

FEBRUARY 2024

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Official Newsletter of the Nipissing Naturalists Club

Photo credit: Rick Tripp

## Hiking the Dragon Tail

It was a snowy afternoon on January 13 when about a dozen members, led by Kim Burns, climbed the escarpment from the decommissioned NORAD base parking lot then hiked along the Dragon Tail trail. Apropos of its name, the trail has short climbs and descents with fair views of Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing in the distance. Along the way, we discussed how to identify Ash trees by their distinctive diamond-grooved bark and opposite branching (most other tree species other than the maples have alternate branching). Ash trees are a species at risk in Ontario as they are affected by the Emerald Ash Borer.



Photo credit: Fred Pinto



Photo credit: Rick Tripp



The Nipissing Naturalists Club is a friendly, diverse group interested in exploring and learning about our natural world. Members are invited to interesting and informative monthly meetings (in person or via Zoom), receive our newsletter, and are invited to members-only outings and activities. Go to [www.nipnats.com](http://www.nipnats.com) for information on how to join.

## This issue:

Hiking the Dragon Tail  
PAGE 1

My Travels Through the  
Northwest Passage - Chapter 1  
PAGE 2

Tiny Talk: *Cladonia rangiferina*  
(Grey Reindeer lichen)  
PAGE 4

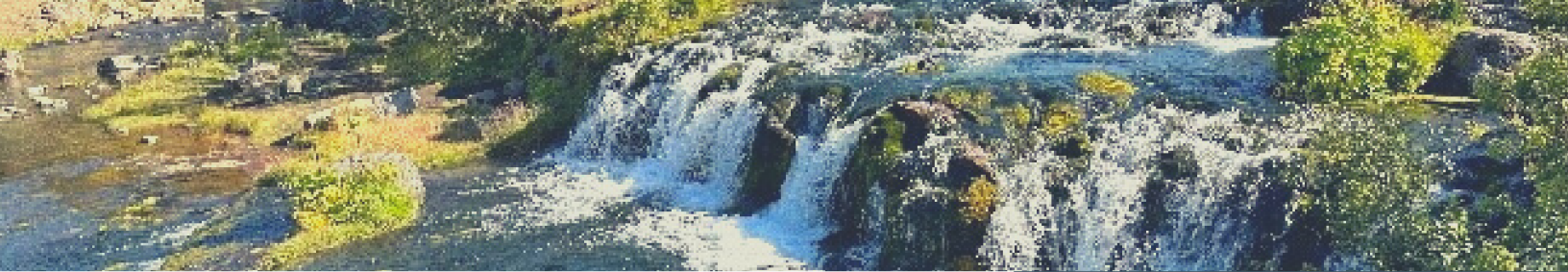
Tiny Talk: Mudpuppies (*Necturus maculosus*)  
PAGE 5

Meet Your 2024 Board of Directors  
PAGE 06

Photo Contest Winners  
PAGE 06







## My travels through the North West Passage - Chapter 1

BY FRED PINTO

My travels took me through four countries and seven time zones. As there is lot to cover, I will submit a series of short articles with photos. My trip began in Reykjavik, Iceland and ended in Nome, Alaska.

The Arctic and the NW Passage have captured people's imagination for centuries. Evidence of Paleo-Inuit in the Canadian High Arctic date from around 4,500 years ago. They spread westwards from what is now Alaska.

The Norse arrived in Iceland, Greenland and parts of Canada over 1,000 years ago. The first Viking settlement is dated at 870 AD. Archeology and the Norse Sagas are important sources of information. The Icelandic saga were written in the 9th-11th centuries. They describe real family events and are wonderful reads that give us a glimpse of how ordinary people lived.



Iceland's capital - Reykjavik is a lively city that has a lot of public infrastructure such as theaters, sculptures, and community spaces.



## ICELAND

Many of the natural and cultural sites of interest are on private land. There is no entry fee to access these sites. Landowners are compensated by a transfer of funds from taxes. Landowners can earn additional money by running businesses such as restaurants that serve tourists.



All photos in this story from Fred Pinto



The geology of Iceland plays an important role in everything. It is the basis of its specular scenery, hydro power and, geothermal heat that provide hot water and electricity which in turn is the basis of Icelandic industries such as aluminum smelting, greenhouses, and carbon capture and storage.



Thingvellir (Pingvellir) National Park is the site of Iceland's historic open air parliament from the 10th to 18th centuries.



A very modern and distinctive Opera House in Reykjavik called Harpa



On my right is the North American continental plate and on my left is the European continental plate in Thingvellir (Pingvellir) National Park. The plates are spreading apart.





