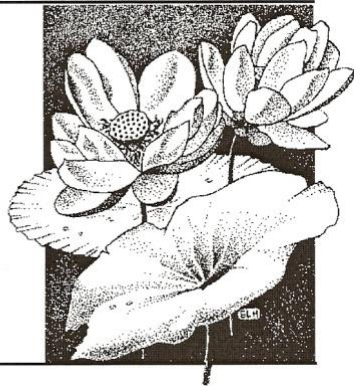


Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



FEBRUARY 2025



Christmas Bird Count — Woodhouse Report by Adam Timpf

These are the results of the 38th Woodhouse Christmas Bird Count held on Sunday, December 15th, 2024. The Woodhouse CBC is centred seven kilometres 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. Thirty-seven field birders covered the count area plus 11 feeder watchers.

Conditions were comfortable to start the day with temperatures above 0, light southeast winds (11-16 km/h), zero snow on the ground, and plenty of open water with little ice cover. Some light rain after lunch made for a quiet afternoon, but didn't affect the count to a huge degree. The mild temperatures leading up to the count meant waterfowl diversity and numbers were high, but we could have used some snow cover to bring more sparrows to the roadsides and feeders.



Bonaparte's Gull Photo by Member Charles Mitchell

The day resulted in an incredible 10 record high counts. Hardy insect eating birds are benefiting from our

warming climate with wrens and kinglets being found in higher numbers than usual this year. Between the inaugural count in 1987 and 2004, Carolina Wren was never recorded in double digits. Numbers began to rise modestly, and now the counts for the last few years are 35, 16, 24, 26, and the new high this year of 46. This is just one interesting example of the power of doing these yearly counts and building a long-term data set alongside all the other Christmas Bird Counts done across North America and beyond.

We tallied 88 species on the day, one more than the average of the last 10 years, and above the 38-year average of 83. No new species were added to the all-time count list, and I'm not aware of any additional count week species. A single White-winged Scoter is the first one since 1990, which sounds long overdue for a count on Lake Erie.

Total Individuals: 22,105 (top 3 species were Canada Goose, Mallard, and Greater Scaup)
Average over all 38 years = 24,688
Average for the last 10 years = 18,700

New Count Highs:

5 Wood Duck (3 several times)
49 Ruddy Duck (40 in 2023)
9 Merlin (6 in 2021) Even if a few wandering birds were double counted, this species does seem to be increasing)
5 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (2 several times)
6 Pileated Woodpecker (5 in 2021)
46 Carolina Wren (25 in 2020)
16 Winter Wren (12 in 2019)
157 Golden-crowned Kinglet (79 in 2008)
3 Ruby-crowned Kinglet (ties high from 2006)
7 Hermit Thrush (4 in 2005)

Cont'd. p.2



Horned Lark

Photo by Sue Drotos

Other Notable Finds:

- 1 Double-crested Cormorant (infrequent)
- 1 Snow Goose (1st since 2015)
- 1 American Wigeon (2nd time in last 10 years)
- 2 Canvasback (2nd time in last 10 years)
- 1 White-winged Scoter (1st since 1990)
- 1 Red-shouldered Hawk (1st since 2016)
- 1 Gray Catbird (2nd time in last 10 years)

Lowlights and Misses:

- 0 Northern Shrike (missed for 2nd time in last 10 years)
- 1 White-crowned Sparrow is unusually low
- 0 Red-winged Blackbird (missed for 2nd time in last 10 years)

Below is the full species list:

