

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

MAY 2017



NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB



From the editor:

The awakening of spring

Renee Levesque

For Earth Day on April 22, I attended a North Bay Symphony Orchestra concert. You may wonder what that would have to do with Earth Day, but two of the pieces played were composed with nature in mind. The first piece was entitled *Nipissing – Big Water* by the Canadian composer Richard Mascal. It begins on ancient Manitou Island and finishes with the plying of the waters of Lake Nipissing, all the while celebrating the heartbeat of Mother Earth. And the second piece was Gustav Mahler's *First Symphony*. Among other things, it is about the awakening of nature and a celebration of the passing hours of a day in a forest. Birdsong and the pulsing heat of the sun can be felt through the music. (I noticed some Nipissing Naturalists Club and Bird Wing members in the audience.)

The main feature in May's issue is Steve Pitt's article on panning for gold in the Klondike and is based on Steve's presentation at our April meeting. From his Yukon experience, Steve wrote a very entertaining young adult novel, *The Wail of the Wendigo*, that features two future well-known Canadians, the two Pierres, Pierre Trudeau and Pierre Berton. Steve generously donated half of his book sales that evening to Nipissing Naturalists Club. If anyone would like a copy, you can email Steve at spit@uniserve.com.

Our speaker for May is another club member, Peter Ferris, who will talk about his canoe trip on the historic Hayes River last summer. Adventure stories are always entertaining and with many members enjoying canoeing, this should prepare us for a summer adventure of our own.

Weather-wise, April was April – some warm spring days and some cool, wet and windy winterish days. As Mark Twain puts it, "In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six different kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours."

On April 27, North Bay was the hottest spot in ALL of Canada, reaching 27.8 C. The next day, the high was 6C. And for those who aren't aware, Lake Nipissing was ice-free as of April 21. The latest the lake was declared ice-free was on May 19 in 1926, and the earliest, April 4 in 1946. In more recent years, the latest was in 2014 when the lake wasn't ice-free until May 14, and the earliest in recent years, April 8 in 2010.

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The great thing about April's rain is that it brings May's delicate, short-lived spring flowers. There is a Chinese proverb that says spring is recognized sooner by its plants than by people. A collage of some of May and June's flowers can be seen in this issue

Also featured are three articles on those beautiful and colourful winged-creatures, butterflies. Mark Olivier, former North Bayite, now living in Sault Ste. Marie, and former Bird Wing participant, writes about eButterfly and early butterfly risers, butterflies you should be able to see now. And I wrote an article on our iconic Monarch, using some information that Fred Pinto sent me a few months back, information on milkweed fluff to make winter coats and new information on how Monarchs navigate. I mention this to also show you that whatever you might send me, photos or suggestions or even articles, I may not use immediately, but possibly will eventually.



Back in the fall, Brent Turcotte led a few of us on a lichen walk in the Balsam Creek area and in this issue, he revisits the terrain of that area.

Snapping Turtles, a species of *special concern*, also make this issue, as do Chimney Swifts, a *threatened species*. Later on in May, Nipissing Naturalists Club will have an outing to see these amazing birds. **Watch for details on the website, on Facebook and by email as to the date and time.** There will also be a May outing to Spring Hill Farms. Details of that outing are inside this issue.

The Laurier Woods Bird Walks begin the first Saturday in May, with a plant walk planned for the last Saturday of May, and a scavenger hunt planned for the first Saturday of June, a scavenger hunt that proved to be a popular event with the family last summer.

Nipissing Naturalists Club has two outings planned for June, a hike up Laurentian Mountain in Mattawa to see the three crosses and a camping cooking demonstration, using an open fire and a reflector oven, with board member Oriana Pokorny. Details of both these outings and the Laurier Woods walks are inside this issue.

Enjoy your May.

~ Renee Levesque, editor, rlevesque1948@gmail.com



A land that ‘beckons and beckons’

Text and photos by Steve Pitt

In the summer of 1981, I found myself hiking down a rolling range of Yukon mountains, lugging an 80-pound backpack and cursing my empty canteen. I was following my newly-acquired brother-in-law, Dal Fry, who claimed he knew where we were going. The landscape was beautiful but lacking any discernible trail or landmark. We had left our truck parked on the side of the road eight hours earlier. We had run out of water six hours ago, and it can get pretty warm in the Land of the Midnight Sun. Instead of travelling from east to west, the sun was circling overhead like a vulture. I looked longingly down from our summit into a nearby valley where I could see trees. Trees meant shade and very likely crystal clear streams full of ice cold running water.

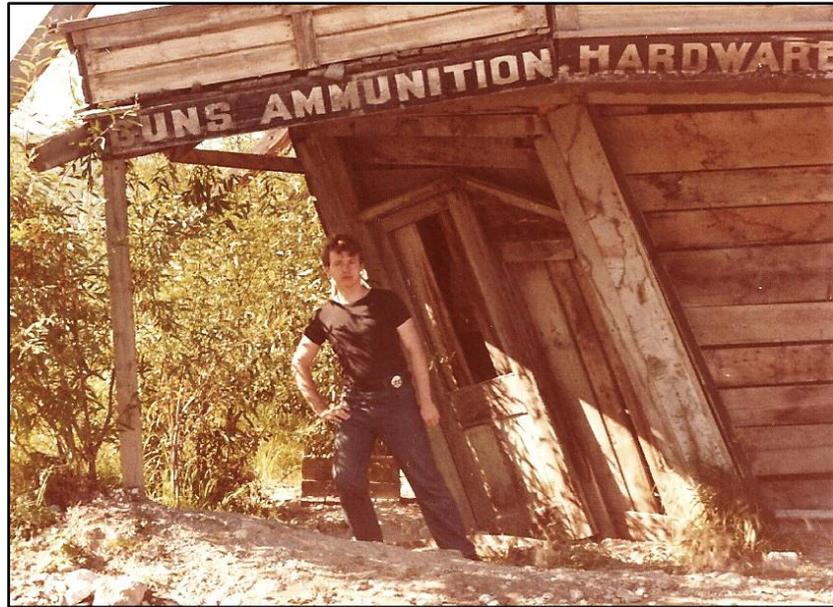
“We need to stick to the high ground,” Dal cautioned, following my glance down the hill. “It’s the shortest distance. Besides, nothing wrong with puddle water.”



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Six hours earlier I might have debated with Dal about the merits of drinking water scooped out of a ground depression shaped suspiciously like a moose hoof print, but now I was not so choosy. Just so you know, Yukon puddle water has a tangy moss nose, turpentine midtones and a funky cloven hoof finish. I cleansed my palate with a handful of delicious wild blueberries.

I was here on this mini-mountain because my sister had married Dal, a third generation Yukon gold prospector. I was a twenty-something city boy from Toronto. Until two weeks ago, my entire knowledge of the Yukon and gold prospecting was based on a 1950s-era Warner Brothers cartoon, *Bonanza Bunny*.



