

The Woodland Observer

Newsletter of the Nipissing Naturalists Club

www.nipnats.com

January 2020



From the editor

Welcome to 2020! The New Year is upon us, and with it, a new look to our newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*. With some trepidation I have stepped into the role of editor, following in the footsteps of other pathfinders, including Pat Boxwell, Christine Page, Fred Pinto, and most recently, Renee Levesque. Please bear with me as I navigate my way through the maze of formatting, auto-correction typos, fonts, and templates! I welcome any suggestions for improvements and, of course, any submissions (photos, articles, book reviews, etc.) for inclusion in the newsletter. I can be reached by e-mail (gmckercher@mac.com) or phone/text (705-499-5577).

In this issue I have provided an update on recent club activities since the summer, including presentations at meetings, the results of the Annual Photo Contest and the Christmas Birds Counts, as well as upcoming events. Of special note is our **Annual General Meeting on Tuesday January 14th at 176 Lakeshore Drive. In addition to a review of the Club’s activities of past year and required financial reports, the meeting will include a pot-luck dinner and ever-popular Silent Auction! See you there!**

Recent Meetings and Club Activities

September 10, 2019 meeting - Joel Harrison: “Monitoring of the North Bay-Mattawa Watersheds”

Joel Harrison, a Water Resources Scientist with North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, presented an overview of the Authority’s monitoring program and their most recent findings about the health of our local watershed. He provided details of how monitoring is conducted and specific results on such indicators as phosphorus and nitrate levels, and blue-green algae blooms in Lake Nipissing and Callander Bay. The full 2018 report card and links to a video about the program can be found at the Authority’s website: <https://www.nbmca.ca/watershed-management/watershed-monitoring/watershed-report-card/>.

October 8, 2019 meeting - Peter Mills: “Metamorphosis - Ontario’s Amphibians at all Stages of Development”

Peter Mills, naturalist, author and artist, presented on his journey to create a new a field guide to the amphibians of Ontario. Using an entertaining multimedia format, he outlined the process whereby he developed his vision for a new guide to amphibians which illustrated all the stages of metamorphosis for each species. This included personally raising a number of species through their life-cycle and meticulously documenting the physical changes at each stage. This information was used to develop his detailed artistic renderings for the field-guide which included computer-assisted colour matching <http://www.peterbmills.com/metamorphosis.html/>.

METAMORPHOSIS Ontario’s Amphibians at all Stages of Development



Written and Illustrated by
PETER B. MILLS

November 12, 2019 meeting - Oriana Pokorny: “ The Galapagos”

Oriana provided a presentation on her recent trip to the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador. *(Editor’s note: Unfortunately I wasn’t able to attend this presentation, and at the time of this newsletter publication I didn’t have a review to include. I will endeavour to have one for next month’s edition.)*

December 10, 2019 meeting - Dr. Jeff Dech, Professor, Nipissing University: “New Research on Forest Fires and Using Stable Oxygen Isotopes in Charcoal to Reconstruct Fire Behaviour”

Dr. Dech provided an overview of research in which he and his graduate students are participating, collaborating with other researchers from Western University in London Ontario. New technologies in isotope analysis are allowing scientists to look back at historical fires and determine their characteristics:

- **Crown fires** burn trees up their entire length to the top. These are the most intense and dangerous wild-land fires.
- **Surface fires** burn only surface litter and duff. These are the easiest fires to put out and cause the least damage to the forest.
- **Ground fires** (sometimes called underground or subsurface fires) occur in deep accumulations of humus, peat and similar dead vegetation that become dry enough to burn. These fires move very slowly, but can become difficult to fully put out, or suppress. Occasionally, especially during prolonged drought, such fires can smoulder all winter underground and then emerge at the surface again in spring

The Canadian boreal forest is a mosaic of species and stands. It ranges in composition from pure deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous to pure coniferous stands. The diversity of the forest mosaic is largely the result of many fires occurring on the landscape over a long period of time. These fires have varied in frequency, intensity, severity, size, shape and season of burn. With new technologies such as isotope analysis it is hoped that we will be able to better understand the effects of forest fires on the ecology of our present day forests and integrate that knowledge into on-going forest management.



Aftermath of the 2018 forest fire near RiverValley in West Nipissing

Annual Photo Contest

Eleven accomplished photographers submitted 54 entries to the Annual Photo Contest in the four categories - Flora, Fauna, Landscapes, and People Enjoying Nature. All of the entries were viewed and voted on by the attendees at the December club meeting. Thanks to Lynn and Sarah for tabulating the results so efficiently after the voting, so that we could have the results in 'real time' during the meeting.

And the First Place Winners in each category are.....