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|------|--------------------------|-----|------------------------|--------------|
| Horned Grebe | 11 | Cooper's Hawk | 8 | Brown Creeper | 24 |
| Double-crested Cormorant | 1 | Red-shouldered Hawk | 1 | Carolina Wren | 46 |
| Great Blue Heron | 10 | Red-tailed Hawk | 67 | Winter Wren | 16 |
| Mute Swan | 3 | Rough-legged Hawk | 3 | Golden-crowned Kinglet | 157 |
| Trumpeter Swan | 8 | American Kestrel | 13 | Ruby-crowned Kinglet | 3 |
| Tundra Swan | 50 | Merlin | 9 | Eastern Bluebird | 19 |
| Canada Goose | 7095 | Wild Turkey | 36 | Hermit Thrush | 7 |
| Cackling Goose | 17 | Bonaparte's Gull | 153 | American Robin | 12 |
| Snow Goose | 1 | Ring-billed Gull | 541 | Gray Catbird | 1 |
| Wood Duck | 5 | Herring Gull | 99 | Northern Mockingbird | 1 |
| Mallard | 1415 | Great Black-backed Gull | 4 | European Starling | 681 |
| American Black Duck | 141 | Rock Pigeon | 376 | Cedar Waxwing | 6 |
| Gadwall | 32 | Mourning Dove | 735 | American Tree Sparrow | 446 |
| American Wigeon | 1 | Eastern Screech-Owl | 6 | Field Sparrow | 2 |
| American Green-winged Teal | 7 | Great Horned Owl | 1 | Song Sparrow | 32 |
| Canvasback | 2 | Belted Kingfisher | 6 | Swamp Sparrow | 36 |
| Redhead | 1581 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 4 | White-throated Sparrow | 62 |
| Red-necked Duck | 18 | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 5 | White-crowned Sparrow | 1 |
| Greater Scaup | 1714 | Downy Woodpecker | 85 | Slate-colored Junco | 1649 |
| Lesser Scaup | 882 | Hairy Woodpecker | 23 | Northern Cardinal | 241 |
| White-winged Scoter | 1 | Yellow-shafted Flicker | 15 | Rusty Blackbird | 1 |
| Common Goldeneye | 152 | Pileated Woodpecker | 6 | Common Grackle | 2 |
| Bufflehead | 199 | Blue Jay | 448 | Brown-headed Cowbird | 47 |
| Hooded Merganser | 49 | American Crow | 529 | Purple Finch | 4 |
| Common Merganser | 283 | Common Raven | 8 | House Finch | 86 |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 458 | Horned Lark | 2 | Pine Siskin | 2 |
| Ruddy Duck | 49 | Black-capped Chickadee | 502 | American Goldfinch | 185 |
| Bald Eagle | 12 | Eastern Tufted Titmouse | 4 | House Sparrow | 275 |
| Northern Harrier | 10 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 5 | | |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 2 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 114 | Total | 88 Sp |

Christmas Bird Count — Fisherville

Report by the Haldimand Bird Observatory (Sarah Sharp)

The 24th Fisherville Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 28th, 2024. Every year there are fluctuating high counts and low counts with a varying species composition, and this year was no different! Last year the Haldimand Bird Observatory took over the coordination and compilation of the count and we were happy to do so again this year! Without further ado, here is a summary of this year's count...

Participants:

First and foremost a big thank you to our dedicated returning and new volunteers who collected this valuable data!

| | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Cody Bassindale | Diane Salter |
| Duane Brown | Greg Salter |
| Audrey Heagy | Bill Smith |
| Anne Marie Henry | Tom Thomas |
| Elizabeth Kirchin | Adam Timpf |
| Micheal Kirchin | Matthew Timpf |
| Dave Maida | Jacob Wever |
| Hugh McArthur | Julia Wever |
| George Uimonen | Randy Wilson |

Setting the Scene:

Our participants spent a total of 55.7 hours counting birds in the field, with a whopping total of 600.7km travelled. There was a total of four hours of owling done, and no feeder-watching. Similar to last year, the weather was mild and wet, ranging from 2°C to 12°C, with intermittent drizzle and fog throughout the day. The wind was Southwesterly (11-21km/h), which brought in a warm and moist air mass from the gulf that resulted in the mild temperatures.



Northern Shrike

Photo by Sarah Sharp



Lesser Scaup

Photo by Sarah Sharp

Onto the Birds:

- There were 14 duck species observed this year, of note was 2 American Wigeons, the first of this species observed since 2019, and 1 Northern Pintail, the first since 2021.
- There was the highest ever count of Lesser Scaup, with 426 individuals tallied.
- Wild Turkeys were down, with the lowest count (10) since 1999.
- Horned Grebe numbers were also down, potentially due to low visibility on the lake, with 5 counted, the lowest count since 2016.
- Typically, the only shorebird to stick around, there were 2 Killdeer sighted this year, the highest total since 2012.
- There was a total of 15 owls counted: 9 Eastern Screech-owls, 5 Great Horned Owls and 1 Long-eared Owl, with a notable absence of Short-eared Owl.
- This year held the second highest total (8) for Common Raven, the highest count at 11.
- 3 Winter Wrens were seen this year, only the 9th time they have occurred on the count.
- There was 1 Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler seen this year, only the 5th time this species has been found on the count!
- Finally, there was the lowest count ever of House Sparrows at 254... good news?

