28	Blue Jay	490	Red-winged Blackbird	17
Greater Scaup	55	American Crow	674	Eastern Meadowlark	5
Lesser Scaup	450	Common Raven	14	Rusty Blackbird	2
Common Goldeneye	177	Horned Lark	4	Common Grackle	8
Bufflehead	79	Black-capped Chickadee	258	Brown-headed Cowbird	17
Hooded Merganser	67	Eastern Tufted Titmouse	1	Purple Finch	29
Common Merganser	81	Red-breasted Nuthatch	34	House Finch	174
Red-breasted Merganser	540	White-breasted Nuthatch	57	Common Redpoll	4
Merganser sp.	11	Brown Creeper	14	Pine Siskin	12
Bald Eagle	26	Carolina Wren	16	American Goldfinch	325
Northern Harrier	15	Winter Wren	6	House Sparrow	476
Sharp-shinned Hawk	9	Golden-crowned Kinglet	45		
Cooper's Hawk	19	Eastern Bluebird	69	**Total**	**94 Sp**
Red-tailed Hawk	112				

A Bug's Life: Undertakers of the Forest Floor

Article by Bernie Solymar (from 2000)

(Warning: Some parts of this story are not for the squeamish.)

Most folks don't give it a lot of thought, but what happens to small birds, herptiles and mammals when they die in the wild? The explanation can be found on the forest floor, away from where most would think to look. For when a mouse or a small forest bird dies there is one insect that has evolved to "sniff out" the little carcasses and put them to use in producing offspring.

Burying beetles (*Nicrophorus*), sometimes called carrion beetles, are large black beetles with orange stripes on their hindwings. Much like spider wasps, dung beetles and some other insects, burying beetles sequester a food source for their young before mating and egg laying. What makes the burying beetle different is that the male and female work in tandem. Highly sensitive receptors on the antennae of these insects allows them to detect the faint smells of decomposing carcasses. After locating a dead mouse, the beetle begins an amazing behavior - it pushes itself under the discovered carcass and digs out a hole underneath it. By turning upside down and using all six legs it positions the body just right in the hole. If the ground is to hard the beetle may actually transport the carcass from underneath for a distance of a metre or more!

Burying Beetle (female) **Photo from Wikipedia**

At some juncture the beetle will climb onto the carcass and stick its back end in the air to release a female attracting pheromone. The scent usually brings a female in short order, who immediately goes to work helping her new mate continue to dig out soil under their prize. Once deep enough the pair replace the soil, this time on top of the carcass, ensuring no other beetles or blowflies have access to the booty.

The beetles then excavate a chamber around the mouse and then trek over it, at the same time excreting a liquid which helps slow decomposition. The beetles mate and, before the female lays her eggs, she prepares a conical depression. Both beetles then regurgitate into the depression partly digested bits of mouse. This mess forms a liquid pablum for the larvae once they hatch. Some researchers have even observed the adult beetles sipping up the liquid elixir and feeding it to their larval offspring! To maintain the food source the doting parents also remove bits of fungi, continue to secrete anti-decomposition slime, and partake in the feast themselves once in a while. To aid them, most burying beetles carry around some symbiotic mites on their bodies. The bright orange mites have easy access to the fungi found on decomposing animals (which they specialize on) and the beetles have some minions to aid them in their parental chores.

Although you might find these descriptions gruesome (and I've enjoyed embellishing them for you), the underlying science is as fascinating as it is complex. The burying beetle is amazing and much advanced in its behavior over the majority of insect species: male and female work cooperatively to prepare and defend food for their offspring, the male hangs around after sex, and both sexes provide care to the young by direct feeding. Truly a unique insect, wouldn't you say? Hooray to the undertakers of the forest floor!

Burying Beetle Larvae
Photo from Wikipedia

Birders' Brains – What's Going on in There?

Article by Erik A. Wing

In 2020, an online bird study was conducted through the University of Toronto/Baycrest Hospital.

Naturalists of all kinds have an important role in advocating for biodiversity, conservation and increasing awareness about the natural world more broadly. Recent work also shows that the cognitive changes associated with acquiring this knowledge can also reveal important insights about brain function.

There is a long history of investigating the cognitive aspects of expertise across various domains, but much remains to be discovered about the neural processes that support acquiring and applying expert knowledge.