Steve in 1981

We were here to stake a claim in a tiny valley that hadn't likely heard a human voice since 1899. At least, not until 1980 when Dal and my sister, Kerry, spent a unique honeymoon panning for gold along the very same stream bed we were now trying to find. Their trip to this creek was positive. They found plenty of colours (gold flakes) in their gold pans, but Yukon streams have a way of sucking you in like a cold-blooded con artist. Many streams up here will happily give you tiny flecks of gold the size of dandruff every couple of pans. It takes several thousand similar flakes to make just an ounce of gold. Even at \$400 an ounce (the price of gold in 1981), that's a long week's work.



Our gold camp deep in the woods

We finally reached our camp six hours later, too tired to make a fire or even care that the tent that had been left behind from the year before had been renovated by at least one bear. The sky shone through huge tears in the ceiling and a gentle breeze flowed through the bear-sized rips on the opposing walls. "Nothing a couple of tarps and some duct tape can't fix," Dal said over the best meal of cold pork 'n' beans, canned spaghetti,

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white bread and tube margarine I've ever eaten.

I fell asleep thinking of the men who had travelled to this very same valley back in 1898. They had come from all corners of the world. Most hadn't any more gold mining experience than I had. It is estimated that 100,000 men made the journey from Skagway, Alaska, to the Yukon interior, a distance of more than 600 miles.

Instead of mere 80-pound packs, they were each required to bring in more than one ton of supplies – enough food to last a single person an entire year in the Yukon. Depending on how much each man could individually carry, he had to divide his supplies into 20 to 50 separate loads and pack each one forward, one stage at a time, up the treacherous Chilcoot Pass in mid-winter. From there, each man had to build a boat or raft to float 500 miles down the Yukon River. Most arrived in Dawson City too late. All the good claims were already taken.



Dawson City in 1981, population 1100

Many thousands went home with nothing but a wealth of stories to tell their friends and families. A hardy minority struck out into the wilderness in search of new gold fortunes. In the spring of 1899, prospectors began staking claims in this very valley. All around us we could see the remains of their tiny log cabins meant to shelter one or more gold seekers during the long, dark Yukon winter.

And then suddenly in September 1899, news of a new massive gold strike in Nome, Alaska, caused every man in the valley to abandon his Yukon claim and start all over again further north.

Growing up in Dawson City, my brother-in-law was raised on tales of promising finds in this particular creek. The stories were convincing enough to make Dal and my sister decide to cash in their bank accounts and spend the next two gold seasons trying to find what the '98s were looking for nearly a century earlier. Now it was our turn.





Looking for colour in a gold pan

The expression “staking a claim” originally meant exactly that. You marked a claim by driving down stakes. But first you needed a starting point that could not be moved, called the “head post”. This was usually a conveniently sized small tree that was cut off at about chest level. On the stump, bark was scraped off to carve or write with an indelible marker your name, the date you staked the claim and the direction the claim ran.

From the head post, you then had to clear-cut a narrow corridor through the woods and put down more stakes to run the entire length of the claim. In modern times, bright orange “flagging” is used to help mark the stakes. The head post marks the centre of the claim. From there, the stakes run 1,000 feet in opposite directions from the post. The best land for finding gold is usually at the bottom of a creek bed, so prospectors try to run along the creek bed as much as possible. Streams in the Yukon tend to meander like writhing snakes. While this is good for finding gold (gold tends to collect in pockets on sharp river bends), it makes for challenging staking as you find yourself crossing the same stream over and over again. In the space of our 2,000 feet of claim, we crossed our little creek 43 times.

To measure the distance from the head post, we used a device that resembles a fishing reel combined with a pedometer. This reel made of strong twine is attached to someone’s belt. You tie one end of the twine to the head post and as you walk, a little dial on the spool records how far you have gone. We put down a stake every hundred feet, so at least two stakes with flagging were easily visible to anyone who happened to cross our trail. Compared to the hike to the camp, the trail clearing and staking was pleasant work, except for the one time when we accidentally pounded a stake into a ground hornet’s nest. According to the twine spool, the hornets stopped chasing us after 382 feet!

Once we had staked the claim, our next job was to take soil samples from the stream bed using a portable drill that had been delivered by helicopter the week before. The drill sat on a couple of homemade steel sled skids. We used a winch at the front of the skid to drag the rig forward over

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the rough valley terrain. The hard part was crossing that meandering stream 43 times again, this time dragging a one-ton drill. Some days we barely dug three holes in 14 hours. Other days, we collected eight samples or more. It was hot, exhausting, noisy work, but still much easier than the old days where they did the same work with a pick and a shovel.

After two weeks, just as our food and drill fuel were nearly exhausted, we were finished. We now had 40 small canvas bags of dirt samples neatly stacked for the helicopter to take back to Dawson. Although Dal and I had to walk out to get back to Dal's truck, this time the thought of hot showers and cold beer made the journey light work. After constantly working next to two roaring compressors and a straining drill, the silence was almost eerie as we charged our way up the mountain with our near-empty backpacks.

Alas, all that work was for nought. Our dirt samples proved that although there was indeed gold in the valley, it was not there in high enough concentrations to make it worth digging out – at least, not yet. The price of gold today is nearly \$1300 an ounce.

Instead of a gold miner, I became a writer and nearly three and a half decades later, I recycled my Yukon experience into a book. It's part of a series of books that teaches young readers about famous Canadian Prime Ministers by dropping them into a Hardy Boys-style mystery. My book, *The Wail of the Wendigo*, features two future famous Canadians, Pierre Elliot Trudeau and Pierre Berton, who are dropped into a northern gold claim very like the one I had worked on.

Working on the novel dredged up fond memories of that isolated little stream. My memories of the heat, thirst, dirt and noise have long since faded, but images of the beauty and splendid isolation of the valley remain. The Yukon had staked a claim on me as much as I had on it. Robert Service said it best in his poem, "The Spell of the Yukon", from his book of poetry, *Songs of a Sourdough*:

There are hardships that nobody reckons;
There are valleys unpeopled and still;
There's a land—oh, it beckons and beckons,
And I want to go back—and I will.