Participation:

We are needing some new participants! For interest in participation next year please contact through email at fisherville.birdcount@gmail.com or through our Instagram @haldimandbirds. Thank you!

Cont'd. on p.4

Overall, participants counted 12,873 individual birds of 75 species! Well done everyone!

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------|-------------------------|-----|------------------------|--------------|
| Canada Goose | 3478 | Great Black-backed Gull | 1 | Brown Creeper | 7 |
| Tundra Swan | 13 | Great Blue Heron | 3 | Carolina Wren | 9 |
| Gadwall | 14 | Northern Harrier | 45 | Winter Wren | 3 |
| American Wigeon | 2 | Sharp-shinned Hawk | 2 | Golden-crowned Kinglet | 36 |
| Mallard | 933 | Cooper's Hawk | 2 | European Starling | 2424 |
| American Black Duck | 100 | Bald Eagle | 11 | Northern Mockingbird | 2 |
| Northern Pintail | 1 | Red-tailed Hawk | 58 | Eastern Bluebird | 25 |
| Redhead | 1035 | Rough-legged Hawk | 10 | Hermit Thrush | 1 |
| Red-necked Duck | 2 | Eastern Screech-Owl | 9 | American Robin | 7 |
| Greater Scaup | 1147 | Long-eared Owl | 1 | Cedar Waxwing | 5 |
| Lesser Scaup | 426 | Great-horned Owl | 5 | Yellow-rumped Warbler | 1 |
| Bufflehead | 264 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 32 | House Sparrow | 254 |
| Common Goldeneye | 206 | Downy Woodpecker | 21 | House Finch | 102 |
| Common Merganser | 149 | Hairy Woodpecker | 7 | American Goldfinch | 70 |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 152 | Northern Flicker | 1 | Snow Bunting | 8 |
| Hooded Merganser | 4 | American Kestrel | 31 | American Tree Sparrow | 163 |
| Double-crested Cormorant | 1 | Blue Jay | 159 | Slate-colored Junco | 173 |
| Wild Turkey | 10 | American Crow | 116 | White-crowned Sparrow | 1 |
| Horned Grebe | 5 | Common Raven | 8 | White-throated Sparrow | 17 |
| Rock Pigeon | 214 | Northern Shrike | 2 | Song Sparrow | 12 |
| Mourning Dove | 342 | Black-capped Chickadee | 120 | Swamp Sparrow | 4 |
| Killdeer | 2 | Tufted Titmouse | 4 | Common Grackle | 1 |
| Bonaparte's Gull | 69 | Horned Lark | 29 | Red-winged Blackbird | 8 |
| Ring-billed Gull | 124 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 4 | Brown-headed Cowbird | 18 |
| Herring Gull | 45 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 30 | Northern Cardinal | 73 |
| | | | | Total | 75 Sp |

We Could Do Worse

by Member Lisa Timpf (Website: <https://lisatimpf.blogspot.com>)

Trees must laugh
to see the way we humans measure
a child's growth, inch by inch,
the lines on the door frame
painstakingly marked and dated.

Trees measure their growth
in larger units. The catalpa we planted
three years ago has shot up
far above my own height, now.

Trees may not say much,
but they know, better than us,
their role in nature's grand scheme,
the steps in life's great dance.

A dead maple snag
at the back of our property
harbors the homes
of who-knows-how-many residents

and in the forest, one tree grows
nourished by the rotting remains
of another. Trees understand
that decay is not death but new life,

and that one generation gives way to the next.
We could do worse than striving
to be more like trees, to root ourselves
in the Earth, and savour its goodness.

Christmas Bird Count — Long Point Report by Stu Mackenzie

A summary of the 64th Long Point Christmas Bird Count is up on the Long Point Bird Observatory Sightings Board [here](#).



Sandhill Cranes Photo by Member Larry Monczka



Trumpeter Swan
Photo by Member
Jan Grincevicius

A very special thank you to all the participants, volunteers, and landowners and caretakers that allowed access to their properties for the count.

