

## History of the KFN 2000-2009

*Erwin Batalla*

This year is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Kingston Field Naturalists (originally the Kingston Nature Club). Histories of the KFN were written on our 5<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, as well as on the occasion of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists conference in Kingston in 1982. This article describes the activities of the KFN over the past ten years. During this time, we partnered with organizations to protect several important sites; saw our membership increase significantly after having been constant for almost a decade, saw our conservation activities multiply under the leadership of far-seeing chairs of the Conservation Committee; and continued acquiring data about the environment, including intensive surveys at ten Bioblitzes. Our objectives remain to “protect, preserve, educate”.

Between 2000 and 2006, membership in the KFN was constant at about 300 individual and family memberships. In the past two years, this figure has increased to about 350. The increase in population and changing demographics of the Kingston region and continued interest in the environment are likely contributing factors. This is consistent with the interest shown by the general public when a bear (or elk!) strays into the more densely-populated areas of the region. John Critchley has been membership secretary over the entire period covered here, and his dedication

to the position is exceptional. He has maintained careful records and was instrumental in a review of membership expenditures, which resulted in revised membership fees and the creation of a new category of member (Young Adult) in 2006. This enabled us to place the KFN in a more stable financial position by applying sustainability principles to our own activities.

While adult memberships grew, the number of Juniors and Teens declined from a high of 80 Jrs. and 21 Teens in 2000 to 50 Jrs. and 6 Teens in 2006. Anne Robertson, with the help of Diane Lawrence and many others, continues to work tirelessly on the best junior program in Ontario. Diane received the Richards Education Award in 2008 from Ontario Nature. The exploding range of activities available to children makes it difficult to maintain the numbers of Juniors. This is a worrying trend and we continue to explore ways to encourage the next generation of field naturalists. Chris Grooms recognized this long before he became our current president, and proposed the establishment of a scholarship to encourage fourth-year Biology students to carry out Natural History work at the Queen’s University Biology Station. The membership responded to the appeal to raise funds for this scholarship, and with the help of a matching contribution by an anonymous donor, we delivered \$33000 to Queens. This fund also

commemorates our past honorary president, Bob Stewart, who was taken from us in 2006. Several articles in the Blue Bill (vol 53, no 3) reminded us of the many contributions Bob made.

We reached out to members through the internet. Our website at <http://www.kingstonfieldnaturalists.org> was started by Sharon David in the late 1990s and received an award for its design. It has since expanded and is a principal source of new members. It is also the location for the electronic BlueBill. Introducing this feature in 2009 reduced our environmental footprint and freed up funds used for printing and mailing the Quarterly Journal.

The Teens have continued to participate in alternate years in the Baillie Birdathon and consistently raise significant funds. On the passing of Nan Yeomans, a fund to support Juniors' involvement in the artistic appreciation of nature was created. With new media like digital photography available to capture impressions of the outdoors, children can develop their artistic talent. Adults have also embraced the depiction of nature and we have enjoyed the result at the December general meetings. This year, Carol Seymour and Rose-Marie Burke with the help of many others organized our first KFN sponsored art exhibition.

Anne Robertson did not limit herself to work with the young over the past ten years. She led about 200 rambles over that time. She is the organizer of the Bioblitz, during which about 75 dedicated members spend 24 hours at a

site (typically 100 acres) trying to inventory all living organisms. While there is a long history of KFN members participating in surveys sponsored by provincial or national organization, the Bioblitz is Our baby. This has seen us visit sites in all parts of the Kingston region at private properties, conservation areas and nature reserves. As well as an important documenting activity, it has bolstered our contact with other conservation-minded organizations and individuals.

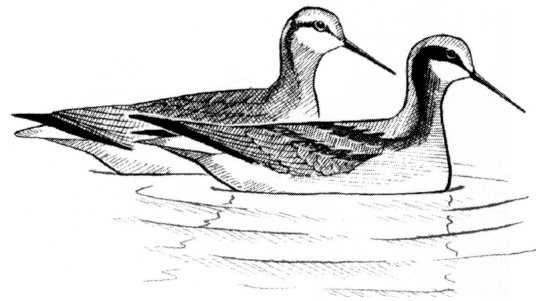
Two Bioblitzes were at sites being acquired by a conservation organization from a private owner. The Elbow Lake property was acquired by the Nature Conservancy of Canada from the Hewlett-Packard Corporation. Many KFN members contributed financially to this purchase. The Lost Lake property (part of the Bayview Bog) was acquired by the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority from the estate of the late Judge Henderson. In that case, the KFN noted that the Bayview Bog had been identified as a significant habitat in our region since the club's founding. We dug deep in our reserves and contributed \$44000 towards this acquisition. We contributed to other purchases of land by the CRCA (Muttart's: \$5000 in 2000, Parrotts Bay: \$5000 in 2004, Owl Woods: \$10000 in 2001), and recently to the enlargement of the Lost Bay Nature Reserve. The generosity of our members, both in time and money, has been incredible throughout the years.