Our portable rotary drill

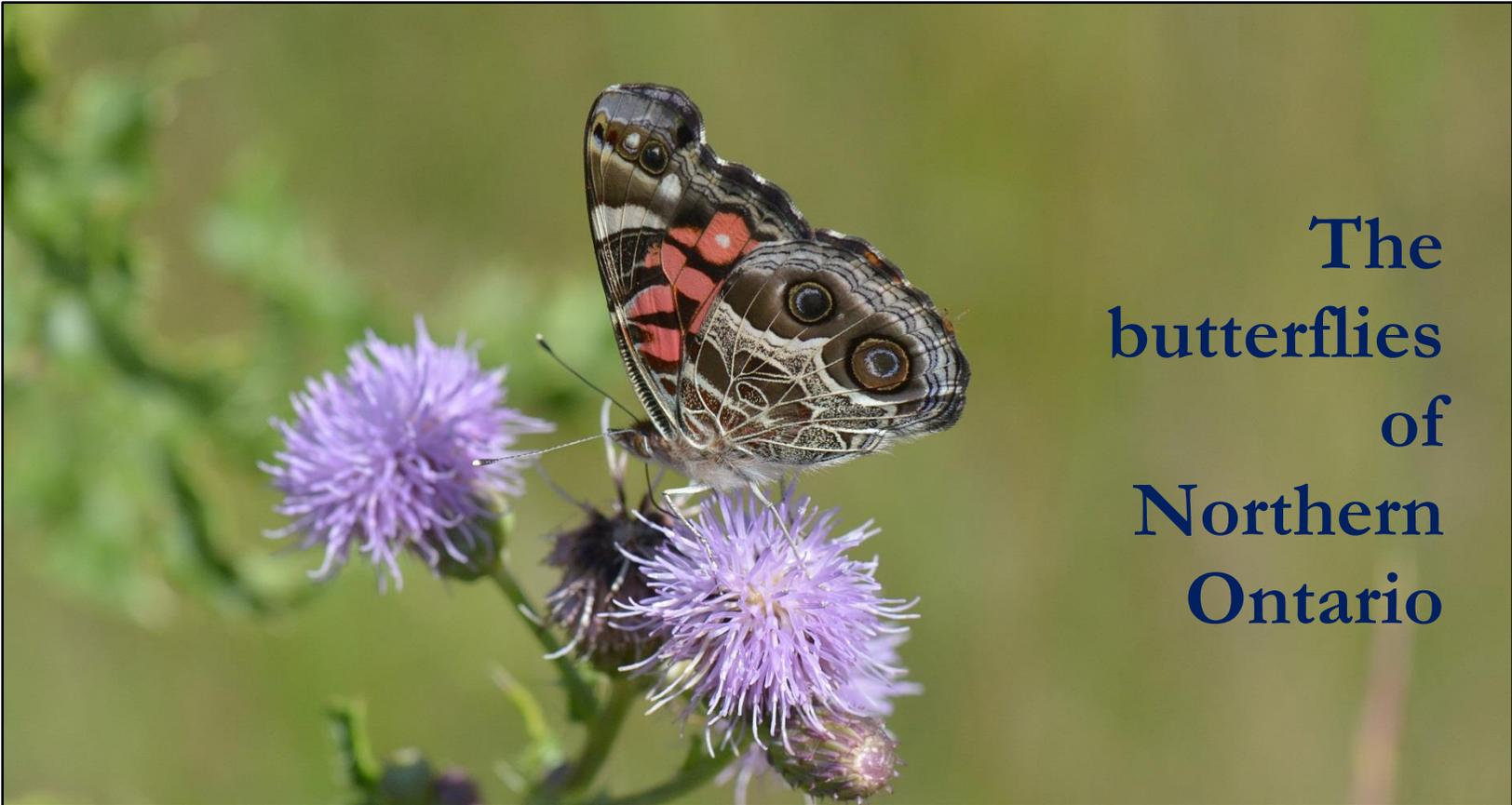




*April showers
bring
spring flowers*



The butterflies of Northern Ontario



American Lady above, American Copper below

Text and photos by Mark Olivier

In 2014, I uploaded some historical photos of butterflies to [eButterfly](#). But it was not until 2015 that I began a journey into learning about the butterfly species of the Algoma District. During 2015 and 2016, I contributed 2000+ observations, including 63 species, several of which had no historical reports for Algoma. A number of species range maps have been altered as a result of my efforts and I look forward to continuing this research.

The Ontario Butterfly Atlas harvests data from eButterfly and uploads it to its data base at http://www.ontarioinsects.org/Squares/index_2.html. By spending a short time viewing the atlas, you will note that the data for most areas of Northern Ontario north of the French River is very sparse, with few reports and very little detail about which species are to be found where and when. (Nipissing is in the transition zone, with much better data collection to the south than to the north.) All data collected within Ontario is very valuable, however my focus is on the northern regions of the province.



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My pet project is to establish a network of like-minded people to get out into the field (perhaps your backyard) and with the aid of a camera continue the work of collecting information about butterfly species in Northern Ontario. I am also reaching out to numerous potential contacts across all Ontario districts with the goal of adding data to the Ontario Butterfly Atlas. I want to share what I have learned and perhaps guide others who have an interest.

Through my efforts, I have gained relationships with a number of well-informed members of the "butterfly community" of Ontario, a community which is mostly in the south. Historical reports for many areas of Northern Ontario were made by scientists and enthusiasts living in the south who made long road trips through the north.

Citizen science projects have made it more practical for the average person to collect data without collecting live samples. Historically, solid knowledge about specific species was very difficult to gain, and, therefore, credible reports were restricted to a small group of educated individuals. Now, because of digital cameras, this is no longer necessarily the case.



Black Swallowtail above, Mustard White below



With photographs which clearly show field markings (sometimes the underwing of a species must be captured for correct identification) and careful notes about location, anyone with an interest in butterflies and learning about them can contribute to data collection. There is a need to keep the atlas scientific, and, as a result, there is a vetting process which can be time consuming for the

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limited number of people who are willing to vet. Therefore, an effort should be made to identify observations before submitting them.

I have built a Flickr account - [Mark Olivier \(Sault Ste Marie, ON\)'s albums | Flickr](#) - on which I have uploaded hundreds of my own photos and organized them into the various butterfly families using both common and scientific names. I have also created a Flickr group for Butterflies of Northern Ontario [Butterflies of Northern Ontario, Canada - Lepidoptera](#).

For anyone interested in pursuing “butterflying”, a must-have resource is the ROM field guide *The*

Butterflies of Ontario, although I can also be used as a resource for those wanting to learn and contribute. My email address is butterfliesalgoma@yahoo.com, and my cell phone number if you prefer to text me is 705-971-6547. I will be out in the field a lot this spring and summer, so be patient if you don't get me immediately. I will return emails and texts once I am back in service areas.

Editor's Note: Before moving to Sault Ste. Marie a couple of years ago, Mark was a participant in our Bird Wing group.