For count participants, preliminary results by area can be found [here](#).

Blood, Sweat and Bark – the Extraordinary Efforts of Enthusiasts and Academics to Recover the American Chestnut

by Mack Metcalfe

We can't seem to let go of the American chestnut. Of all the trees to have disappeared since the Columbia Exchange, this one has maintained its grip on the human psyche, even now, a century after its reign. And yes, *reign* is the appropriate term.

Read the rest of the article [here](#).



Credit: Zoya Akulova-Barlow

Fast Facts about Owls

Owls don't have eyeballs. They're more like eye tubes. They're elongated and held in place by body structures in the skull called sclerotic rings.

Owls can't roll their eyes. Their eyes are fixed in place. That's where their heightened neck mobility comes in.

Owls have binocular vision. Like humans, they can see an object with both eyes at the same time.

Owls can't see objects up close. To make up for this, they have filoplumes — small hair-like feathers on their beaks and feet — to feel out their food when hunting.

Owls have three eyelids. One is for blinking, one for sleeping, and another for keeping their eye "tubes" clean.

Owls have 14 vertebrae in their necks. That is double the number for the average bird.

Owls can't turn their necks 360°. The accurate measure is 135° in either direction from facing forward, which is 270 total degrees of movement.

A group of owls is called a congress or a parliament or, less commonly, a stare.

Compiled from 15 Amazing Owl Facts at treehugger.com

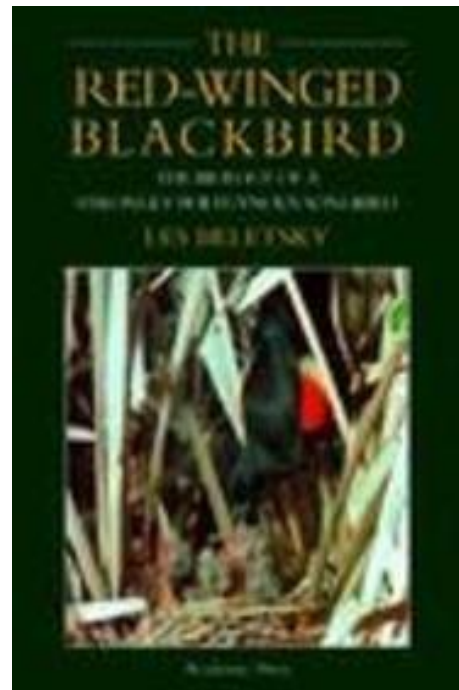


One of My Recent Favourite Readings

by Member, Jeff Hiebert

The Red-winged Blackbird: The Biology of a Strongly Polygynous Songbird, by Les Beletsky

An excellent overview of the biology of a much studied and common bird. The book focuses on Red-winged Blackbirds' breeding biology and the studies most focused on are for a particular population in Washington state which the author has studied for years. One of the interesting points the book puts across is that Red-winged blackbirds are common across the United States, southern Canada, and Mexico but they exhibit different behaviours in different populations/regions. This is sort of a rule across animal species, but it was interesting to see it demonstrated and explored with this familiar bird. Lots of interesting discussions of how animal behaviour research is done and how we know so much about a species because we've studied them for so long but, as a consequence, we open up more frontiers of mystery to explore (the research questions never stop, they only split into more questions).



Species in Focus

The Red Fox

Yes, red foxes are wild in Ontario, and can be found in a variety of habitats, including forests, farms, and suburbs.

The red fox *Vulpes vulpes* is a small, dog-like mammal, with a sharp pointed face and ears, an agile and lightly built body, a coat of lustrous long fur, and a large bushy tail. Male foxes are slightly larger than females. Sizes vary somewhat between individuals and geographic locations—those in the north tend to be bigger. Adult foxes weigh between 3.6 and 6.8 kg and range in length from 90 to 112 cm, of which about one-third is tail.

Although “red fox” is the accepted common name for the species, not all members of the species are actually red. There are several common colour variations, two or more of which may occur within a single litter. The basic, and most common, colour is red in a variety of shades, with a faint darker red line running along the back and forming a cross from shoulder to shoulder on the saddle. Individuals commonly exhibit some or all of the following markings: black paws, black behind the ears, a faint black muzzle, white or light undersides and throat, a white tail tip, and white stockings. Other common colours are brown and black.