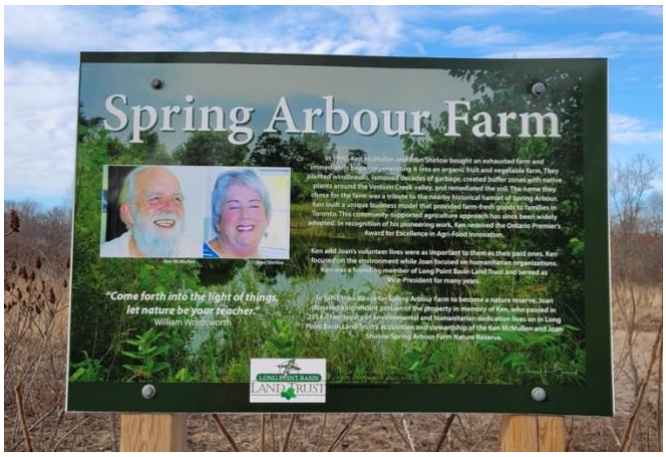
An article on the research program was published in the October 2021 issue of OFO News, published by Ontario Field Ornithologists, starting at page 12. Go here.

Erik A. Wing is a birder and postdoctoral research fellow in cognitive neuroscience at Baycrest's Rotman Research Institute in Toronto.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher **Photo from Wikipedia**

Spring Arbour Farm Nature Reserve

This property is a recent acquisition of the Long Point Basin Land Trust made through a donation of a significant portion of the property by Joan Shirlow in memory of her husband, Ken McMullen. Ken and Joan believed in the importance of environmental and humanitarian dedication. The reserve is located at 305 N/S Walsingham Townline Rd. in Norfolk County. There is a trail that goes partially around the pond.



"I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles."

~ Anne Frank

The Nature of Norfolk
Coltsfoot Challenges the Country Wine Maker

Article by Harry B. Barrett - May 7, 1975
(reprinted with permission)

Though the wind has had a sharp, biting edge this past week, sheltered places, particularly southerly slopes in my woodlot are responding, as I have ben to the sun's promise of new life around us. The leaves of the adder tongue are laying a mottled green and brown carpet of camouflage on the forest floor. Spring beauties already bloom in the lee of the maples. For a week the unstable, steeper clay slopes along the creek have been dotted with the deep, heart-warming yellow of coltsfoot.

Perhaps because it is among the first of our spring flowers to appear, coltsfoot, so named because the flower bud resembles a tiny horse's hoof, has always intrigued me. The thick, scaly flower stalks spring from creeping root stalks and are quite woolly, as if to protect themselves from early frosts and biting winds. It is not a native, but a highly successful immigrant from Eurasia and North Africa. The genus name, Tussilago, is derived from tussis, a cough, for which coltsfoot has long been a home remedy. The species name farfara is Latin for coltsfoot.

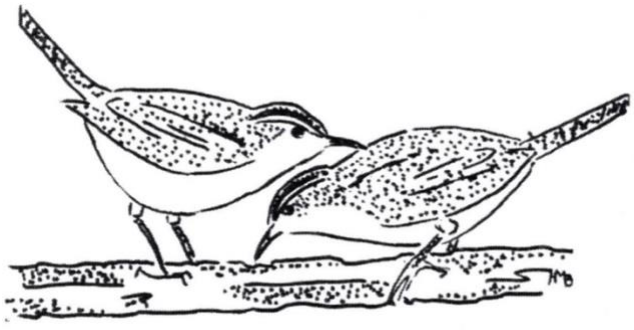
Coltsfoot **Photo by Len Grincevicius**

Coltsfoot stirs another chord in my nature for it is an early source for delectable, subtly flavoured country wine. Should you wish to try it, don old, warm clothes and boots that can withstand a bit of mud. For each gallon required of finished product, collect two quarts of coltsfoot flowers only, carefully avoiding any stem. Place these in a sterile stone crock and add a half pound of raisins, the pulp of one orange and one lemon.

In a boiler put one gallon of water, three pounds of sugar and the sliced rind of the orange and the lemon. Bring this to a brisk, rolling boil and quickly pour the whole boiling contents over the coltsfoot flowers. Cover. The old-country housewife would float a bit of bread yeast on a piece of toast on the crock's contents, once it is lukewarm. You can improve on this by adding a packet of dry, andovin wine yeast and allowing it to stand at room temperature under a cotton or plastic cover. Stir daily.