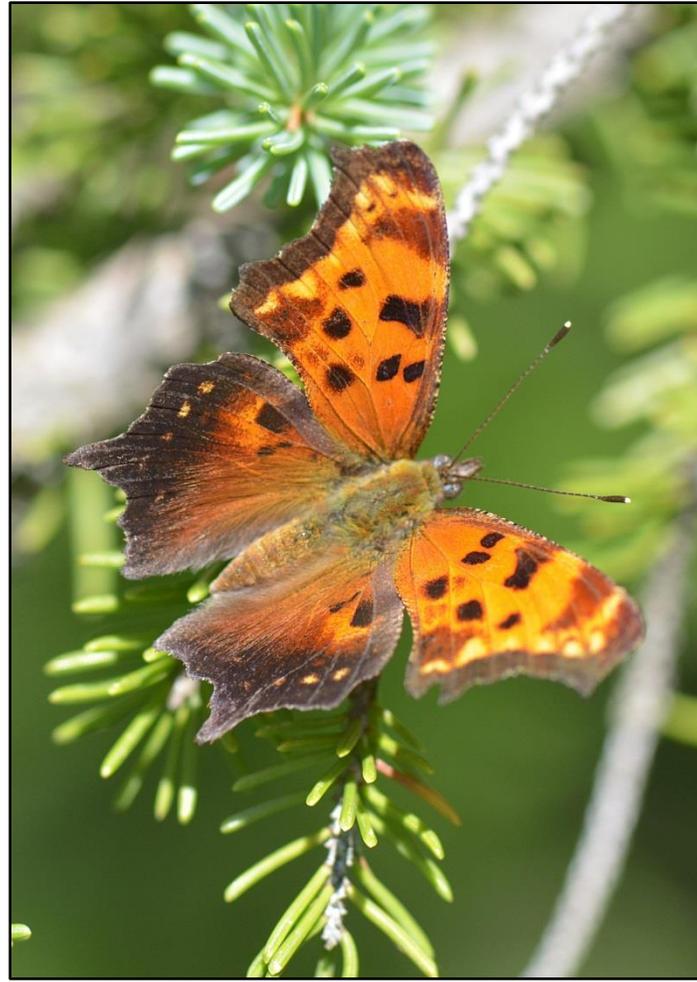
Northern Crescent above, White Admiral below



Early risers

Photos by Mark Olivier

Some butterflies spend the winter as adults and it is these butterflies we see early in the spring. All that is needed for them to fly about is a sunny day with the temperature at 10C or higher, snow or no snow. One of these early risers is the Mourning Cloak, the one most recognized among the early risers. You often see the Mourning Cloak on tree trunks. That's because they prefer tree sap, especially the sap of oak trees. They only occasionally feed on flower nectar.



Eastern Comma

Other butterflies in our region which winter as adults and fly about early on warm, sunny spring days are the Compton Tortoiseshell, Milbert's Tortoiseshell, Eastern Comma, Gray Comma, Green Comma and Hoary Comma.



Mourning Cloak



Milbert's Tortoiseshell



Mark Olivier

Coming to the aid of the amazing Monarch

By *Renee Levesque*

The Monarch. It is one of our most fascinating species and the most widely recognized of all our butterflies. But it could eventually disappear altogether if steps are not taken to protect its habitat and the plants it requires.

This past December, the status of the Monarch in Canada was changed from *special concern* to *endangered*. This status change came about because of ongoing habitat loss of the Monarch's wintering grounds in Mexico as a result of illegal logging and the destruction of milkweed and other nectar plants in the United States and Canada. The destruction of these plants is caused by a herbicide called glyphosate which is applied to fields of genetically modified corn, canola and soybeans. These crops are immune to the damage of this herbicide, but the milkweed and nectar-producing wildflowers are not.

What is needed is a concrete action plan on a large scale if this species is to be saved. Hopefully that plan is in the works and will soon be formalized, but in the meantime, we can continue as Nipissing naturalists to do our bit by planting a patch of milkweed and nectar-producing plants. The Monarch larva feed exclusively on milkweed and the adults feed on the nectar of many flowers, particularly goldenrod and asters as you can see from the photo at the right.



Renee Levesque

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Even a small patch will help, but first determine what plants are best for your soil and light conditions. You will need areas where the garden gets at least six hours of sunlight. Butterflies also like trees, shrubs and perennials for shelter, and they like rocks and logs on which to sun. They rely on the heat from the sun for their energy.

After years of research and testing, a Quebec company is now making a limited number of winter coats using the fluff from Milkweed pods. The fluff acts as an insulator. What this means for the Monarch is that more Milkweed is being planted. It is not harvested for winter coats until after the Monarch has

migrated. For more information on this company see:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-milkweed-winter-coat-1.3804138>.

The caterpillar or larva is brightly striped – yellow, black and white. The photo at right shows it on the Milkweed plant. It remains in this stage for about two weeks and then transforms into a pupa or chrysalis (jade and gold coloured), and then two weeks later the adult Monarch emerges. It is a striking butterfly, large and brilliantly orange, with a thick black border and two rows of white spots on both wings.

The spring migration from Mexico begins in March. With only a few weeks to live, the Monarch heads north, laying its eggs as it travels, each time producing the next generation. By the time we get to see the Monarch in our area, it is a few generations later. The Monarch from the last generation is the Monarch that makes the journey back to Mexico, to a place it has not been before, to overwinter. During this fall migration, it is in reproductive dormancy.



Mark Olivier

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Some may mistake the Viceroy for the Monarch, and no wonder. They both have nearly identical colouring and patterning. The main visual difference is a black line bisecting the hind wings of the Viceroy. This line is lacking in the Monarch. The Viceroy is also smaller than the Monarch, although unless you see them together, this is not a good method of determining which is which. Below are photos for comparison. Viceroy is on the left and Monarch on the right.



Mark Olivier



Renee Levesque

The Monarch's diet of milkweed contains alkaloids which are toxic and so predators know to stay away from the Monarch. The Viceroy mimics the colour of the Monarch for good reason – so predators avoid it also! However, it is thought the Viceroy may actually also be toxic because of a substance its caterpillar eats from willow leaves. So it may be that predators also avoid the Monarch because it looks like a Viceroy!

Scientists think they have figured out how the Monarch uses its built-in compass to migrate 3,000 miles or more from Canada to Mexico each fall. It seems it uses two cues from the sun. Its antennae senses time based on the position of the sun, while the neurons connected to the antennae tell the butterfly its latitude by the position of the sun above the horizon.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry through its Natural Heritage Information Centre tracks species at risk. There is an online form on which you can report sightings. Photos and specific locations are helpful. See: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/natural-heritage-information-centre>. Or you can report your sightings to Journey North, an online project that tracks Monarch migration. See: <https://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/>.

Surveys say...



By Renee Levesque

For those who missed the Chimney Swift article in the July 2016 issue of *The Woodland Observer*, I am publishing it again because there will be an outing in late May just before sunset for members to see the amazing wonder of hundreds of Chimney Swifts heading down a Main Street West chimney to roost for the night.

There will not be any Chimney Swifts roosting at the McIntyre Street chimney because the chimney was capped earlier in the year. Interestingly, there were few Chimney Swifts roosting at the McIntyre Street chimney last year.

In late May and into early June, Grant and Shirley McKercher will continue their SwiftWatching at the Main Street West chimney and April McCrum, who watched the McIntyre Street chimney last year, will instead monitor potential sites that appear not to be capped. April has at least three chimneys in mind. (SwiftWatch is a survey conducted by volunteers through Bird Studies Canada.)