Flora - Fred Pinto

"I took the photo on a NipNat hike into the Widdifield Forest Provincial Park in 2019. This is the largest park within the City of North Bay. Access to the park is very limited. There is a sliver of public land at the southern boundary that allows entry in the winter. There had been a snowfall the night before our hike so the trees were covered in snow."

Camera: Pentax K-70 using a 55-300mm lens



Fauna - Buddy Myles

"I used a zoom lens and got lucky seeing this fox travelling down a road right when I was pulling into a hiking parking lot. Walked right past me, not caring about me as how I got so close."

Camera: Nikon, with zoom lens
Location: Near Verner, ON

One can only imagine the natural drama that unfolded prior to this photo showing the successful predator and the not-so-lucky prey.....Editor



Landscapes - Buddy Myles

“I went out at about 10:30 at night to the darkness away from the city, and using a really slow shutter speed, I was able to get the Northern Lights on camera (although the photos still don’t compare to their beauty in person)”.



People Enjoying Nature - Gary Chowns

“The picture was taken on the Lavase River trail from Champlain Park. The chickadees are used to being fed and usually fly around looking for a handout. My grandson, Oliver, is a typical three year old boy and rarely stops moving, so I knew I had to be fast. I managed to get three shots off in a second and that was that. The bird flew and Oliver ran.”



Camera: Nikon 7100, ISO 100, F8, 1/250 sec, 70 mm focal length, taken in RAW format

Thank-you to all of the participants, and a special congratulations to all of the winners! Thank-you as well to Sarah Wheelan for coordinating all the submissions and posting them on the club website.

I will highlight the second and third place winners in the February newsletter.

In the meantime a link to all of the winning entries (1st, 2nd and 3rd place) can be found at the [NipNaps Facebook page](#).

Christmas Bird Counts

North Bay Christmas Bird Count

By Lori Anderson, Compiler

North Bay's 41st Count is was held on 14 December 2019.

Congratulations and thank-you to all who participated - a very worthwhile citizen science contribution. The count began in North America in 1900 and continues, now including multiple countries with over 2000 count circles - ours is ONNB. Our full history of data can be found using the following link: <http://netapp.audubon.org/cbcoobservation/>

Our day this year produced above average numbers and species. Weather was mild and calm - perfect for the 19 field surveyors who travelled 584 km by car and 30 by foot within the count circle on Saturday. Feeder Watchers, 23 in total, spent over 50 hours watching feeders within the circle!

In the field, open waters on Trout Lake enabled several species of diving ducks to be scoped. Most notable of these the Bufflehead, only counted twice previously, over 10 years ago.

One species, Bald Eagle, broke the high count record with 23 counted this year.

No new species were entered - Wild Turkey and Peregrine Falcon were count week observations. They were seen on one of the 3 days before or after the count, and so were recorded, but not included in the official data. Both would be new species for North Bay!

Other notable observations from the field include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Barred Owl (both in field and at a feeder), and Cedar Waxwings. We could expect Bohemian Waxwings to visit North Bay for its abundant supply of berries in winter months; Cedar Waxwings normally head further south well before Christmas Bird Count. This year only the Cedar variety were spotted and photographed for confirmed identification. Also enjoying the berry crop, were a number of tardy Robins.



Cedar Waxwing G. McKercher



American Robin G. McKercher



Barred Owl G. McKercher

One Northern Shrike was counted - by a feeder watcher! A nice addition to the count, but hopefully has not remained at the feeder.

Finches were up and down. Over 500 American Goldfinch counted exceeds the total in any of the previous 10 years. Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Crossbills and Redpolls were not found at all. Purple Finch were only found in one area and at one feeder, and 8 Siskins were seen at just one feeder.

Finding a Northern Cardinal in North Bay is a real treat. Feeder watchers made the observation in the Ferris area, putting this lovely bird on the board.

Six reluctant Grackles were also seen at just one feeder.

Sadly, our Canada Jay with its recently restored, rightful name, could not be located this year.

TOTALS
Species 35
Numbers 3152 (403 of these at feeders)

Special thanks to Shirley Mackie and Grant McKercher who so generously invited surveyors into their home for potluck and tally following the count - such a welcome reward after the day afield.

Thank-you feeder watchers! Every year you come through to make this count complete (and find those special birds and additional species the field surveyors just can't).

East Ferris Christmas Bird Count (part of the North Bay CBC)

By Gary Sturge

In East Ferris the Field Observers numbered 4 and comprised 2 teams as in 2018, while 3 Observers watched feeders at their homes. The weather for count day was reasonable starting out slightly below zero, overcast but not snowing. In the afternoon light snow developed but did not interfere with observing and counting.

