



# The Blue Bill

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Submissions should be in MS Word format or in "plain text" format (PC or Macintosh) or unformatted in the body of an e-mail.

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## President's Page

*Hugh Evans*

The very enjoyable May dinner meeting marks the end of general meetings for another year. Its success was due to hard work on the part of many volunteers, in particular Alexandra Simmons who oversaw the event with the help of ticket sellers John Critchley, Jackie Bartnik and Norma Graham. The excellent meal provided by the Italo-Canadian Club was much appreciated. Adrian Forsyth gave us a very interesting talk on the role of land purchases in preserving biodiversity in the neotropics. A thoughtful discussion of the many issues that are involved was illustrated by a description of the success at Monteverde in Costa Rica and preserves in Peru. The silent auction went well, thanks to Peter and Lorraine McIntyre and the donations of club members. The desire of attendees to acquire a treasure at a bargain price always helps.

The KFN has taken a number of important actions in the past year to promote interest in conservation and appreciation of the environment. In the fall, steps were taken to establish the Kingston Field Naturalists Award for the Queen's University Biological Station (QUBS) by the donation of \$15,000 to Queen's. This award is established in memory of Dr. Robert Stewart (Bob), past president and longtime member of the KFN. The award has since been approved by the University senate, and will be given for the first time in the 2007-2008 academic

year. It will go to an undergraduate student for study at QUBS in conservation science or natural history. I would like to thank Chris Grooms, vice president, for spearheading the scholarship establishment.

It is with great satisfaction I can report that the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority has acquired the Bayview Wetlands. This area, just west of Kingston and north of Taylor Kidd Blvd, is 700 acres of some of the most biodiverse land in this area. Members will remember that the Bioblitz was held there last year. The KFN contributed to the acquisition by a donation of \$44,000, which should give us additional satisfaction that the area will continue to be preserved.

Faith Avis is our new Honourary President replacing Bob Stewart, who passed away last June. We are indeed fortunate that Faith will provide the wisdom and knowledge of experience to the executive. There are a number of other changes in the KFN executive. Susie Rance and Howard Bridger have stepped down to be replaced by Alexandra Simmons and Janis Grant. Susie has handled the demanding duties of the editor of the Blue Bill since 2003. Thanks very much Susie for a job well done. I know Alexandra will continue the great tradition. Janis is replacing Howard as member-at-large.

The development of a reliable system for monitoring the supply of water for

the cattle on the Amherst Island property has progressed well. A new alarm system has been installed which should alert us through an alarm company if the water trough fails to fill. This system will replace the monitoring provided by residents of Amherst Island last summer. I would like to thank them and those who responded when pumping of water from the lake was required.

The many activities of the KFN are described in the annual reports of the executive that appear in this Blue Bill. I have been very impressed by the diverse activities of the executive and volunteers that make the KFN run smoothly. Thank you all for a successful year.

*Hugh Evans*

## Search for the West Virginia White

*Bruce Ripley*

A sunny day with partial clouds, little wind and a temperature of 18 degrees made for great conditions to search for early-season butterflies at the Helen Quilliam Sanctuary on May 9th. A group of twelve nature enthusiasts ventured into the north woods to search for the provincially rare West Virginia White butterfly (*Pieris virginiensis*), which is found in only a few other locations in Ontario and only during May and early June. Surprisingly, there were almost no Black Flies around.

The seldom-observed West Virginia White is locally common because of the occurrence of the Toothwort plant, on which this species of butterfly lays its eggs and on which the caterpillars feed. Two species of Toothwort, Toothwort (*Cardamine diphylla*) and Cut-leaf Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*) are found in the Kingston area, and both are host plants for the West Virginia White. We were able to locate an area with a small patch of Toothwort in bloom.

After a long search in this area, we

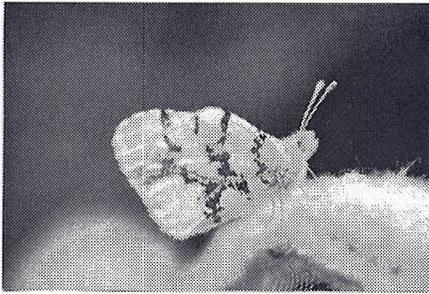


Toothwort by Bruce Ripley

located a few West Virginia Whites. Some other wildflowers noted include White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*), Red Trillium (*Trillium erectum*), Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), May Flower (*Hepatica americana*), Early Saxifrage (*Saxifraga virginiensis*), Large-flowered Bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*), Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*) and Pale Corydalis (*Corydalis sempervirens*).

Identifying the West Virginia White is a bit of a challenge, as there are three similar-looking species of white

butterflies found in the same area at the same time of year. These are the Mustard White (*Pieris napi*), Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*) and the stunning Olympia Marble (*Euchloe Olympia*), always a prized find with its greenish yellow marbling on the underside of the hindwing and a pinkish cast over the wings. With the aid of an identification handout, the group managed to capture and identify all four species of white butterflies and then safely release them back into the wild. Some of the butterflies stayed motionless long



Olympia Marble by Murray Seymour

enough for people to take close-up photos.

Other butterflies identified were 3 Juvenal's Duskywing (*Erynnis juvenalis*), 1 Columbine Duskywing (*Erynnis lucilius*), 4 Henry's Elphin (*Callophrys henrici*), 5 Eastern Pine Elphin (*Callophrys niphon*) and 2 Spring Azures (*Celastrina ladon*). Common dragonfly species seen during the morning were the American Emerald (*Cordulia shurtleffi*) and a few Common Green Darners (*Anax junius*), a couple of Hudsonian Whitefaces (*Leucorrhinia hudsonica*) and one species of unidentified damselfly. A baby Midland Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta marginata*) the size of a loonie was moved off the road after being closely observed by all. Six pairs of mating American Toads (*Bufo americanus*), observed at close range depositing their long strings of eggs, was a highlight for some and a good way to end the day.