Grant and April will send me their reports sometime in June and I will do an article based on their data for either the June or September issue of *The Woodland Observer*. It will be interesting to compare the number of swifts at the Main Street West roost this year compared to last and to determine if other chimney swifts are roosting elsewhere.

Other surveys through Bird Studies Canada keeping some members on the alert are:

Nocturnal Owl Survey in April.
Teams of: Marc Buchanan, Paul Smylie, Fred Pinto and Sarah Wheelan; Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing; Gary and Connie Sturge, two routes, one with daughter Rachel Sturge; Doug Sr. and Doug Jr. Patterson; April McCrum and Corey Witham; Dick Tafel and Renee Levesque. There is a trophy at stake.



Barred Owl, photo by Ken Gowing

American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey in May. Gary and Connie Sturge.

Marsh Monitoring Program in May and June. Paul Smylie, Laurier Woods.

Whip-poor-will Survey in June. April McCrum and Renee Levesque.



American Woodcock, photo by Renee Levesque

Breeding Bird Survey in June. Paul Smylie.

Canadian Lakes Loon Survey from June to August. If anyone is doing this survey, please let me know. A description of what is involved is on page 18 of the April issue of *The Woodland Observer*. See: <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

Great Canadian Birdathon. At least two teams: Marc Buchanan, Sarah Wheelan and Grant and Shirley McKercher; Dick Tafel, Lori Anderson, Brent Turcotte and Renee Levesque. There is a trophy at stake.

Motus Station: A committee consisting of Marc Buchanan, Oriana Pokorny, Dick Tafel and Gary Sturge has been established to look into the feasibility of having a Motus Station installed in our area. **An example of one can be seen in the photo on the right by Stu McKenzie, Motus Program Manager, Bird Studies Canada.** For more information on the Motus Station see the November 2016 Bird Wing report, pages 7 and 8: <https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/bird-wing-meetings-outings/>.

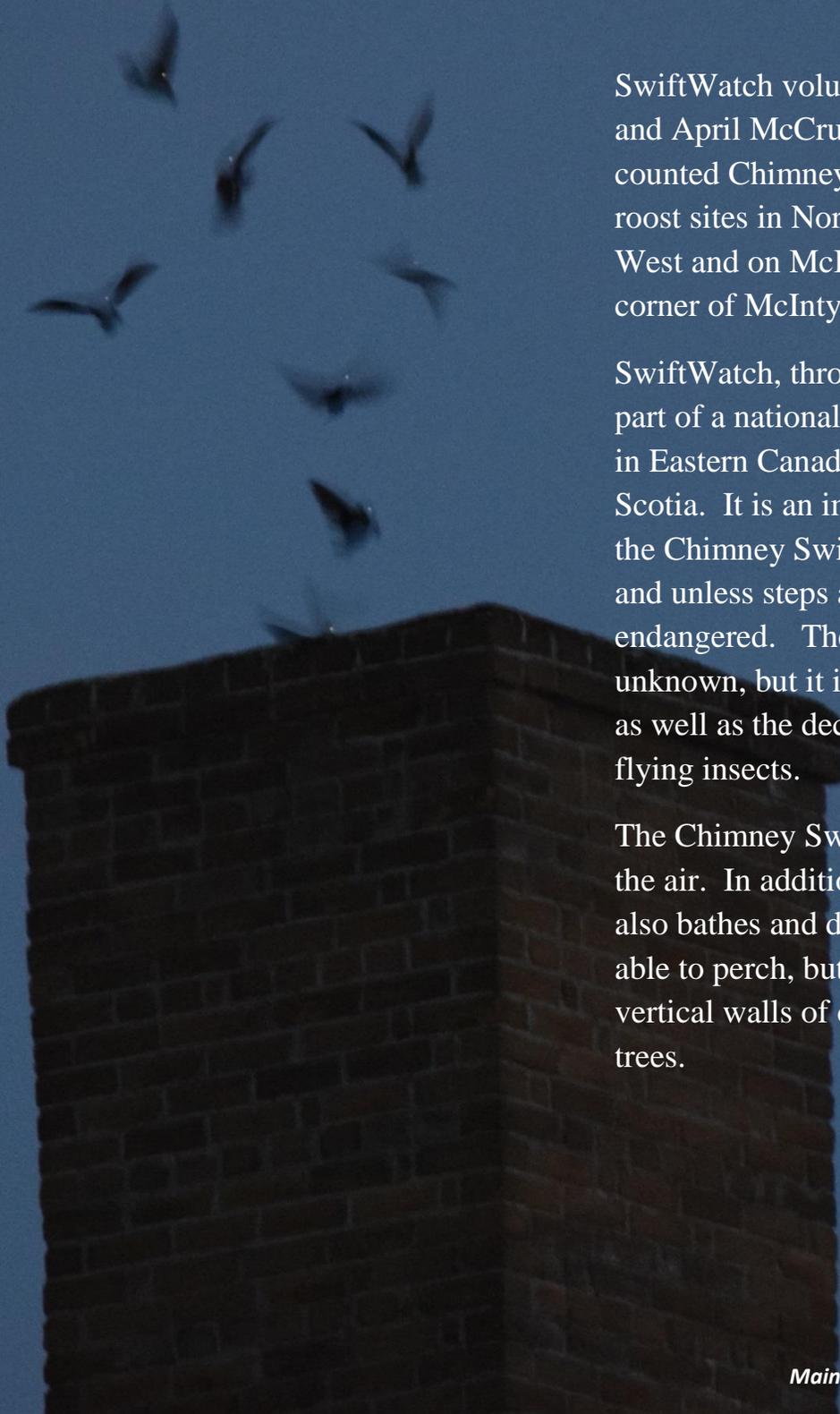
Anyone interested in any of the bird surveys, consider coming to the Bird Wing meetings at the North Bay Public Library on the fourth Tuesday of each month, September to April, followed by field outings from May to August. You can also check out the various surveys online through Bird Studies Canada.

And, outside of birds, **bat monitoring** in the McConnell Lake area will continue this June with Rebecca Gauvreau, Sarah Wheelan, Fred Pinto, Marc Buchanan, Megan Finlay and Paul Smylie if he is in town and available at the time. If others are interested, you can let Fred know. Recently Rebecca and Sarah were interviewed by CTV. Check it out at: <http://northernontario.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1108803>.



SwiftWatchers

By Renee Levesque, Grant McKercher and April McCrum



SwiftWatch volunteers, Grant McKercher and April McCrum, with their helpers, counted Chimney Swifts at the two known roost sites in North Bay, 412 Main Street West and on McIntyre Street West near the corner of McIntyre and Fraser Streets.

SwiftWatch, through Bird Studies Canada, is part of a national roost monitoring program in Eastern Canada, from Manitoba to Nova Scotia. It is an important program because the Chimney Swift is considered *threatened* and unless steps are taken, it could become endangered. The reason for its decline is unknown, but it is believed to be habitat loss, as well as the decline of its food source, flying insects.