Habitat and Habits

Red foxes dig dens in loose soil, often in abandoned dens of other mammals like groundhogs or skunks. Dens are usually located in dense brush, under fallen trees, or on the side of a hill.

Red foxes inhabit home ranges of 4 to 8 km² around den sites. Pairs of adult foxes may separate during the winter, especially if hunting is poor, but they come together again in the later winter or early spring for breeding and denning. From autumn until March of the next year, the foxes take shelter in thickets and heavy bush, even during the coldest winter weather.

Young males travel as far as 250 km from their place of birth. The average life span of wild foxes is five or six years in northern Ontario and about three years in southern Ontario. The red fox prefers mixed terrain and does well in farming country.

Feeding

Probably red foxes eat more small mammals—voles, mice, lemmings, squirrels, hares, rabbits—than any other food, although they supplement this with a wide variety of other foods, including plants.

Red foxes hunt by smell, sight and sound. They have excellent eyesight, and the slight movement of an ear may be all that they need to locate a hidden rabbit.

They have a keen sense of smell and acute hearing. They can smell nests of young rabbits or eggs hidden by long grass. Sometimes they wait patiently for the sound of a mouse moving along its path in grass or snow and then pounce. At other times, hearing movement underground, they dig quickly and locate the prey by its scent. They hunt mostly toward sunset, during the night, and in early morning.

Breeding

Dog foxes (males) and vixens (females) are usually, but not always, monogamous.

Foxes breed between late December (in warmer areas) and mid-March. After breeding, the foxes seek a suitable den.

Pups are born from March through May. Litter size may range from one to 10 pups, but the average is five. The young are blind at birth, their eyes opening during their second week. The vixen takes great care of the very young cubs before their eyes are open and at this stage usually keeps the dog fox from entering the den, although he will hunt for the family. After the cubs' eyes are open and they begin to crawl, the dog fox will relieve the vixen while she hunts.

At one month, the cubs are weaned. Both parents hunt for themselves and bring back small game for the cubs to play with. In this way, the cubs learn the smell of the prey and how to eat it. The cubs practise hunting under the eyes of the adults. When the young are able to feed themselves, usually at about three months of age, they leave the den site alone.



Red Fox Photo by Member, Larry Monczka

Haldimand Raptors in Winter Event

On January 11th, NFN member, Audrey Heagy, lead a driving tour for nine keen birders to look for raptors and other winter birds on the backroads of Haldimand County. We were hoping for Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, and other birds and maybe even a Snowy Owl. Here's what we saw, with the Short-eared Owl being the highlight for everyone.

Raptors — Bald Eagle (immature), Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk
American Kestrel and Short-eared Owl.

Water birds — Canada Goose, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser and Long-tailed Duck.

Gulls — Great Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull.

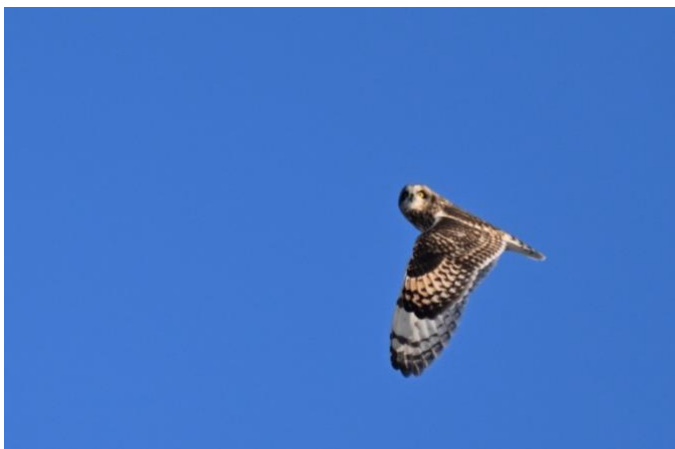
Others — Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow and Northern Cardinal.