## Kingston Field Naturalists 2006-2007 Annual Report

### Conservation *Elaine Farragher*

#### *Official Plan*

All studies from Transportation to Natural Heritage, were received by the Planning Committee in June 2006, and were given to the consultant to develop a draft New Official Plan for the City of Kingston. In November and December the City held public workshops to obtain input on planning issues, at which KFN members participated by filling out kits and participating in

discussions. A Draft Official Plan is expected in the spring, at which time further public consultations will be held. The KFN is stressing the importance of wildlife corridors, buffers around streams and wetlands and preserving natural areas by limiting urban sprawl.

#### *Central Cataraqui Region Natural Heritage Study*

The Central Cataraqui Region Natural Heritage Study was completed in June. Carolyn Bonta, KFN's representative on

the committee, gave the study a stamp of approval.

### *Cataragui West*

In June 2006, the City Planning Committee recommended that the woods between the Collins Creek wetlands and the new development be bought by the city to be preserved as public open space. The KFN addressed the Planning Committee on June 15 2006, asking that the public pathway be moved from the bottom of the slope next to the marshland to the top of the slope between the woods and the development. Comments about stormwater runoff, public information packages and the provision of public outlooks over the marsh were also made.

### *Pesticide Bylaw*

On January 9th 2007 Council voted unanimously to direct the Environment, Infrastructure, and Transportation standing committee to make recommendations on a bylaw to eliminate the use of cosmetic pesticides by May 1st. At the first meeting of the committee on February 8, members voted unanimously to direct city staff to present five different bylaw models, including the Peterborough model as potential candidates.

### *Mitchell Creek*

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment required the Township of South Frontenac to carry out an Environmental Assessment of Mitchell Creek. The Township hired Ecological Services for this purpose. In September, the KFN and Ontario Nature both sent

out Action Alerts about the bridge. However, late in 2006 the township received funding for the bridge rebuilding. The decision on the Mitchell Creek Bridge was posted on the Environmental Registry on March 8, giving the go-ahead to build the higher bridge.

### *Collins Creek Watershed Greenbelt Corridor*

Loyalist Township and Kingston have recommended that their planning staff examine a regional open space system for the Collins Creek watershed, as well as the Bayview Bog. The KFN has been named as one of the stakeholders when a committee is eventually formed by the CRCA. The KFN has not yet been approached.

### *Frontenac Arch Conservation Partnership*

On October 13, 2006, Ontario Nature convened a workshop attended by groups such as MNR, Nature Conservancy, and Parks Canada, to explore ways to promote interconnected core habitats and wildlife corridors in the Frontenac/Leeds/Grenville area. Sharon Critchley and Erwin Batalla represented the KFN. Another meeting was held on February 21, 2007, attended by Elaine Farragher and Chris Hargreaves, at which a working group with Chris Hargreaves as the KFN representative was formed to further discuss the concept.

### *Big Marsh, Amherst Island*

The KFN was approached by Murray Beckel, Loyalist planner, about making a contribution towards the acquisition by

Loyalist of 11.44 acres on Big Marsh. After visits to the site, the Conservation Committee recommended that no contribution be made, since the main beneficiaries would be local hunters who would gain easier access to the marsh.

#### *Tanner Drive Development*

A nursing home development off Tanner Dr., north of Bath Rd. was proposed in an area bordering Little Cataraqui Creek. The site plan showed parking and other built uses that fell well within the 30-metre buffer beside the creek. The KFN wrote a letter and read a statement at the Planning Committee meeting, supporting the position of the CRCA that the 30-metre zone had to be respected. The Planning Committee later ruled that the concerns of the CRCA and the KFN had to be satisfied.

#### *Airport Master Plan*

A proposed new Airport Master Plan would allow industrial-style hangars and buildings a mere 10 metres from the western boundary with Lemoine Point and necessitate the cutting of the woodlot in the southwestern part of the airport. As well, an extension of the north-south runway would allow approach lights over Collins Bay and Lake Ontario and the cutting of some trees to allow for those approaches. John Diemer and Chris Hargreaves attended public open houses and lobbied the committee. The KFN wrote a letter objecting to the proximity of the industrial buildings to Lemoine Point.

#### *Endangered Species Act*

A new Endangered Species Act for Ontario has been introduced in the Legislature. Elaine Farragher attended an Ontario Nature summit in Toronto and, together with Kurt Hennige, met with Kingston MPP John Gerretsen to urge the swift passage of the act before the end of the Liberal mandate in October. Letters in support of the act were collected from KFN members and given to Mr. Gerretsen during the meeting.

#### *Wind Turbines, Wolfe Island*

The main wind farm project in the Kingston area is going forward on Wolfe Island. The project consists of 86 turbines situated mostly in the western end of the island. The towers supporting these turbines are 80 meters tall and together with the turbine blades, their overall height is 130 meters. In February, two residents of Wolfe Island challenged the decision of the Township of Frontenac Islands to change the zoning bylaw specifying setbacks at 350 meters for these wind turbines. In March, members of the KFN attended a further open house on the project. The position of the 86 towers was indicated as well as the plan for limited lighting of towers at the perimeter of the project. We have written to the consultant to reiterate our concerns about impact on the wetlands at Sand Bay, Big Sandy Bay and Bayfield Bay. We are also inquiring about mortality studies at other wind turbine projects in Ontario and requested a clear protocol for shut-down if threshold fatalities occur for specific species groups.

**Field Trips***Kurt Hennige**Field Trips*

During 2006-2007, 18 field trips were conducted. Places visited included Wolfe Island, Prince Edward Point, Helen Quilliam Sanctuary, Napanee Important Bird Area, Lost Bay Nature Reserve, Amherst Island, Sandbanks Provincial Park & Beaver Meadow, Thousand Islands, Little Cataraqui Conservation Area and Presqu'île Provincial Park Brighton. Trip Leaders included Erwin Batalla, David Bree, Peter Good, Barry Hanna, Chris Hefferman, Kurt Hennige, Paul Mackenzie, Bruce Ripley, Bud Rowe, Owen Weir, Ron Weir. The KFN was joined by members of the Prince Edward County Field Naturalist on two field trips.