The Chimney Swift spends most of its life in the air. In addition to eating on the wing, it also bathes and drinks on the wing. It is not able to perch, but instead clings to the vertical walls of chimneys and in hollow trees.

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The 2016 National Roost Monitoring dates were May 25, May 29, June 2 and June 6. Grant reports the numbers at the Main Street West site as follows:

Main Street West Roost

May 25: 81 seen entering the chimney; Grant and Shirley McKercher, observers.

May 29: 70 seen entering the chimney; Grant McKercher and Sarah Wheelan, observers.

June 2: 134 seen entering the chimney; Renee and John Levesque and Kevan Cowcill, observers.

June 6: 224 seen entering the chimney; Grant and Shirley McKercher, observers

On May 21, prior to the date of the official SwiftWatch, Grant saw 317 swifts entering the chimney. On May 22, John, Renee and Dick Tafel saw 127 entering the chimney. And on June 12, post official SwiftWatch, April McCrum saw approximately 860 entering the chimney.

On May 23, this video of Chimney Swifts entering the Main Street West chimney was posted on You Tube, thanks to Neil Brown:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pELCXCmsSo&feature=youtu.be>.

Last year, Grant did three counts in late May and saw between 12 and 150 swifts entering the chimney each evening. So numbers at the Main Street West roost are up from last year.

McIntyre Street West Roost

April McCrum was the SwiftWatch volunteer for the McIntyre Street West roost site. She reports the following numbers:

May 25: 2 seen entering the chimney and about 60 seen flying over, but not entering the roost.

May 29: 0 seen entering the chimney and 2 seen flying over.



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June 2: 0 seen entering the chimney and approximately 60 seen flying over.

June 9: 0 seen entering the chimney and 2 seen flying over. (April inadvertently did her count on June 9 instead of June 6, but given the numbers on the other dates, it is highly unlikely many more, if any, would have been seen entering the chimney on June 6.)

April reports the 2016 numbers are significantly down from 2015 when 320 entered the roost on May 24; and numbers are also significantly down from 2014 when 370 entered the roost on May 21.

The fly-overs April saw seemed to be heading to the Main Street West roost, and it would appear the Main Street roost was favoured this year and the McIntyre Street roost last year.

Grant and April used video recording this year to improve the count accuracy.

Additional Information on Chimney Swift

You do not see Chimney Swifts at every chimney because existing stone and brick chimneys have been demolished, capped or upgraded and newer chimneys are narrower and lined with metal which are not suitable for roosting or nesting.

Before Chimney Swifts adapted to chimneys, they roosted and nested in tree cavities and this may be more common than previously thought. They use a variety of live, dead deciduous and coniferous trees, but the trees need to have large hollow sections and the cavities need to have large diameters.

Chimney Swifts also roost and nest in air vents, wells and caves.



McIntyre Street West roost, photo by April McCrum



Snapping turtle hunting ban now in place

Text and photo by Renee Levesque

As of April 1, the hunting of Snapping turtles, a species of *special concern*, was banned in Ontario. Although the hunting of turtles did not yield large numbers, the loss of even one of a species at risk is a big loss.

Snapping turtles are Ontario's largest freshwater turtle. They can live for up to 100 years, but with such longevity, it takes them from about 15 to 20 years to reach sexual maturity. Therefore, renewal of the species is slow.

The female generally lays her eggs in the early summer in a nesting site of loose soil, sand, loam, vegetation debris or sawdust in which she digs a nest 4 to 7 inches deep. She lays between 20 to 40 eggs the size and shape of a table tennis ball. Up to 84% of nests can be destroyed by predators – minks, raccoons and skunks.

Despite the ban on hunting, snapping turtles still face a number of serious threats – poaching, habitat loss and road mortality. The latter is a huge threat, so we can all do our bit by slowing down in rural areas where there are wetlands and on roads which turtles cross to lay their eggs. Keep a lookout in these areas for turtle-crossing signs.

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Is it an esker, a kame or an outwash?

By Brent Turcotte

In the January 2017 issue of *The Woodland Observer* is an article entitled “Consider the lichen” that I wrote about a trip I led last October to a logging road off Songis Road in the Redbridge area.

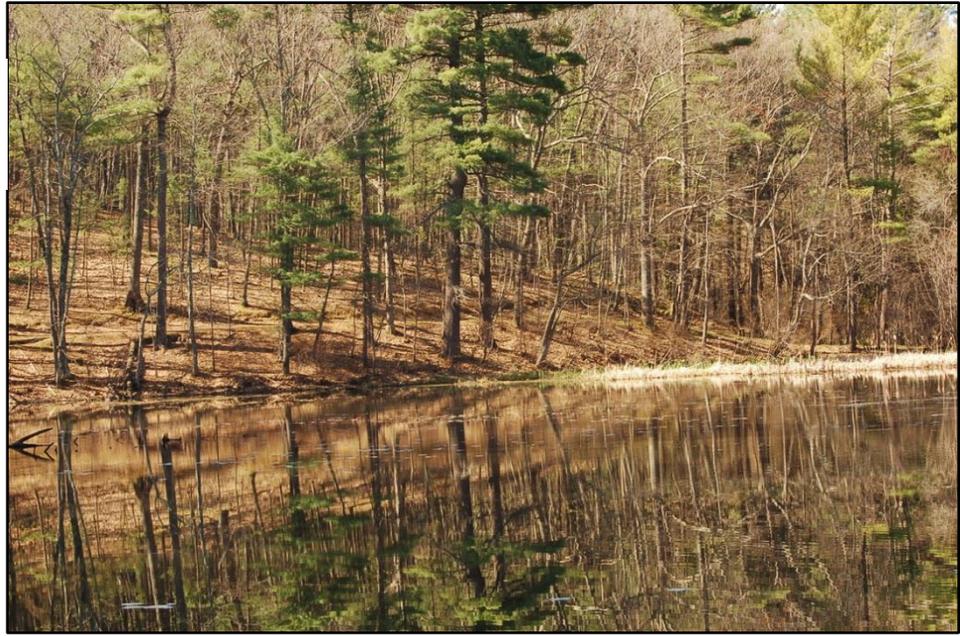
This area is dominated by mosses, lichens, mushrooms, club mosses and Black Spruce trees. (photo of area below) While on the trip, we speculated if the area was an esker due to the sharp drop and an absence of rocks. However, I no longer believe it is an esker because eskers are high ridges of sand left by the glaciers and I can find no evidence of a drop-off on the other side. This can be backed up by the map, *Quaternary Geology North Bay-Mattawa Region*, http://geoscan.nrcan.gc.ca/starweb/geoscan/servlet.starweb?path=geoscan/download_e.web&search1=R=108936. (Click on PDF and use your zoom. You can scroll both down and across.)