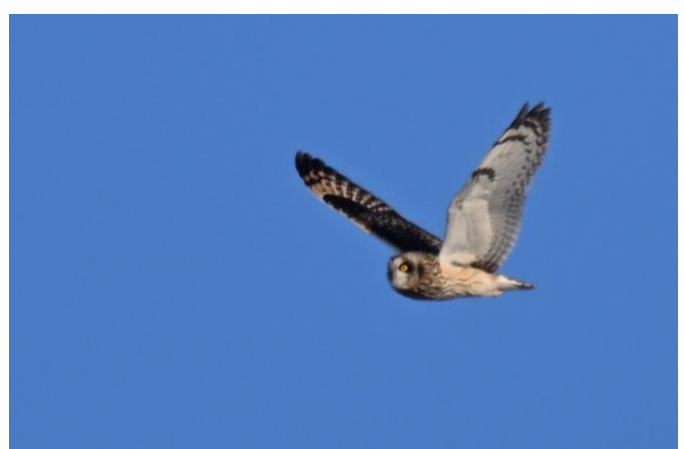
Northern Harrier Photo by Member Richard Szychta



Short-eared Owl Photo by Member Richard Szychta



Short-eared Owl Photo by Member Tracey Gardiner



Short-eared Owl Photo by Member Tracey Gardiner

The Winter issue of ON Nature is found [here](#).

Try out the newest [nature quiz](#) to test your birding skills!

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

Welcome New NFN Members

2024 - 2025 Season

Callum Gibson & Emma Buck, Sue Graci & Kaitlin Ellis, Vivian Fuller, Martin & Leah VanTil, Stephanie Wilson, Eli Winward, Paul Winward, Seth Winward

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

Thank You!

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

We are in the midst of unprecedented times as we experience a changing world all around us. The headlines these days are enough to give you high-level anxiety — invasions of sovereign countries by other countries under the guise of “war”, forced mass immigrations, ongoing biodiversity loss, accelerating climate change, Trump, AI. It becomes more and more important to find mental stress relief and what better place than natural spaces in Norfolk. Entering one of the trails of Backus Woods, watching a sunset over Big Creek Marsh, birding in Long Point, snowshoeing in the Back 40, the calls of Coyotes and Great Horned Owls at night, quietly sitting and observing the birds at your feeder, reflection and meditation in a quiet sunny glade in the woods. These are all ways to deal with the increasingly angry world around us. Make sure to experience and commune with nature on a daily basis — it's the best medicine for your mental health!

In our small way we hope to alleviate anxiety with a series of hikes and rambles in Norfolk's nature this year, along with workshops to help you better experience the outdoors. The first of those was held on January 11th as we birded for raptors next door in Haldimand. The thrill of seeing Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls was a great adrenaline rush! Next, we'll have a winter tree hike with NCC staff in Backus Woods on March 8th. The following Saturday, Mike Burrell will help us learn how to use the iNaturalist app so we can record species of flora and fauna we encounter in nature. Then, on March 22 Kevin Kavanagh of South Coast Gardens will teach us how to naturalize our properties for nature. Make sure you sign-up and join us for these educational events!

Your Board of Directors met on January 28th and approved a new policy on making financial donations to other charitable organizations. This will help us (board and membership) direct the funds remaining in the Frishette bequest that we received back in 2023. We'll make available soon.

The next BoD Meeting will be held on March 25, 2025. The report from this meeting will be in the April issue of the Lotus.

Upcoming NFN 2025 Winter and Spring Events

- Winter Tree Hike – March 8
- Learn to use iNaturalist Workshop – March 15
- Create a Garden that Benefits Nature Workshop – March 22
- Star Party – April 5
- Timberdoodles Walk – April 11



[Long Point Bird Observatory
Newsletter](#)

NATURE

"Trees are poems that the earth
writes upon the sky."
~ Kahlil Gibran

Tell a friend about us.

The benefits of membership,
membership forms and payment
options are available at
www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

We welcome new members. Don't
keep us a secret.

NFN Meetings

Norfolk Field Naturalist meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from September to April. Meetings take place at the **Simcoe Recreation Centre, 182 South Drive, Simcoe**. The meetings are free and visitors are always welcome. Doors open at 6:30 pm, programs begin at 7:00 pm.

NFN Mailing Address

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

Next Lotus Issue:

**April 2025
Input deadline:
Friday, March 21, 2025**

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

2024 - 2025 NFN Directors and Coordinators with Project Information

Email: info@norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

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