*May Bird Walks*

Eight walks were conducted by KFN birding experts on Wednesdays in May, at 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Six were at the Little Cataraqui Valley Lands Trail and 2 at Lemoine Point. These walks were open to the public. Leaders included Erwin Batalla, Hugh Evans, Ken Edwards, Chris Grooms, Kurt Hennige, Gerald Paul, Shirley Paul, Bruce Ripley, Bud Rowe, Paul Mackenzie, Owen Weir.

*Spring Roundup: May 20-21, 2006*

The annual May birding competition, where teams try to find as many species of birds as possible in 24 hours was co-ordinated by Ron Weir. Scores were tallied at the pot luck supper at the residence of Joel and Marion Ellis.

*Fall Roundup: November 4-5, 2006*

The annual November birding competition, where teams try to find as many species of birds as possible in 24 hours was co-ordinated by Ron Weir. Scores were tallied at the pot luck supper at the residence of Joel and Marion Ellis.

*Christmas Bird Count Dates and Co-ordinators*

Sat. Dec. 16: Prince Edward Point; *Joel Ellis*

Sun. Dec. 17: Kingston; *Ron Weir*

Wed. Dec 20: Westport; *Ethel Green*

Tue. Dec. 26: Thousand Islands; *Ken Robinson*

Thu. Dec. 28: Rideau Ferry/Smiths Falls; *Jean Griffin*

Fri. Dec. 29: Amherst Island; *Janet Scott*

Sat. Dec.30 : Napanee; *Ann Brown*

**Nature Reserves** *Mike Evans**Helen Quilliam Sanctuary*

Fourteen members spent an exceptionally warm morning clearing and marking trails and removing roadside garbage at the Helen Quilliam Sanctuary. A few large fallen trees need to be removed this summer. Thankfully, no large items had to be removed, unlike the previous April when we found that an air-conditioner had been rolled down one of the steepest parts of the roadside. As reported last year, the buildings constructed at the northwest corner of our property by our neighbour

have been removed, thanks to pressure from the township council. We were recently advised that our application for inclusion under the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program has not been approved by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, as the sanctuary does not abut Frontenac Provincial Park, nor is it an ANSI. We can reapply on the basis that the area is habitat for several species at risk. However, the presence of such species has to be confirmed by staff from the ministry's Natural Heritage Information Centre in Peterborough. Meanwhile, our inclusion under the Managed Forest Tax Incentive was extended to the end of 2009, so property taxes will remain low for at least the next two years.

#### *Amherst Island Property*

Once again, there was much activity on Amherst Island as various members struggled to keep the cattle watering system operational. A number of improvements were made, including replacing the smaller plastic troughs with a concrete water trough, and a new solar panel to provide more power to the pumping system, the wind generator having been destroyed by a storm. Remaining problems with the shore well at times of low water in Lake Ontario require pumping water from the lake to fill the trough and the well, quite a challenge as it involves holding the intake pipe in the lake some distance from the shore to reduce the amount of algae drawn into the pump.

A monitoring system will be installed this summer to alert us when the trough water level is not being maintained, rather than relying on volunteers

checking the level. Among other improvements needed are new batteries. Once again the club is indebted to Chris Grooms and George Vance, who amongst the many volunteers who have strived to keep the system operating, have put in by far the greatest amount of time and effort.

The damaged control gate that keeps water in the wetland was to have been replaced by Ducks Unlimited this spring, with repairs to eroded sections of the berm to be made at the same time. Unfortunately, the contractor was unable to start work early enough to avoid risking disturbing the nesting phalaropes, so the work has been postponed to August.

Plans are being made to plant some trees on the property to make it more attractive to passerine migrants arriving on the south shore in spring. Willows have been planted at the southeastern corner close to the existing weather-beaten willows. The planting of a few deciduous trees along the central fence is also being discussed, the aim being eventually to provide alternative nesting sites for ospreys and other raptors rather than unsightly nesting platforms on poles. At one time, Bald Eagles nested in large deciduous trees on the island; it is worth trying to have this happen again

This year's Bioblitz will take place in mid-June on Amherst Island with the KFN and the Owl Woods as study sites. This will give us a better idea of the species present on these two properties and also allow club members, Amherst Islanders, and any other interested

people to become better acquainted with them.

### *Stewardship*

Monitoring of properties owned by other conservation organizations continued with Evan's Woods, Lost Bay and Mitchell Creek properties being visited this year. A trip to a fourth property, Roziland Island on Eagle Lake is planned for this summer. The Greenwood property acquired recently by the Ontario Heritage Trust has been added to the list of properties that the KFN has agreed to monitor and help manage. A visit by one of the Greenwood family will be organized this summer to unveil a sign indicating that the property, donated by Mary Greenwood in memory of John Edward Greenwood, will be known as The John Edward ("Ted") Greenwood Wildlife Sanctuary. A management plan will also be formulated with input from the OHT.

*Anyone interested in helping with preparing the plan, or with the monitoring any of the properties under KFN stewardship should contact the Nature Reserves chairperson, Mike Evans.*

### **Publicity/Newsletter** *John Diemer*

Members received a monthly newsletter that informed them of Club activities and interests, including monthly meetings, field trips, special activities, and conservation matters.

To inform the public about the Club and its activities, monthly meetings were advertised in the Kingston Whig and in

Kingston This Week. The only activities advertised as open to the public were the special bird walks held Wednesdays throughout the month of May.

Our ad was placed in the Kingston Whig's Spring and Fall Activity Guides and in the City of Kingston's Spring and Fall Leisure Magazines, and we also had a booth at the City's Spring Leisure Showcase to publicize our Club and activities.

### **Membership**

*John Critchley*

KFN currently has 331 paid adult memberships, including 18 Life members and 3 Young Adult members. The adult membership is almost evenly split between individual and family memberships, which increases the actual membership to 500 voting members. There are 50 junior and 13 teen memberships. Members will notice that their mailing label indicates the type of membership and the expiry date.