The count went well with one team starting the day at the landfill site where a record number of Bald Eagles were observed, 21 versus a previous high of 15. All the roads in the East Ferris area were covered and more species were observed this year than in 2018, 20 compared to 17. Also the total number of individual birds counted increased with 417 seen versus 362 last year.

The results of the count in East Ferris are:

Common Goldeneye 14, Hooded Mergansers 3, Common Mergansers 2, Mallards 2, Red-breasted Nuthatch 10, White-breasted Nuthatch 2, Hairy Woodpecker 8, Downy Woodpecker 3, Pileated Woodpecker 1, Blue Jays 52, Common Ravens 87, American Crows 6, Black Capped Chickadees 73, Mourning Doves 16, Bald Eagles 22 (21 at the landfill site), Barred Owl 1, European Starlings 40, American Tree Sparrows 7, American Goldfinches 29, Purple Finches 39.

This is a good result contributing substantially to the North Bay Count total of 35 species and 3152 individual birds.



Bald Eagles at the East Ferris landfill
- *Gary Sturge*

Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count *By Martin Parker, Compiler*

The 43rd annual Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count was held on 18 December 2019. Twenty field observers and five feeder-watchers participated, logging 641 km by car, 23.75 km by foot, and 49.7 hours of active searching and watching. This was followed by a delicious pot-luck supper at the local Legion, and a tally of the birds seen.

The final tally for the day's efforts was a total of 31 species and 2368 individual birds:

Trumpeter Swan (2), Mallard (1), Ruffed Grouse (16), Wild Turkey (53) - new high
Golden Eagle (1) - 4th time on the count, Bald Eagle (5), Rock Pigeon (187)
Mourning Dove (63) - new high, Barred Owl (1), Downy Woodpecker (20)
Hairy Woodpecker (31), Pileated Woodpecker (6), Blue Jay (376),
American Crow (4), Common Raven (189),
Black-capped Chickadee (613), Red-breasted Nuthatch (110),
White-breasted Nuthatch (8), Brown Creeper (1),
Golden-crowned Kinglet (10), European Starling (74),
Bohemian Waxwing (12), American Tree Sparrow (79), Dark-eyed
Junco (58), White-throated Sparrow (1), Common Grackle (1),
Purple Finch (18), White-winged Crossbill (3), Pine Siskin (53),
American Goldfinch (373)



American Tree Sparrow G. McKercher

Notable absences from the count included:

Northern Shrike - 1st time since 2009 count it has not been recorded
Canada Jay - only the 4th time it has not been recorded on the count
Winter finches - no Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, Evening Grosbeak
House sparrow - the 3rd year it has been absent

Calendar of Events

Club Meetings (176 Lakeshore Drive, North Bay P1A 1J8)

Tuesday January 14th, 2020 will be the **Annual General Meeting**, with silent auction and potluck dinner, starting at **6:30 pm**. Please bring your pot-luck contribution (prepared dish or food) as well as your own plate, cup and utensils. Any items that you wish to donate for the silent auction can be brought to the meeting room the night of the AGM. **Any volunteers who wish to help with the set-up are requested to come at 6:00 pm** so that the meal and meeting can start at 6:30 pm.

Tuesday February 11, 2020

“Canoeing the Broken Skull and Nahanni Rivers” - presentation by Peter Ferris



Tuesday March 10, 2020

“Hiking the Ontario Temiskaming Highland Trail” - presentation by Keith Pearson



Tuesday April 14, 2020

“Freshwater Mussels” - presentation by Paul Smylie

Tuesday May 12, 2020

“Bird and Animal Calls and Their Meaning” - presentation by Steve Morrin

Other Announcements/Information

News from the Bird Wing

Renee Levesque has announced that she will be stepping down from her role as our dedicated Bird Scribe. In her words,

“The time has come for me to devote time to other interests and hobbies. I will continue to bird and to be a member of Bird Wing and will continue in the role of communicator for all things bird, that is, reminding you of the monthly Bird Bashes, the monthly meetings, all outings and all other activities, such as the Great Backyard Bird Count, etc. , as well as sending you Dick’s monthly Bird Bash reports which I lightly edit and format for ease of reading. I will also help Dick develop the agendas and meeting room changes, things like that, and will also from time to time send you emails about birds, things I have read and found interesting and want to pass on.

For the time being, I will provide a list of birds we mention seeing (at our Bird Wing meetings) unless someone else would like to immediately take over that role.