In four or five days strain the crock's contents into a clean, sterile container and put under fermentation lock. Once fermentation ceases the yeast has done its work and now lies dead in the bottom of your container. Rack off the contents and bottle. Store them in a cool cellar and forget them until cold November winds demand an applewood fire in the fireplace and a special wine to celebrate with an old friend that memorable occasion.

My early morning breakfast yesterday took on a new dimension when our pair of Carolina wrens appeared on the rail fence in the backyard. Every crack and cranny of the rails was systematically searched for new hatched insects, eggs or larvae. A large, buffy bird as wrens go, with a longish tail and light-coloured heavy eye-line that accentuates beady "miss nothing" eyes, they have been visitors to our feeder all winter. Though not a common bird in southern Ontario they appear to be increasing and are a most welcome addition to our avian fauna. If you wish a dawn call to rise, their strident notes will pierce the ear of the deepest sleeper.

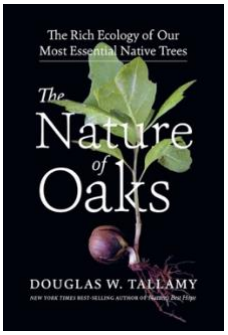


Drawing by Elizabeth Barrett-Milner

Some of My Recent Favourite Readings

by Peter Carson

In or around 2009 I discovered a new voice on the environmental stage. Douglas W. Tallamy, a professor at the University of Delaware in the Entomology and Wildlife Ecology Department published **Bringing Nature Home**. This book was of particular interest to Mary and me because it documents a process of returning nature to a degraded site by using native species of plants. Over several years, he converted a barren 10-acre subdivision lot into a functioning ecosystem. In 2019 Professor Tallamy followed up on his first book with a second, **Nature's Best Hope**. In this one, he suggested that if the homeowners of the USA were to plant 50% of their lawns into productive native plant communities that the collective total would be greater than the existing National Park system. He goes on to suggest naming the new park Homegrown National Park and lays out the "whys and hows" to accomplish this.



I have touched on these two proceeding books as an introduction to his third, **The Nature of Oaks** that was published in 2021. This latest book builds on the experiences and ideas of the first two by celebrating the importance of one of his successes. This particular success, and he makes the point that he could have focused on many others, is the white oak acorn that he planted the fall of 2000 when they moved into their new home. Many years later this acorn is now nearly 45 feet tall and 47 inches around at breast height. He divides the review of the yearly life of oaks in general and this one, in particular, by a monthly approach and focuses on the significant role that oaks play on the lives of so many other native species. As you might have guessed, birds are right up there and then the insects to feed birds and, of course, trees to feed insects and it goes on. What I particularly liked about this approach is the use of nature nuggets to weave the web of interconnectedness that makes up the wonder and strength of biodiversity.

Mary and I had the privilege of hearing Doug talk a number of years ago at Western University and suggest that if you ever get the chance to hear him, don't hesitate. He is a great speaker with a deep commitment to conservation. In the meantime, I recommend any or all of these books. They both educate and inspire.

Bringing Nature Home – How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants.
Nature's Best Hope – A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard.
The Nature of Oaks – The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees.
All published by Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.

Norfolk Naturalist Blog

Blog Written by NFN Member, Jeffrey Hiebert

This blog issues posts every two weeks or so and covers all sorts of topics. Jeff's blogs are accompanied by lots of photos he has taken. His travels to such places as Algonquin, and closer to home places such as Port Burwell, Big Creek and even his own backyard provide him with lots of various topics. He offers lots of information based on his observations of various species of insects, mammals, reptiles, plants, and fungi. He also posts reviews of nature books that interest him.

To visit Jeffrey's blog and subscribe to receive emails about new posts, go here.

About Jeffrey
Jeffrey an amateur naturalist who wants to learn and share about the amazing diversity of living things that inhabit this world with the rest of us. He has always been fascinated by nature's beauty and complexity and wishes to spread the appreciation and wonder of the natural world.

Ontario Nature BRIEFS

Great Backyard Bird Count

Are you looking for a fun nature activity this winter? Join bird watchers from around the world this February 18-21 for four days of observing and recording birds in your favourite nature spot. The Great Backyard Bird Count helps scientists better understand global bird populations and is a great way to familiarize yourself with the feathered friends that visit your neighbourhood.