The system of sending out personalized renewal notices is working very well. The majority of members renews their membership before the end of the fiscal/membership year, and receives their Membership Cards with the May Newsletter. For those who haven't renewed, a second renewal reminder (yellow) is included in the May Newsletter. These renewal notices form part of the hard copy audit trail necessary for tracking payment of membership fees and donations so it is important to return them.

John Critchley also prepares all mailing labels and thanks volunteers Audrey

Brown and June Fitchett, who fold and mail the newsletter and Norma Graham who mails *The Blue Bill* and on occasion does double duty for the combined mailing of *The Blue Bill* and the newsletter.

### **Junior Naturalists** *Anne Robertson*

This year, 52 members registered in the Junior program and enjoyed a mixed program of 16 meetings and 5 field trips.

Topics this year included Lepidoptera, Shorebirds, Seed Dispersal, Guts, Canidae, Ears, Rocks and Minerals, Invertebrates in the House, Adaptations, Fish, Turtles and an advocacy meeting on endangered species as well as the usual May Bird Walk and our Wild Food Picnic – the 23rd! The annual Orientation and the Seasonal Craft meetings round out the 16 indoor meetings. Each meeting has a hands-on portion on the topic of the day as well as demonstrations on the topic and discussion on a nature note, a challenge, a mystery guess and trivia on the topic.

Our field trips went to Little Bluff Conservation Area in October and Portland Conservation Area in November. In January the field trip was cancelled, but in February we visited the Bayview wetlands, and in March we went to the Depot Lakes Conservation Area. Our cleanup trip this year went to the KFN Amherst Island property.

We had three sub-groups this year, and due to pressure of other activities we assigned three or more leaders, who rotated leadership roles, to each group.

We thank the following leaders for their interest and patience: Rebecca Mezciems (second year), Rebecca Spaulding (second year), Amelia Fong, Colleen Sutton, Emma Siemiatycki, Gillian Piggott, Jason Raine, Jesse Chambers, Katy Knight and Wendy Chui. Diane Lawrence very ably managed the meetings when I was away. She is a terrific source of inspiration and support. **Thank you all!**

A member certificate was given out to individuals with a year of membership stamp. Further stamps will be given each year of membership. T-shirts and sweat shirts were sold at cost to members. A new "The Loon, Nature News" newsletter was published twice during the year by Shirley French. This colour newsletter aimed at Junior members had nature articles of topical interest locally and around the world, as well as puzzles and lots of pictures.

Two prizes were presented this year: the Nan Yeomans prize for a nature journal was awarded to Phoebe Tietzen Braun, and the Roland Beschel prize for a summer project on a natural history topic with an emphasis on observation was awarded to Devin Graham-Ancsin. The Stirrett Scholarship for participation in a nature camp was not taken up this year.

Our Christmas collection this year went to support saving snakes through the Reptiles at Risk on the Road program. We collected \$85.00. Cards signed by the Juniors were sent to Premier Dalton McGuinty urging a new strong endangered species act and a large stuffed paper turtle with a conservation

message on each scute was given to the Hon. John Gerretsen MPP

We have had a good year and continue to enjoy sharing our passion for nature with young people.

### **Teen Naturalists**     *Anne Robertson*

Thirteen Teen Naturalists registered in the program this year. In addition, the two oldest members of the Junior group were invited to the meetings in the Fall. Two more Juniors joined the group after Christmas. This is a good increase of Teen members over the numbers for 2005/2006. We had ten trips and covered a variety of locations and activities. Adult member role models and drivers on trips are much appreciated. Diane Lawrence is a co-leader of this group and a wonderful source of ideas. **Thank you all.**

Our first trip of the year was the September Monarch butterfly tagging trip. This was most successful and is written up in *Blue Bill* Vol. 53 No. 4. In October, we had an exciting trip to the Moira Cave led by an experienced spelunker. This trip was also written up in *Blue Bill* Vol. 53 No. 4. Our November meeting was a workshop to learn about recognizing bird songs. A test before and after the workshop showed good improvement in recognizing songs. In December we went for a Big-hike-in-the-cold in the Helen Quilliam Sanctuary. January and February were not good for cross-country skiing this year. In January we went to Big Sandy Bay on Wolfe Island and saw a good list of bird species including snowy owls, as

well as walking along the beach to the marsh and discussing bay mouth bars. We went to the Robertson cottage in February and learned tree identification and land classification of forest habitats. Waterfowl was the topic for March and we went to Presqu'île Provincial Park. Unfortunately, the conditions were not good but we enjoyed ourselves anyway. The April trip was for shrike habitat improvement on the Scheck site of the NCC (Nature Conservancy of Canada) where we had fun piling brush. In May we held our Baillie Birdathon and in June a canoe trip to monitor an island in Eagle Lake for the NCC. Some members may participate in the Bio-Blitz in June.

Part of all our Teen trips is writing up a field notebook so that the outings can be recorded. This is good practice as well as helpful in reviewing the topics covered on the trip be it what clothes work for the weather that day, what is good for lunch or what the terrain is like or a list of the species seen, research done, photos taken and so on.

We learned a lot and had many memorable times together.

### **Rambles**     *Anne Robertson*

Twenty-one rambles were held in the April 2006 to March 2007 year with an average of 13 people attending out of 64 different members who went on at least one ramble. The maximum number of participants was 26 in May and the minimum six in March at -20C plus wind at Belle Island. These numbers show an increase in the number of

members participating compared with last year (64 vs.47).

Rambles covered the area from Napanee to Verona to Gananoque. Amherst Island and Helen Quilliam Sanctuary properties were visited, we visited the properties of three club members and we had six rambles within the city limits. Many thanks are due to the members who led rambles in my absence including Erwin Batalla, Paul Mackenzie, Bud Rowe and Karen Stinson.

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> year of rambles. The interest and expertise is shared by the participants and continues to be interesting and stimulating.

