



The Woodland Observer

Nipissing Naturalists Club

November 2014



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Summer outing: Meet the Researchers in Algonquin Provincial Park

Every year dozens of research studies are conducted in Algonquin Provincial Park. Some of the research trains university students on the use of the scientific method. Students learn how to develop hypotheses from the various ideas (in everyday language we call these theories) and how to test and reject these hypotheses. Other research is conducted to provide long-term trends on various populations and ecological processes. There were a lot of students represented this year in Algonquin Provincial Park. Some were continuing work started by professors who started their research in Algonquin Park. For example, the longest Snapping Turtle study was started by Dr. Ron Brooks (U. of Guelph) whose work was then continued by Dr. Jackie Litzgus (Laurentian U) as she worked on her undergraduate degree and is now being continued by a host of graduate students. The photo shows an old male Snapping Turtle that was tagged by Dr. Ron Brooks about 40 years ago. Tagging allows us to calculate survival and movement of animals.

Periodically in the winter we may get an eruption of owls. This happens when there was an abundance of small mammals such as lemmings during the breeding season in the Arctic resulting in the high survival of owlets. A lack of food in the winter in their home range then results in the dispersal of the less robust individuals. The owls that move south are often in dire condition as they are searching for food in areas al-

ready occupied by predators. Owls that are unable to fend for themselves are sometimes captured and sent via the Ministry of Natural Resources to the Owl Foundation (see photo of Owl Foundation work). The Owl Foundation, located in Vineland is set up to care for the owls so that they can be (hopefully) nurtured back to health and released.



Following the opportunity to talk to various researchers we hiked the Two Rivers trail. The trail has a number of information posts that describes some of the dynamics of nature. Our intuitive belief that nature is static is a myth. Beaver ponds last about twenty five years, spruce budworms kill certain trees while enabling others to grow and become more abundant. Fire kills other trees again changing the structure and composition of a forest. Here is a question: how are wildlife population trends used incorrectly by various activist groups? Activist groups are known to select a start year when a particular species of interest they want to

Summer outing: Meet the Researchers in Algonquin Provincial Park continued...

highlight was high. For example several warbler species had high populations in the 1970's when spruce budworms were epidemic across Eastern N. America. By choosing the 1970s as the start some groups claim that certain forest dwelling birds are declining. Well-designed studies by Bird Studies Canada show that forest dwelling birds in Ontario are not declining but aerial insectivores, grassland and shore birds are declining.



On our way back we stopped to look at the "Algonquin by Night" art exhibition. Many well-known artists have their work for sale at the old park information centre. As we had some time we dropped by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources office in Bracebridge. Here, Biologist, Linda Dix-Gibson explained how she ages mammal teeth. Mammals in the northern hemisphere change their metabolic rates to deal with less food in the winter. This reduction in metabolic rate results in layers of dentine similar to the rings of a tree being laid down in the animals teeth. Question: do humans that live in northern Canada also put on distinctive layers of dentine? Answer at the end of this article.

The age from the teeth is used to develop a harvested age class structure of a species. For example, a frequency diagram showing the number of harvested bears in each class can be developed. This graph shows how many one year bears were harvested in 2013, how many two-year bears were harvested the same year, etc. The information is used as one indicator of the viability of bear populations in Ontario. Female bears are less likely to roam across large areas and are also critical in maintaining a self-replacing population. If the proportion of female bears harvested increases to over 30% of the total harvest it signals that that bear population may be in decline.

The many years of age class structure of harvested bears show that 2 years after a food (nuts, acorns and fruit) failure there is an abundance of young bears. These young bears then disperse and are likely to be wander through places where we live resulting in more calls about "nuisance bears". We have asked Linda Dix-Gibson to speak to our club later this year so that find out when there would be more young bears two years after a bear food failure.

Question: Do humans that live in northern Canada also put on distinctive layers of dentine? Answer: No, we evolved and lived for most of our history in the savannahs of Africa. Humans do not change their metabolic rates in the winter as we had access to similar food supplies all year round in the savannahs When we migrated out of Africa we used technology to ensure we had a similar access to food in every season.