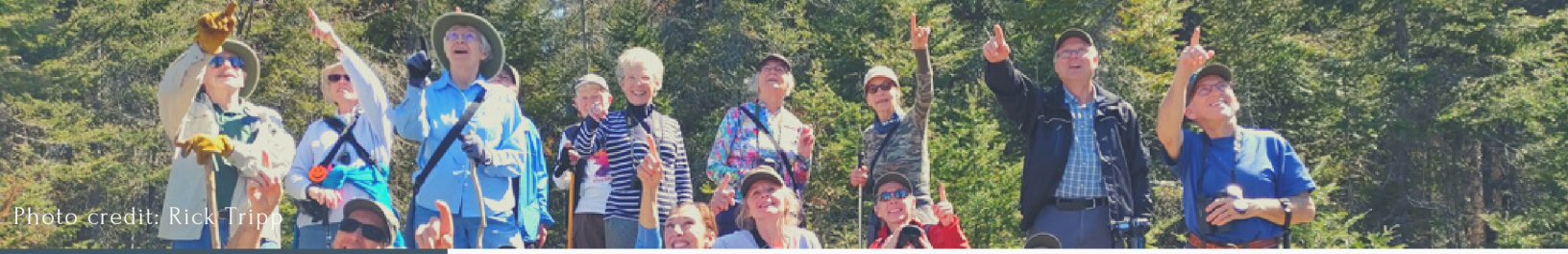


Photo credit: Rick Tripp

**“Consider the Lichen. Lichens are just about the hardest visible organisms on Earth, but the least ambitious.”**

BILL BRYSON, AUTHOR OF “A WALK IN THE WOODS”



Photos by Kim Burns

# TINY TALK: Cladonia rangiferina

BY KIM BURNS

Common names: Reindeer Cup Lichen, Reindeer Lichen, Grey Reindeer Lichen, Reindeer Moss, Deer Moss, and Caribou Moss

- Found in hot and cold climates (extremely cold-hardy) in a wide range of well-drained, open environments such as pine forests, hot/humid open forests, rocks (but not bare rock)
- Forms extensive mats on the ground up to 4 inches tall that grow very slowly - only 0.2 to 0.4 inches per year.
- Tend to live a long time – more than 100 years on average – but because of slow growth rate, may take decades to recover if damaged or destroyed.
- Inhibit incursion of surrounding competitive plants by secreting acids and other chemicals.

## Benefits:

- Edible and high in carbohydrates – eaten by reindeer, moose, musk oxen, mountain goats, Dall sheep, deer, insects and small mammals.
- Humans can eat it too but it is crunchy and can be soaked with wood ashes to remove its bitterness.
- Help regulate water tables, maintain cool soils, and prevent soil erosion.
- Important in carbon and nutrient storage.
- Sensitive to air pollution and can be good indicators of air quality.
- Used by birds and mammals in nest-building.

## What I notice about them:

- Younger ones seem more greenish
- Older are light grey
- Grow in sandy areas and can survive drought conditions
- When the bush is really dry, they are very dry and crunchy to walk on
- When the bush is very wet, they are very spongy and soft to walk on
- Lichens are very shallowly anchored in the ground.
- They look like a blanket of snow on a moonlit night



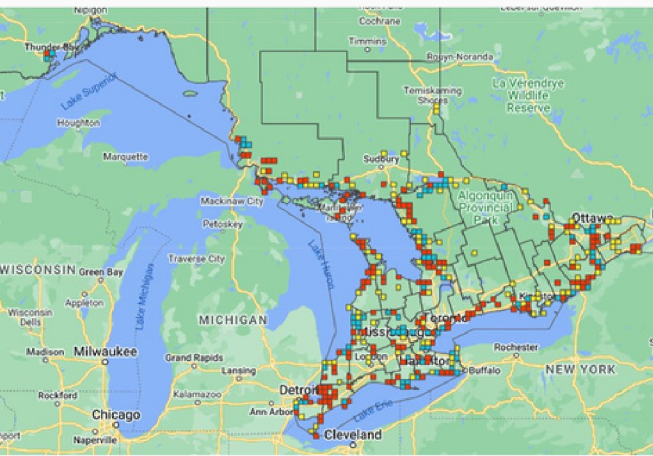
References:  
[https://northernwoodlands.org/outside\\_story/article/reindeer-lichen](https://northernwoodlands.org/outside_story/article/reindeer-lichen)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cladonia\\_rangiferina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cladonia_rangiferina)  
[https://northernwoodlands.org/outside\\_story/article/reindeer-lichen](https://northernwoodlands.org/outside_story/article/reindeer-lichen)







Photo credit: Fred Rinto



1. <https://www.herpman.com/species/salamanders/mudpuppy/>

References:

- <https://ontarionature.org/programs/community-science/reptile-amphibian-atlas/mudpuppy/>
- Map: <https://www.ontarioinsects.org/herp/index.html?Sort=44&area2=squaresCounties&records=all&myZoom=6&Lat=44.23&Long=-79.02>

## TINY TALK: Mudpuppies (*Necturus maculosus*)

BY ANGELA MILLS

Mudpuppies are also known as common mudpuppy and waterdog. They are Canada's largest and only completely aquatic salamander, growing to 30 to 50 cm long. Mudpuppies may live for 30 years or more. Mudpuppies live in lakes, rivers, and streams. They have been found in muddy weed-choked streams and in depths of up to 30 m. They are nocturnal, usually hiding under rocks during the day. Mudpuppies are carnivorous, feeding on worms, fish eggs, aquatic insects, crayfish, and small fish.