## Education

*Shirley French*

This year I published a fall and spring newsletter for the junior and teen naturalists. The goal was to provide information about recent discoveries in science pertaining to nature, have a section where kids could speak out and answer fun questions, and give a few puzzles for the kids to do. The publications were printed in colour with the intention of making the newsletter more "eye catching". Anne Robertson and Diane Lawrence provided constructive input into the editing, and Anne followed up with discussions about the newsletter in her junior and teen naturalist program. KFN members generously provided nature photos to include in the newsletter.

KFN members Diane Lawrence, Erwin Batalla, Eleanor Porteous, and Shirley French judged natural history projects at

the 2007 Frontenac, Lennox & Addington Science Fair. Three students at the junior level were awarded first and second place prizes. One student collected samples and looked at acidity in Antarctic waters, the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Ontario. He made interesting observations about the wildlife that he had seen and was quite knowledgeable. The other project was on reefs and two girls worked together to get an understanding of the threats to this habitat, and were informed about the biology of reefs. The Stirrett Prizes consisted of \$100 in total for book gift certificates.

A workshop on Citizen Science is being coordinated by Oliver Reichl of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park. Co-workers Chris Bellemore, Brian Farkas, and Josh Van Wieren will demonstrate how to monitor forests and wetlands in the Gananoque Wildlife Reserve. This event is on May 12<sup>th</sup>, in Gananoque. I hope we can use similar criteria for monitoring the wetlands and owl woods on Amherst Island during the BioBlitz.

## Guest Speakers *Chris Grooms*

The speakers and their topics presented in 2006-2007 are listed below. More details are available at the KFN website at [kingstonfieldnaturalists.org/meetings.php](http://kingstonfieldnaturalists.org/meetings.php).

September: *John Smol*; Warnings from Lake Mud: Tracking Long-term Environmental Change in the Arctic

October: *Joe Nocera*; How Birds Use Social Information to Solve Ecological Problems.

November: *Lonnie Aarssen*; Why are There So Many Small Plants?

December : *Members' Night*

January: *Robert Montgomerie*; How the Birds Got their Colours.

February: *Jody Allair*; The Return of the Bald Eagle

March: *Caroline Schultz*; Save the Boreal Forest: Ontario's Songbird Nursery

April: *Peter de Groot*; Polar Bear Mating Systems

May: *Adrian Forsyth*; Monteverde Then and Now: The Role of Land Purchase in Conserving Biodiversity in the Neotropics

## **The Blue Bill**      *Susie Rance*

The past year has brought another four issues of *The Blue Bill*, each with excellent contributions from KFN members and others. From field trip reports and seasonal birding summaries to tributes to missed Club members and their legacies, covering topics ranging from loons, scuttleholes, turtles, rocks, snakes and dragonflies to spelunking, photographing fungi, "BioBlitzing", tagging monarchs and reading tracks in the snow, this year's issues of *The Blue Bill* add to a growing wealth of natural history information, whose contents are now wonderfully indexed. Norma Graham has once again looked after the big job of handing out and mailing *The Blue Bill*-not to mention lugging it home from the printer first!

*All Club members are invited to contribute to The Blue Bill in the year to come.*

## **Ontario Nature**      *Jacqueline Bartnik*

As your Ontario Nature rep., I attended the Eastern Regional meeting on Nov. 4, 2006 in Almonte at Mill of Kintail. It was a great day but with a poor turn-out. All the clubs attending presented what had occurred throughout the summer. Our group was very active with rambles, field trips, meetings and projects, including ones on Amherst Island and the Bioblitz to name just a few. Our guest speaker Paul Egginton, a former Director of NRC addressed the issue of Climate Change, which led to several long discussions. The day was enjoyed by all. There is another regional meeting at the end of May in Pembroke.

I ordered two boxes (20 packages of cards in each) of Christmas cards and one box of hasty notes. We have approximately 10 packages of cards left from last year. We did not sell as many cards this year as in previous years. We sold all the old cards, however the 2006 cards still remain. We have 23 Christmas cards and 7 hasty cards left. All funds we given to our treasurer.

As your ON rep, I have been asked to set up a display for the International Flowing Match Sept. 18 to 22 2007. *Volunteers are welcome to help us man the display and spread conservation ideas. For more info contact Jacqueline at 613-531-3736 or [thegrump@kos.net](mailto:thegrump@kos.net)*

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## A Journey to Costa Rica, April 2007

*Chris Cannon*

Costa Rica is a splendid nature destination. It combines incomparable natural diversity with tropical climate and hospitable people, leaving us full of wonderful memories after a 12-day stay. Put Costa Rica together with Elderhostel's superb organization techniques, and you have a spectacularly delightful holiday. Virginia and I joined 16 Americans on this intimate review of Costa Rica's natural habitat. Flying from Syracuse New York, we joined the Americans, a guide, and our driver in downtown San José, and devoted most of the next 11 days to perfect eco-tourism.

### *Introduction to Costa Rica and our companions*

Both the country and our companions were full of contrasts. First, the companions. Two lived in Greenwich Village, while one came from the Ozarks. Two spoke with strong Brooklyn accents, yet their partners spoke "Long Island." Another spoke with a strong country accent but was not the guy from the Ozarks. At least ten demonstrated strong antipathy to George W. Bush, while one couple displayed stern silence during any political discussions. All were intensely curious, intelligent, and interested in everything from architecture to floral splendours.

Now the country of contrasts. Costa Rica encompasses hot, steamy

Caribbean tropical lowlands, 4,000 metre high mountains, 120 volcanoes, a hot dry Pacific coast, densely populated cities, and vast wildernesses. While the ATMs handle direct withdrawal from a Canadian chequing account in either Costa Rican or U.S. currency, and give you a choice of English or Spanish, the roads are frequently little better than cart tracks. Lodgings were universally well appointed, with great bathrooms, comfortable beds, and lots of space. Yet these same lodgings were often located two or three hours from any major road, down a bumpy narrow cart track.