To get involved go here.

Winter Issue of ON Nature Magazine is here.

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

Welcome New NFN Members

2021 - 2022 Season

Eugene Jankowski and Judith Pelley, Gary and Geraldine Livesey, Corinne McDonald, Mary McElhone, Kit O'Sullivan and Pamela White

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

Thank You!

From Norfolk Field Naturalists to

Will & Morgan Partridge

Guardian Computing

For hosting our website

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear NFN Members,

As the pandemic creeps on your Board of Directors have continued to meet. The first was an in-person meeting at the Simcoe Public Library on November 30th, and then by Zoom call on January 25th.

We decided last July we would continue with Zoom meetings for the Speaker Program for the foreseeable future, and depending on Provincial COVID guidelines, organize some in-person outings. In that vein Len has put together another interesting program. WE decided from this point on we would make the presentation available to the general public at no cost in order to entice new members to sign up.

Cindy and Bernie have continued to stay involved in discussions regarding developing a Natural Heritage Plan for Norfolk's Official Plan. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has shown some earlier leadership and hired Dougan and Associates to complete a comprehensive review and inventory if existing data and information on natural heritage features; identify criteria and methods for the I.D. and mapping of a Natural Heritage System; complete a draft Natural Heritage System map based on the recommendations and current data available; and complete a spatial gap analysis with recommendations on data needs.

Cindy has also been active in reviewing and providing comment to the revised Forestry Conservation Bylaw being developed by Norfolk County. The latest draft is an improvement over previous versions but there are still some areas of concern. Cindy has requested a deputation to Norfolk County councillors to bring those concerns to their attention.

Years ago, I created a Face Book site in dedication to Harry B. Barrett named *The Nature of Norfolk*, depicting photographs of animals, plants, and landscapes of Norfolk. Today the site has over 2,800 followers. As of December, the site is now the official Face Book site of the NFN. It's hoped we can draw significant new attention to our programming and to grow our membership with this partnership.

We continue to have discussions at our Board meetings on future directions for the organization, realizing that Covid-19 has resulted in both short-term and long-term ways in which we can reach out to and engage our local community. As these plans begin to formulate, we will keep the membership updated.

Hoping everyone is staying safe and healthy, and that you are enjoying this fabulous winter with lots of snow and sunshine.

Yours in nature, Bernie
Bernie Solymar, President, NFN

Upcoming NFN
2021 Winter Events

No events currently scheduled. Watch for pop-up events as permitted by COVID protocol.

AllTrails is a fitness and travel mobile app used in outdoor recreational activities. AllTrails is commonly used for outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking, climbing and snow sports. The service allows users to access a database of trail maps. Search over 200,000 **trails** with **trail** info, maps, detailed reviews, and photos curated by millions of hikers, campers, and nature lovers like you.
For more information, go here.
Download the app to your smart phone.

Hummingbirds can smell their way out of danger
In less time than it takes to read this sentence, hummingbirds can catch a whiff of potential trouble. That's the result of new UC Riverside research showing, contrary to popular belief, the tiny birds do have an active sense of smell.
UCR scientists have now shown for the first time that not only can hummingbirds smell insects, but also that scent may help them stay out of danger while looking for nectar to eat.
To read the whole article, go here.

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:

April 2022
Input dead line:
Friday, March 25, 2022

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

2021 - 2022 NFN Executive with Contact and Project Information
Email: info@norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

President	Bernie Solymár
Vice-President	Peter Carson
Sanctuary	Peter Carson
Past President	Inga Hinnerichsen
Treasurer	Peter Vaughan
Secretary (Interim)	Inga Hinnerichsen
Director/Membership	Jan Grincevicius
Director Speaker Program and Field Events	Len Grincevicius
Director Publicity	vacant
Director Environment	Cindy Presant
Director-at-large	Judy Boone
Director-at-large	Bernd Mueller
Director-at-large	Madaline Wilson
Lotus Editor (appointed)	Jan Grincevicius
Website Coordinator (appointed)	Lisa Timpf
Butterfly Count (appointed)	Adam Timpf
Christmas Bird Counts (appointed)	Adam Timpf - Woodhouse Count Linda Thrower - Fisherville Count
Honorary President	George Pond
Honorary Directors	Anne and Dolf Wynia