Female mudpuppies lay 30-190 eggs in the spring which hatch two months later. Juvenile mudpuppies are orange to black with yellow stripes and take four to six years to reach maturity. Adults are grey to rusty brown with dark blue spots, small eyes, external feathery gills, short legs, four toes per foot, and a paddle-shaped tail.

Threats to mudpuppies include poor water quality (e.g., from pesticides; PCBs are known to cause deformities) and human activities (e.g., fishing for bottom feeders, dredging, commercial fishing nets, and boat propellers).

Status:

- International Union for Conservation of Nature: Least Concern (2015)
- Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Not at Risk (2000)
- Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO): Not Assessed



[https://www.crowrivermedia.com/dnr-wants-to-know-of-mudpuppy-salamanders-die-offs/article\\_51c892f4-ebc9-59ef-adde-87f88b48d5a4.html](https://www.crowrivermedia.com/dnr-wants-to-know-of-mudpuppy-salamanders-die-offs/article_51c892f4-ebc9-59ef-adde-87f88b48d5a4.html)





Photo credit: Rick Tripp

## Did you know?



Manitoulin  
Nature Club

Nipissing Naturalist Club members are welcome to join the Manitoulin Nature Club monthly meetings via Zoom. Email: [nipnatclub@gmail.com](mailto:nipnatclub@gmail.com) and we will send you the meeting link once it is available.

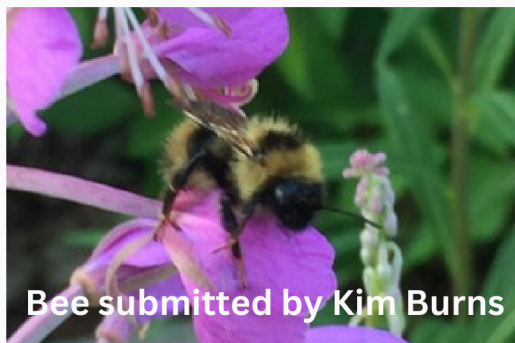
BIRD WING IS A BRANCH OF THE NIPISSING NATURALISTS DEVOTED TO THE ENJOYMENT AND STUDY OF BIRDS. ALL CLUB MEMBERS ARE WELCOME TO JOIN BIRD WING FOR AN ADDITIONAL \$5 MEMBERSHIP FEE. FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO [WWW.NIPNATS.COM/BIRD-WING/](http://WWW.NIPNATS.COM/BIRD-WING/)

## PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

### Two 'Wildlife' Winners



Wilson's Plover submitted by  
Rachel Sturge



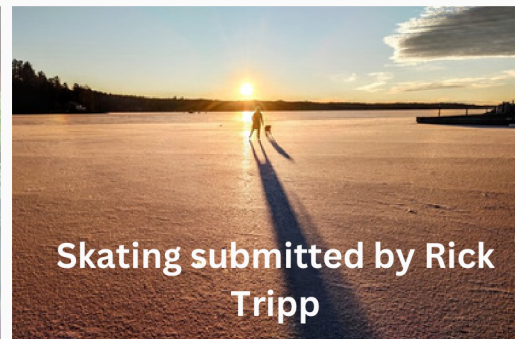
Bee submitted by Kim Burns

### 'Plant' Winner



Acacia Thorns submitted by  
Rachel Sturge

### 'People & Pets' Winner



Skating submitted by Rick  
Tripp

THE NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB IS AFFILIATED WITH ONTARIO NATURE [WWW.ONTARIONATURE.ORG](http://WWW.ONTARIONATURE.ORG).

## FROM THE EDITOR

"There is no winter without snow,  
no spring without sunshine, and  
no happiness without  
companions."

Korean Proverb

Please send your photos, articles,  
thoughts, poems, favourite trees,  
book reviews, interesting  
observations, etc to  
[Ldm199219@hotmail.com](mailto:Ldm199219@hotmail.com)

Lori McDowell

## Meet Your 2024 Board of Directors

The new board was acclaimed at the Nipissing Naturalists 2023 Annual General Meeting held on February 20 at 176 Lakeshore Dr., North Bay and by Zoom.

- Angela Mills
- Aris Morosin
- Brittany Tartaglia
- Connie Sturge (Treasurer)
- Fred Pinto (Past President)
- Kim Burns
- Lori McDowell (Secretary)
- Louise Simpson
- Rachel Sturge
- Rick Tripp (President)
- Siobhan O'Leary (Vice President)