The KFN remained involved with some of these newly-protected areas by

monitoring their environment. This was a deliberate change of direction for the club. In 2000, an *ad hoc* Properties committee, chaired by Anne Robertson, was formed to review the activities of the club in property acquisition. As a result, members of that committee went on to form the Kingston Frontenac Lennox and Addington Land Trust and the executive of the KFN decided to seek to acquire property only near our existing reserves on Amherst Island and the Helen Quilliam Sanctuary (HQS). In 2005, we were approached by the Natural Heritage Trust of Ontario to become the stewards of the Ted Greenwood Sanctuary, a property which is nearly adjacent to the HQS. Mike Evans, Nature Reserve Chair at that time, negotiated an agreement that will have us monitor this property until 2030. When a sign was erected at the entrance leading to the property, the HQS was the site of a moving ceremony remembering a great lover of nature, Ted Greenwood, as we have before remembered Helen Quilliam, Betty Hughes, Art Bell and others.

We continue to take pride in our two nature reserves. Over the past ten years, we made significant changes to the Amherst Island property. We fenced the lake side of the property, built a solar-powered watering system and installed several Purple Martin houses. We continue to collaborate with Ducks Unlimited and participated financially in an upgrade of the control structure in the man-made ponds. All of this would not have been possible without the work of Chris Grooms, George Vance, Mike Evans and Jay McMahan. George

Vance received the W. W. H. Gunn Conservation Award in 2004 from Ontario Nature. At the HQS, we continue to maintain the trails and the habitat as undisturbed as possible. We have coped with some vandalism and the illegal cutting of trees on our property and succeeded in having a structure built on our property without our knowledge removed. Without the vigilance of members living near our reserves, it would be difficult to maintain these two properties and the nesting population of Wilson's Phalarope on Amherst and Blanding's Turtle at HQS just to name two very special species.



KFN members continue to collect Natural History data. We conducted fall and spring bird round-ups, Christmas Bird Counts in the Kingston, Napanee, Delta, Amherst Island and Prince Edward County and Lake Ontario Winter Waterfowl Surveys, all compiled by Ron Weir with timely summaries in the Blue Bill. We took part in the second Breeding Bird Survey of Ontario. These data were included in the new edition of Ron Weir's **Birds of the Kingston Region** published in 2008. We also shared our bird observations through the internet. Bob Sachs began disseminating our weekly bird

observations electronically in 2000 and Peter Good continues to do so today. We participated in surveys of Red-shouldered Hawks, Loggerhead Shrikes, Chimney Swifts and Short-eared Owls.

In recent years, we advanced knowledge of butterflies and dragonflies in our region. Bruce Ripley and Kurt Hennige compiled summaries of observations of Butterflies and Odonates respectively, which were published in the Blue Bill. Several species were documented for the first time in our area. We also monitored wetlands and recorded flowering dates for plants as part of provincial programs.

To encourage these species to continue to thrive in our region, the Conservation Committee worked to protect their habitat. The chairs of that committee have commented on proposed residential developments at Cataraqi West and at the Little Cat, on the quarry at Mellon Lake and on wind turbines projects on Wolfe Island, Amherst Island, Prince Edward County and Kingston. They have encouraged protections of wetlands within the Kingston Wetlands Working Group; they have asked for mitigation at construction projects on highway 401, at Mitchell Creek and on Counter Street and Centennial Drive; they have supported tree and pesticide bylaws for the city of Kingston. As well as reacting to proposals, the committee has been proactive and Sharon Critchley spearheaded the report on the Little Cataraqi area which evaluated the environmental significance of the area in

the southeast of the penitentiary farm. This earned her the CRCA Foundation Conservation Award in 2005. With foresight and perseverance, this committee has given us the tools to comment intelligently and rationally on future development proposals.

Over the last ten years, we have had five presidents. Sid Andrews, Bud Rowe, Erwin Batalla, Hugh Evans and Chris Grooms. Sid has moved out west but remains a life member of the club. The other four can often be found shoveling crushed stone on the Amherst Island property or setting a tent at the Bioblitz or taking part in a bird round-up. They are definitely a hands-on group. Surrounded by an outstanding executive that includes members like John Critchley, Rose-Marie Burke and Anne Robertson who have been serving for the entire decade, these presidents cannot help but make our club the successful organization that it is.