Kaye Edmonds

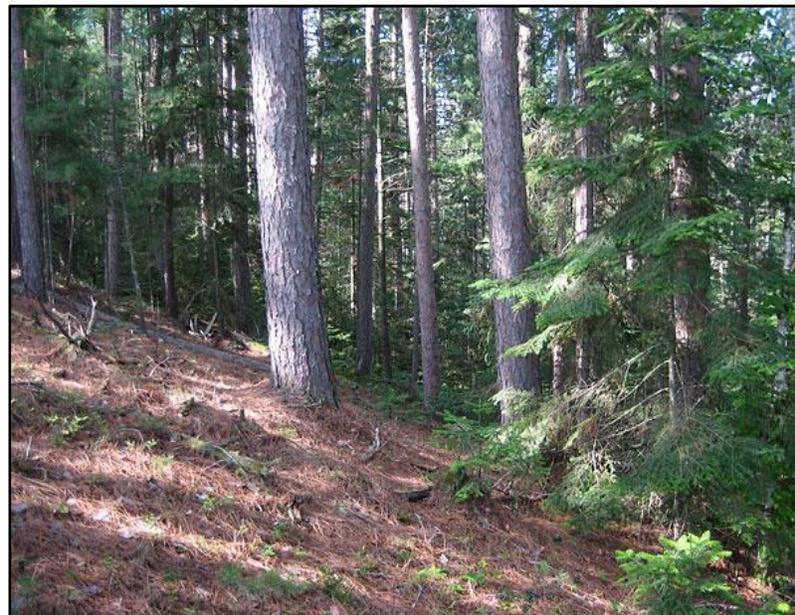
This quaternary geology map does not show any eskers in the area we explored, although does show it as an area (#3 on the map) known as glacial gravel which is described in the legend as “sand, gravel and boulders occurring as kames, eskers, and outwash”. This area borders most of Balsam Creek.

Geology maps don't really show the area as an esker, which is a narrow ridge, so it could be a kame or an outwash. A kame is a mound-like hill and an outwash is relatively level or gently rolling terrain. Another map online identifies it as an outwash. An outwash is sediment that has been transported by meltwater from a



glacier. The sediment gets finer with increasing distance because larger sediment (such as pebbles) cannot travel as far. In terms of the vegetation the area has, it is my speculation that because the area is overlain primarily with sand, it is relatively infertile, so what is there took a long time to develop. On the other hand, it may be a climax vegetation community, a type of bog. Above is a photo of a kame at Faerie Pond, Concord, Massachusetts from <http://surroundingtownsgeologytour.weebly.com/faerie-pond.html>.

Below are two photos by Bob McElroy of an esker, the six km long Greenbough Esker in Clara Township, Upper Ottawa Valley. This esker extends from Deux-Rivieres to Wendigo Lake. One photo shows a disturbed portion of the esker, and the other photo, an undisturbed portion with a dry Red Pine forest growing along the ridge. From Bob and Diane McElroy's blog, <http://www.mcelroy.ca/notes/greenbough.html>: "*Wooded uplands support Red and White Pines as well as Large-toothed Aspen, White Birch and White Spruce. The esker gives rise to significant wetland complexes that include kettle lakes. Rare plants such as Small Bur-reed, Virginia Chain Fern, and Swamp Beggar-ticks grow in peatlands bordering the southern third of the esker.*" (For anyone visiting the area, you might also want to check out the other links listed on the right side of Bob and Diane's blog page.)

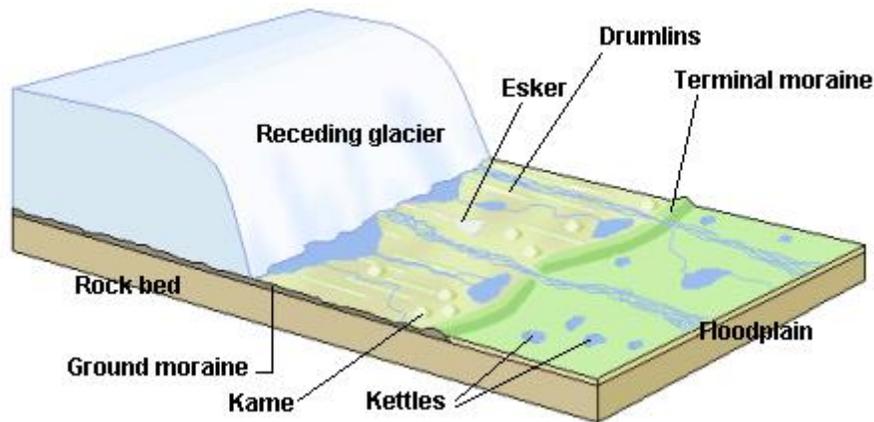


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Another map I found online is entitled *Soils of North Bay Area*. Click on <http://sis.agr.gc.ca/cansis/publications/surveys/on/on54/index.html> and scroll down to and click on *Map North Bay*. Then using your zoom, go to the bottom right of the map and look for an orange area with the symbol Tvfl/b0. T stands for Thistle and vfl stands for very fine sandy loam. The area is described as “calcareous very fine sand outwash or deltaic material”. A calcareous soil describes a soil that reduces acidity. It may have calcium of some form, and some types of calcareous soil include limestone and dolostone. Calcareous soils are found only in a few spots on this map. This is because glaciers from the ice ages tore off all the limestone with their passing. I suspect in the areas shown where there is calcareous soil that you will see subtle changes in the vegetation and find uncommon and rare plants.

The great thing about these maps is they provide you with new opportunities for exploration. Eskers, kames, kettle lakes, different soil types, etc. are all out there locally waiting to be explored. You may find rare plants or animals. You may find interesting vistas. Or you may not find anything particularly special. Before you go, realize that these maps are not necessarily precise. Some features are not mapped because of their small size or because the features are visible only in parts of the zones mentioned. Check also with crown land maps to make sure you are allowed in a particular area.

Showing the land features mentioned above is a diagram obtained from <http://www.summitsofcanada.ca/canatrek/environment/glaciers-anatomy.html>.



Another website to check out is the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines: <https://www.mndm.gov.on.ca/en>. You can download geological data, view it in Google Earth, purchase paper copies of maps and reports and more. Links are at the bottom of the home page.

Editor's Note: I added the information about the Greenbough Esker and received permission from Bob McElroy to use his esker photos. I also found online a photo of a kame and the above diagram. Sources are attributed.

Brent is looking to lead another outing to the same area to check out the land formation and to look for club mosses.

June outings



Renee Levesque

On Saturday, June 3, from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., there is an outing to the **three crosses high on the Laurentian Mountain overlooking the Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers.** (This outing was arranged by Elmer Rose who was our excellent guide last October on the Bonfield/Mattawa tour.)