Costa Rica's children set out for school in crisp uniforms, with hair newly groomed each morning. Yet these same children may wake up in a tin-roofed hut nestled tightly with dozens of similar huts bathed regularly in the dust from the dirt roads. A group of pre-teens whom we met at Poás Volcano National Park were keen to practice their English and were disarmingly friendly as they chatted with us. In addition to their English instruction, they also studied Mandarin and French. These future-of-Costa Rica young people bode well for the future of the country.

The Generation X and Y people who serve as guides have post-secondary education in natural resources management or eco-tourism, even as they may have grown up in poverty on a small rural farm. Our guide spent the

one slightly chilly morning (temperature around 15° Celsius) shivering in a jacket and gloves. He spends the bulk of the year, when not guiding, on the forested Pacific slopes in 40° temperatures managing a reforestation project.

Costa Rica has been an independent country for nearly two centuries. The "modern era" started after World War II, and the country shares a closer alliance with Great Britain than with Spain. The national sport is soccer, where neighbouring countries send professional-calibre baseball players to the Major League. Costa Rica disbanded its military in 1948, devoting the funds to education and health instead. Young square-jawed hunks that we'd usually see in a U.S. Marine T-shirt proudly wear T-shirts declaring that "we shut down our army in 1948."

Costa Rica did not electrify until 1954, yet even the tiniest hovel displays a rudimentary electrical connection. The country's leaders awoke to the need for protection of its natural heritage over 20 years ago. Previously heavily devoted to cattle grazing, banana plantations, and pineapple cultivation, Costa Rica is now naturalizing and/or reforesting much of its landscape. And establishing top-flight educational programs for its young focused on eco-tourism.

We certainly benefited from the wisdom of Costa Rica's leaders. Let me share with you a brief journey around the country.

### *Urban Costa Rica*

The city of San José combines a bustling downtown walkway full of people with cell phones, women bedecked in stiletto heels and tight-fitting pants. The workday seems to start around 6 a.m., and finish by 2 p.m. or so. Everyone hurries along the pedestrian piazza past endless shoe shops, fashion apparel stores, and cafés. Immediately outside of downtown, the streets are lined with small auto repair shops, vendors of equipment parts, and other tiny businesses. Residential neighbourhoods and businesses alike surround themselves with wrought-iron fences and razor wire.

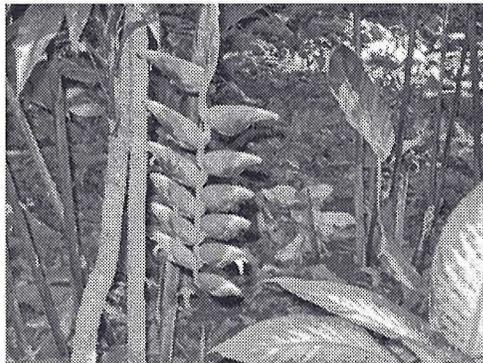
Spanish-language signage in Costa Rica is easy to read, devoted to simple messages (words are remarkably similar to French) and clear instructions. So Virginia and I had no trouble joining the locals in parading down San José's main street, purchasing bottled water, and looking into shops before we met the other Elderhostel tour participants.

Our downtown hotel was well appointed and featured the same fairly bland cuisine we experienced everywhere else in Costa Rica. Beans and rice (arroz con frijoles) for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Add wonderful fruits and melons for all three meals. Ensure the papayas are absolutely fresh and brilliantly orange-red. For breakfast, vary the repast with plenty of scrambled eggs. For lunch, perhaps fish (pescadaro) or chicken (pollo). Alter the colour of the rice and beans with a variety of spices. Put cilantro in nearly everything. And ensure lunch and

dinner are accompanied by wonderful berry or melon juices either mixed with milk or water. I ate enormous quantities of food for all three meals, every single day, yet didn't gain an ounce.

San José is in the highlands near the centre of the country. It enjoys a relatively temperate climate, and our visit coincided with the dry season. Each day featured ample sunshine, although the occasional rain shower dusted the leaves on the flowers, trees, and shrubs at night.

Did I say flowers? Costa Rica is in flower throughout the year. Orchids, bromeliads, bougainvillea, huge trees in full flower – flowers everywhere.



As we toured a coffee farm and the National Biodiversity Institute from our first stay in downtown San José, we looked up into the top branches of giant kapok trees, reached out to lush broadleaf deciduous shrubs, and watched over a dozen types of hummingbird drink from flowers at eye level.

### *The Caribbean tropical rainforest*

We left San José for the Caribbean lowlands, after passing through the mountains and stopping at Poás volcano

to see only a thick cloudbank where a spectacular crater should be. Despite the clouds, Poás was our first real opportunity to see the spectacular wild birds of Costa Rica, and we noted such aptly named birds as the “yellow-thighed finch.” Our destination was the Sarapiquí River, for a two-day stay at Selva Verde Lodge. The Sarapiquí flows into the Rio San Juan, which forms the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The San Juan opens into the Caribbean Sea, and our stay was near the edge of the Caribbean lowlands.

Traditionally a farming and ranching area, an Italian-by-birth Florida travel consultant saw the eco-tourism potential of the landscape around 20 years ago, purchased a significant tract of land, and founded a lodge that combines scientific research, tourism, and recreation. The Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Centre at Selva Verde Lodge involves the local community in conservation and ecotourism through education, community development, and fostering contact of tourists with the local residents. We spent a morning at this learning centre receiving instruction from a local resident in preparation of a dish made up of plantain chips and guacamole sauce. The instructor possessed only a few words of English, yet led the session with confidence though she likely had never ventured much beyond the tropical lowlands of her residence.

Housed in Selva Verde's luxurious clusters of screened haciendas, we closed the shutters at night and slept beautifully except for the rooster's announcements at 3 a.m. Typical of each

day outside San José, we began the day at 6am with a pre-breakfast birding hour, spent daylight hours exploring the natural environment or agriculture, and ended the day with a lecture on a relevant topic, presented by an expert in the discipline.

Here near the Sarapiquí, adventures included rafting down the river with expert guide, cooking instruction, and enjoying a beer (cerveza) after an afternoon swim. We relished a fascinating morning visit to a banana plantation, again with expert guide showing us all aspects of banana cultivation and harvest. Now we look at bananas in a whole new way!