Calendar of Events

Next General Meeting

Tuesday, November 11, 2014
Cassellholme Auditorium @ 7:00 pm

Upcoming Speakers

Date: November 11, 2014

Speaker: Fred Pinto

Topic: The people and ecology of the Khumbu Valley of Mount Everest

The speaker recently trekked through the Khumbu Valley, an area settled by Sherpa and Rai people for several centuries. This tough terrain today welcomes over 70,000 trekkers and mountain climbers annually from around the world. The influx of tourists has resulted in a new set of problems while improving the economic conditions of the local people. The large number of tourists and in the past refugees from Tibet have reduced natural vegetation cover as wood is used for fuel and building. Recent attempts to control unsustainable tree removal, browsing, hunting, removal of stones for building are having some success. The recent introduction of vegetable gardening by Sherpa and Rai has been very successful in reducing food imports.

Date: December 9, 2014

Speaker: Larry Dyke,

Larry Dyke is recently retired from the Geological Survey of Canada where much of his time was spent researching the implications of permafrost for arctic resource exploitation. Prior to that, he taught engineering geology and hydrogeology at Queens University.

Topic: The bedrock and glacial geology of the North Bay area.



We would like to give a special thanks to last month's speaker, Don Willis, Professional Forester and manager for Jiffy Products for sharing his personal story regarding Lyme disease.

Monthly Bird Bash — Saturday & Sunday
Spend some time observing our local birds and report on how many species of birds you see. Contact Dick Tafel for dates: rtafel@sympatico.ca or 705 472-7907.

Birdwing Meeting
Fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm.
Bird watching topics will be discussed. Meet at the library (auditorium). Contact Dick Tafel at 705 472-7907 or email rtafel@sympatico.ca

2014 Photo Contest

- Submit photos to nipnats@gmail.com
- Submit by November 30th
- Max 4 per member
- Photos taken within 80km (50 miles) of North Bay
- 4 Categories:
 - Flora
 - Fauna
 - Landscapes
 - People Enjoying Nature

Photos will be presented and voted on at the December meeting.




YOUR BEST SHOTS



Due North! A NipNat Road trip

By: Kelly Major

The Nipissing Naturalists club kicked off June with a trip North on Highway 11 to the Hilliardton Marsh (just past New Liskeard). Eight NipNats began their day with a visit to the Hilliardton Marsh Research & Education Centre where their volunteers led a tour of a bird netting site and demonstrated techniques in bird banding. Each



participant had the opportunity to hold a banded songbird (pine siskins and alder flycatchers) as well as listen to the purr of a hummingbird's heartbeat. It's not every day that the opportunity arises to have a hummingbird pressed against one's ear!



After the banding station, participants spent an hour walking through the marsh where American Bittern were a common

sight and the call of the Sora was a common sound. Trails were broad and dry and cut a swath through the marsh proving a great birding opportunity for wetland, waterfowl and wood warbler species.



Several bobolinks and a kingbird made appearances in the parking area.



On the drive home the group made stops in Cobalt and Temagami. In Cobalt, participants perused the broad selection of novelties at the North Cobalt Flea Market; deals were had by all. In Temagami, participants climbed the 100 foot fire tower at the top of Caribou Mountain. The sunny and clear weather permitted visibility of approximately 40 kilometres in all directions, including the town of Temagami situated some 400 feet below. Despite a valiant effort, the wind at the top of the tower failed to claim any NipNat hats. Participants returned to North Bay in the late afternoon.



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New Website Launched!

By: Kelly Major

After years of fine service, our good-ol' website at www.nipissing-naturalist.com has retired... perhaps for some bird watching on sunny Florida beaches. The Nipissing Naturalists Club's new virtual home was launched last month on a snowy October 31st. Powered by a modern web hosting service, this new webpage represents more than just a visual facelift:



What's New:

- **New Address** – We've change our URL to www.nipnats.com. This shorter URL should be catchy and more memorable; great for promotional materials.
- **Sleek Design** – Streamlined for easier navigation to essential information.
- **Current Information** – You will find up-to-date tables of club events and upcoming speakers.
- **Powerful Software** – User-friendly editing software that will empower our club's volunteer webmasters, both present and future.

Newsletters and Birdwing/Bird Bash materials will continue to be available for download. To help the transition, we'll have all traffic to the old URL redirected to the new site. Your feedback and suggestions are always welcomed at nip-nats@gmail.com. Thanks to everyone who helped in the site development and editing.

First Monarchs Arrive at Winter Grounds!

By: Fred Pinto

Estela Romero from Michoacán, México reported that the first Monarch butterflies from the north arrived their wintering grounds on October 30th.

At 6:35 pm three Monarchs were flying about in the core of El Cerrito Forest, likely preparing to rest for the night in the soft pines having just completed their long journey south. These adults will have to survive until the spring and then fly to Texas where they will hopefully breed starting a new generation that will fly to areas further north and east including central Ontario.