I have been writing Bird Wing reports since September 2012 when I attended my very first meeting and Dick astutely assumed I would be up to the challenge of being the Bird Wing secretary. (Not sure if this was the case. He basically told me to take the minutes and I did so, eventually expanding the minutes from just straight minutes to include other bird-related items and bird photos.) After 2 or 3 years as secretary, and with Lori Anderson’s support, we changed my title from secretary to Bird Wing Scribe, a title Lori came up with. It better reflected my actual role. While I was writing the monthly Bird Wing reports, I was also, from October 2015, writing for, laying out, finding photos and editing The Woodland Observer, and prior to October 2015 and for most of my working life, I wrote reports, a combination of rehabilitation, vocational, medical and legal reports for private organizations, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and law firms. I may go into severe withdrawal not writing reports after all these years, but I am willing to chance it!

Thank you for your support and in particular a huge thanks to Dick.”

We will certainly miss the great dedication and journalistic expertise that Renee brought to her report writing, both for the Bird Wing, and the Woodland Observer. These publications were eagerly anticipated by many, and documented the exceptional work of all the members of the Nipissing Naturalist Club. Thank-you Renee!

In Memorium - Pat Boxwell

A former Nipissing Naturalists Club member, Pat Boxwell, died in Cambridge Ontario June 20, 2019. Renee Levesque sent out the following notice to inform members of her passing:

“Pat edited Nipissing Naturalists Club’s newsletter for a number of years, from 1998 to 2006, and liked to bird. I don’t think she was as avid a birder as her husband, Greg Boxwell, who passed away here in North Bay on June 13, 2016. After Greg’s death, Pat moved to Cambridge to be closer to family members, her sisters in particular. (I wrote about Greg in the July 2016 issue of The Woodland Observer. Pat loved the photo I used, taken by Kevan Cowcill

when Kevan, Dick, Greg and I were on a Lake Nipissing boating outing to look for migrating lake birds in September 2014. Dick remained in touch with Pat and had the photo developed and sent to her. Pat did not use the computer and did not have email.

I first met Pat at a Nipissing Naturalists Club meeting in April 2015 and last spoke to her in the late winter/early spring 2019. I called her to see if she knew who came up with the wonderful name of the club's newsletter, The Woodland Observer. Neither she nor Ted Price nor Angela Martin to whom I also spoke knew.

Pat struggled with health issues for years, but that did not stop her from being a most pleasant and gracious woman.

As expressions of sympathy, donations to the Canadian Cancer Society or the Humane Society may be made through Westmount Memorial Celebration Centre, 519-743-8900. To leave an online message of condolence, please visit <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/funeral-homes/kitchener-on/westmount-memorial-celebration-centre/3688>.

You can read Pat's obituary here: <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/kitchener-on/patricia-boxwell-8757307/>."

The Banff Mountain Film Festival

This popular evening of selected films from the Banff Mountain Film Festival will again be coming to North Bay, Thursday **January 23, 2020**, at the Capitol Centre. This year's tour features a collection of the most inspiring action, environmental, and adventure films from the festival. Traveling to exotic landscapes and remote cultures, and bringing audiences up-close and personal with adrenaline-packed action-sports, the 2019/2020 World Tour is an exhilarating and provocative exploration of the mountain world.

Tickets (\$25.00, general seating) can be purchased at the Capitol Centre box office or at Lefebvre's Source for Adventure (160-180 Sheriff Avenue, North Bay). **The proceeds from this event will be shared between the Nipissing Naturalists Club and the Canadian Ecology Centre - so come on out and have great night of adventure films, while also supporting our two organizations!**

Nominate your Nature Hero for a Conservation Award!

Join us in recognizing Ontario's nature heroes by submitting nominations for the 2019 **Ontario Nature Conservation Awards** (<https://ontarionature.org/take-action/conservation-awards/>). These annual awards recognize excellence by honouring individuals, groups, government agencies and corporations that have worked to protect nature in Ontario. All award recipients will be honoured at our Annual General Meeting on June 6, 2020 at Evergreen Resort on the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula. The deadline for nominations is **March 27, 2020**.



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705-472-7907

Monthly Bird Wing and Bird Bash reports are sent to members by e-mail and posted on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website: <https://www.nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-wing-meetings-outings/>, and <https://nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-bash-reports/>.

The Woodland Observer

The Club's newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*, is published electronically September to June, sent to members by e-mail, and posted in date order on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website: <https://nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

Grant McKercher, Editor gmckercher@me.com 705-499-5577

Contributors to this issue: Lori Anderson, Gary Sturge, Martin Parker

Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalist 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 each month in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library from 6:30 - 9:00 p.m. **This membership fee is paid directly to treasurer of the Bird Wing.**

Nipissing Naturalists Club is a member Ontario Nature: <http://www.ontarionature.org/>.