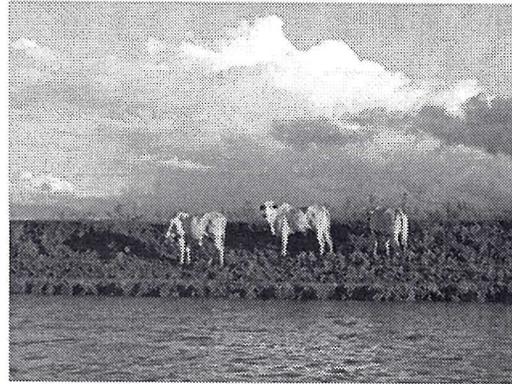
I remain impressed with the vision of the Holbrook family at Selva Verde, their community outreach, and their protection of this tropical rainforest environment. Our evening lecturer helped us better understand the importance of tropical rainforests to the world's ecosystem, and also demonstrated the superb education Costa Rica's young people are receiving.

### *Caribbean tropical wetland*

After two days in the tropical rainforest we clambered aboard the Toyota diesel bus (holds 20+ passengers, has a 4.4 litre engine and 5 speed transmission, carries suitcases in a roof rack, and negotiates the tightest hairpin turns with ease) and set out for Caño Negro, situated at a biological reserve protecting one of the country's most important wetlands. The last 20 km to Caño Negro is a one-lane dirt washboard track, negotiable at 20 km or less, and passes within seven kilometres of the Nicaraguan border.

This enabled dramatic birding discoveries.

The result was worth the journey. Comfortable accommodations and food left us well-rested and able to enjoy exploring the wetlands by boat and stroll through the tiny village of Caño Negro and soak up the traditional pastoral setting.



Each small house, typically with unscreened open windows and tin roof, had running water to a large sink on the porch, and clothes washing, dishes, and personal hygiene took place at the outdoor sink. Each house had freshly-washed clothing hanging from a line or spread atop a fence or shrub. Children went to school every day. The river served as a traffic artery, including for employees of a bar/restaurant whose clientèle came by boat or on horseback. A bus system enabled other locals to get to work at a farm, plantation, or local resort. No matter where we were in Costa Rica, residents appeared well served by bus service. In Caño Negro, in the middle of the wilderness, buses came down the dirt road every 15 minutes early in the morning!

While meandering through the nooks and crannies of the Caño Negro wetlands, we witnessed an amazing

diversity of wildlife, including a number of caimans plus more egrets and herons than I thought were possible. We breezed through the brief rain showers by ducking under the boat's canopy. My most precious tools were my waterproof binoculars and pencil plus notepaper. Local guides with capable English skills helped us identify the denizens of the wetlands.

### *Arenal volcano*

Inching our way down another 12 km of dirt road from Caño Negro, we finally reached a paved road heading southeast into the highlands and Arenal volcano. Among the 120 Costa Rica volcanoes, Arenal is the most active and spectacular. The present eruptive cycle began in 1968, reshaping the configuration of the peak (now peaks) immensely over the last 39 years. Volcanic gases killed two people just seven years ago, while they hiked an established trail heretofore considered safe. The trail is now closed.

The bustling town of Fortuna is the gateway to Arenal. Prosperous from tourism and quite urban despite its pastoral origin, the town features good restaurants, interesting shops, and a "bustle" that contrasts with the sleepy farm villages such as Caño Negro. Our eyes popped at the grandeur of our accommodations, situated immediately across the valley from the volcano. Our lodgings, Arenal Paraiso, consisted of lavishly furnished independent cottages, each with a large veranda looking directly at the volcano. Certainly worth a week's stay.

Exploring the grounds at Arenal Paraiso, we found a series of hot springs linked by tumbling hot water, terminating in a swimming pool with wet bar. Just think about sitting in a natural hot spring with hot water cascading down your back, surrounded by tropical plants and perching toucans, gazing over the valley to steam rising from the volcano. Luxury indeed!

Nearby but away from volcanic risk, Arenal features a hanging bridges system of trails within a tall highland forest canopy. We walked the trails and traversed the suspension bridges while looking down into the upper story of tropical trees dozens of metres in height. Monkeys peeked through the branches, while incredibly exotic birds such as the Great Curassow perched deep in the forest yet proved detectable to the intrepid birder. Streams of water cascaded down the canyon below us.



The Arenal volcano is currently around 1633 metres high. But its shape and height may change with each eruption. At night when the clouds were absent, the volcano glowed pink with its constant indigestion. We sat on our veranda after a sumptuous dinner and watched the volcano change colour. And awoke early to watch the volcano

again. We could hardly tear ourselves away to start the next adventure.

### *Toward the Pacific coast*

Crossing the continental divide into rivers that flow toward the Pacific Ocean, we headed toward Manuel Antonio National Park and the northwest tropical dry forests of Costa Rica's more traditional tourist areas. En route we enjoyed a crocodile safari on the Tarcoles River. This river drains the entire west side of Costa Rica's central valley, is fairly polluted, yet hosts a diversity of wildlife along its banks and in its mangrove areas.

Proceeding from the Tarcoles River to our nighttime destination, we first spotted Scarlet Macaws courting, then bounced on unpaved washboard roads that had been ostensibly under construction for the past 25 years. Dwellings clustered close to the dusty road, and freshly scrubbed children set out for school through the choking dust. We sighed as we reached our lodge, as rooms were not far back from the road. However, turning on the fan at night shut out the noise of bouncing trucks and cars.

The next morning we set out across the most rustic bridge imaginable to reach Manuel Antonio National Park and its beautiful beach. The bridge was barely wider than our bus, and we could see water through gaps between the loosely scattered planks. But we made it, and walked around 500 metres across sandy pathways to reach a spectacularly beautiful beach. Meanwhile, monkeys, exotic birds, a sloth, and tiny white-tailed deer encouraged us on.