Once in Mattawa, there will be a short boat trip with host and guide, Andre Viau, across the Ottawa River to the area on the Quebec side of the river where the climb begins. The three crosses were originally located on Explorer's Point beside the Mattawa Museum, erected there in 1686 to mark the spot where the Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers meet. They remained there until 1917 when three local priests decided to place them instead on Laurentian Mountain. The crosses have naturally rotted a few times over the years, but have always been rebuilt. They are now equipped with solar powered lights so they can be seen at night.

The climb is steep and the trail uneven, so you will need to be relatively physically fit and agile. Wear appropriate footwear and clothing. There will be blackflies, so be sure to bring a bug jacket and/or insect spray. Also bring a lunch and plenty of drinking water.

Meet at the former Visitors' Centre on Seymour Street by 11:00 a.m. for car-pooling.

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On Sunday, June 4, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., there will be an **outdoor cooking demonstration** with Oriana Pokorny at Gary and Connie Sturges' property in Trout Creek. Oriana will demonstrate some of her camping cooking skills using a reflector oven and an open fire. You may recall that in February when Oriana did her presentation on Camp Temagami, food was a big part of that presentation. If you missed the meeting, you can read about some of the things Oriana touched on, including food, in the March 2017 issue of *The Woodland Observer*, starting on page 6. See: <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

For the June 4th demonstration, Oriana plans to show us how to make bagels, cinnamon buns, apple crisp, peach cobbler and burritos – and there should be enough for everyone to taste. Makes one hungry just reading this!

If you wish, bring a picnic lunch or food to share. **And don't forget to bring a lawn chair.** You might also want to consider insect spray and/or a bug jacket. Gary and Connie will supply the soft drinks

Meet at the former Visitors' Centre at 10:00 a.m. for car-pooling and directions to the Sturge property.



Oriana Pokorny with a reflector oven, photo courtesy of Oriana

Guided walks in Laurier Woods



On Saturday mornings in May from 9 to 11 a.m., you can enjoy bird watching walks with Dick Tafel in Laurier Woods.

May is the prime time to see wood warblers and you are bound to see plenty of them in Laurier Woods. Warblers are colourful, active birds, smaller than sparrows, with thin needle-pointed bills. Most have some yellow in their plumage, like the distinctive male Chestnut-sided Warbler in the photo below on the right with his bright yellow crown, his black mustache and a long narrow chestnut streak on his side. But some warblers don't have yellow in their plumage, like the male American Redstart in the photo below on the left with his dramatic orange patches that contrast with his coal-black coat.

Warblers aren't the only birds to be seen. If you are especially fortunate, you might also see the exotic male Scarlet Tanager (below middle) with his blood-red body and jet-black wings. It is a bird not always easy to see because it likes to stay high in the forest canopy.

Bring your binoculars and if you don't have any, you can still enjoy the walk, see some of the birds and hear them sing. *(Photo above is by Renee Levesque. Photos below, left to right, are by Kevan Cowcill, Lisa Hackett and Renee Levesque.)*



Other Laurier Woods outings

On **Saturday, May 27, from 10:00 a.m. until noon**, Lori Beckerton, plant enthusiast, will be leading a walk on **edible and medicinal plants**.

On **Saturday, June 3, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**, Valerie Vaillancourt, biologist, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, will lead a **nature scavenger hunt** for old and young alike. This fun and educational outing was a very successful last year. Valerie will provide each family with a list of informative and interesting items to find and identify. Once identified, there will be a brief discussion on the role and the importance of each species.

Club and non-club outings and events in May

On **Monday, May 15, at 6:00 p.m.**, there will be an outing to **Spring Hill Farms, 88 Glen Roberts Drive, Trout Creek**. Spring Hill Farms is an organic, hydroponic farm consisting of a 21-acre spread and four large greenhouses in which a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and plants are grown. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH9WBTUcFoo>. **Meet at the former Visitors' Centre at 5:15 for carpooling.**

Mattawa Museum will be opened for the season starting the Victoria Day weekend, May 19. During this holiday weekend, it will remain open from Friday to Monday inclusive, then weekends only for the rest of May until school gets out. After that, it will be open daily for the rest of the summer. Hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Telephone number to call for additional information and to check on admission prices, times and tours is 705-744-5495.

Last October, many club members had an informative tour of the museum. See the Gray Owl exhibit photo below. It is worth the trip to Mattawa!

On **Wednesday, May 3, at 11:00 a.m.**, prior to the opening of the museum, there is a Meet and Greet, an opportunity to meet the museum's Board of Directors and to learn about membership and volunteer opportunities. Tea will be served at noon.



Upcoming speakers at monthly meetings

On **Tuesday, May 9**, Club member **Peter Ferris** will talk about **Canoeing the Historic Hayes River**. Peter's canoe trip on the Hayes River was a 640-km trip that began in August 2016 near Norway House, Manitoba, and ended 29 days later at York Factory on Hudson Bay. Peter's presentation will focus on the historical and cultural significance of the Hayes River in relation to the exploration and founding of Canada; its status as a Canadian Heritage River; the geological and whitewater characteristics of the river; trip preparation; observed wildlife; and interesting experiences during this adventurous journey.



Canoe at evening camp on Hayes River, photo by Peter Ferris

And at our final meeting until September, on **Tuesday, June 12**, **photographer/canoist, Paul Chivers**, will talk about **Rediscovering the Nastawgan**, an exploration of the ancient Nastawgan network of canoe routes, portages and winter trails used by First Nations for millennia.

The largest remaining intact remnant of this vast interconnected network is in the Temagami area where Paul has spent more than 20 years researching, photographing and re-establishing lost routes there.



Photo courtesy of Paul Chivers

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Board of Directors, 2017

Fred Pinto, President: fredpinto1@gmail.com 705-476-9006

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Greg Boxwell

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Bird Wing

Dick Tafel, Chairman: rtafel@sympatico.ca. 705-472-7907

Gary Sturge, Treasurer

Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe.

The Bird Wing newsletter is published each month, except December, and sent to members by email and posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club website, <http://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/>.

The Woodland Observer is published electronically each month from September to June and sent to members by email and posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club website, <http://www.nipnats.com/> under the link, "Newsletter".

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Contributors this issue: Paul Chivers, Kevan Cowcill, Kaye Edmonds, Peter Ferris, Ken Gowing, Lisa Hackett, Renee Levesque, April McCrum, Bob McElroy, Stu McKenzie, Grant McKercher, Mark Olivier, Fred Pinto, Steve Pitt, Oriana Pokorny and Brent Turcotte.

Special thanks to: Websites <http://www.summitsofcanada.ca/canatrek/environment/glaciers-anatomy.html> and <http://surroundingtownsgeologytour.weebly.com/faerie-pond.html> for photos.

Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fees are: single \$20.00; family \$30.00.

There is an **additional annual \$5.00 membership fee for Bird Wing** which meets the **fourth Tuesday of every month in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.** This fee is paid directly to Bird Wing.



The Nipissing Naturalists Club is affiliated with Ontario Nature: <http://www.ontarionature.org/>.