It was hot and sunny. The sand did not become too hot underfoot, but the salt water was almost too warm. Us "elders" of Elderhostel played in the warm water with abandon. I declined to rinse off the salt, as I seldom get an opportunity to enjoy salt water. Changing clothing at our lunchtime stop, we next hopped aboard a small boat for a tour of Damas Island, off the Manuel Antonio beach area.

Our guide and her family were originally from Switzerland, and settled on a Costa Rica farm around a decade ago. Barbara had a degree in art history, yet was by now an expert in the flora and fauna of the mangroves. Typical of the expatriates we met, Barbara spoke fluent Spanish and English as well as German, moved to Costa Rica for its wide-open spaces and serenity, and never intended to return to her homeland. We spotted monkeys, lurking herons, sloths, and a silky anteater as we gently glided through the passageways around the island.

### *Into the mountains*

Then on by bus to the San Gerardo de Dota valley. Crossing the coastline mountain range toward the Pan American Highway, we climbed to several thousand feet seemingly straight up. On tight switchback roads, we simply crawled because of the steep grades, all the while catching glances back over our shoulders to the Pacific Ocean. At the top of the first mountain range we stopped for lunch at what appeared to be a hovel. One of our passengers said "you've got to be kidding". But our attitudes changed

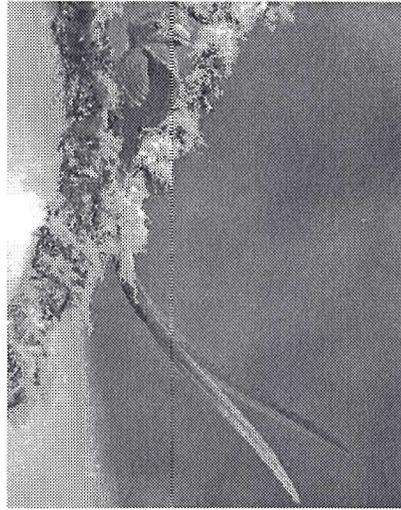
when we went into the restaurant: a spectacular view westward across the mountains toward the Pacific, an incredible diversity of bird life, terrific Costa Rican food, decent plumbing facilities, and interesting conversations with other guests.

One couple with two small children spoke with English accents to us, but in Spanish to the staff. The husband had left his high-powered London England barrister position to buy 150 acres near Costa Rica's border with Panama, and his wife says he's happiest when wielding a macheté in the wilderness. Two fellows who spoke vernacular Spanish to the staff looked straight from Marlboro cigarette advertising. One was from British Columbia while the other was from Texas.

We were in no hurry to leave. But our destination beckoned. This last overnight before San José begged for a much longer booking. Partly because of its spectacular natural setting and specialized bird habitat, and partly because of its cultural history.

San Gerardo de Dota is a small, secluded valley high in the Talamanca mountain range. The valley is nearly impenetrable and quite isolated from civilization. Surrounding mountains are around 2,500 metres high and plunge precipitously into the valley (so does the road). The forest cover is dense. This forest provides perfect habitat for the aptly named Resplendent Quetzal – one of the most beautiful birds in the world. The male is turquoise on its head, back, and tail, and a brilliant crimson on its lower breast. Its tail feathers are a foot or more in length, such that the quetzal

must back into its nesting cavity. Resplendent plumage indeed. And we saw one.



But the history of the valley and its settlement is even more interesting. In 1954 a poor farmer and his brother got lost while hunting for food for their families. They strayed into the valley, found a cave for shelter, and stayed a few days until they could safely find their way back home across the mountains. The farmer returned again and again to hunt and explore the valley, returning to the family homestead once or twice a month. He lived in the cave for several years, then built a rudimentary shelter and moved his family to the valley.

In Costa Rica, one could establish land ownership by occupying and working land for a few years, and this farmer and his family, living in total isolation, managed to feed themselves through hunting and subsistence agriculture. A number of years passed, and the children had no opportunity for schooling. Then the government continued building the Pan American

Highway southward, passing only nine kilometres from the valley.

The farmer, Mr. Chacon, was now able to improve his trail out of the valley and make weekly trips to San José to sell cheese. And finally join the cash economy. One thing led to another for this man of vision. First he met an American who supplied him with fingerling trout for the nearby river. The trout thrived, the family ate well, and other Americans sought fly-fishing opportunities. Mr. Chacon built a couple of cabins for these fishermen, and marveled at how they would catch fish and release them again rather than rely on the fish fillets for the dinner table.

With some improvements in access to the valley, Mr. Chacon hired a permanent schoolteacher for his children, who took up residence in the valley. Staff were hired to support the tourist operation, and it thrived. In 1985 government representatives visited the valley to encourage reforestation so that quetzal habitat would be preserved. Mr. Chacon saw the merits of eco-tourism and instead of expanding his cattle operation, he listened to government representatives, planted apple, peach, and avocado trees and improved the

lodgings for guests. His offspring and his brother's offspring now run a handsome lodge. Grandchildren have university educations. Mr. Chacon continues in his eighties to look ahead to 2050 and beyond, and believes his operation should grow no more or the ecology of the region would suffer. We met Mr. Chacon's son Marino, who was born in 1952. Marino is a man of great warmth and charisma, and told us of walking into this valley for the first time when he was seven years old, never to see the inside of a schoolhouse again. He remembers not having enough to eat, yet now sends his own children to university, is a naturalist guide, and shares management responsibility for a beautiful resort called Savegre Lodge with 28 employees. A writer is at present putting the Chacon family history into book form. We hope for a movie.

I'm not sure which is more memorable, Marino Chacon or the Resplendent Quetzal. But I'd welcome a return to Costa Rica, and recommend spending a week at Savegre Lodge and a second week at Arenal Paraiso.

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## Teen Forest Survey Trip February 10, 2007

### *Fenris McCabe*

This trip was very fun, and seemed to include enough running around in snowsuits (in some cases black and lined!) to give a workout to an Olympic runner! The day started with everyone gathering and discussing what we were going to be doing. After that, we drove

to the Robertson property on North Otter Lake and found a wide variety of trees which we learned to identify, as well as some animal tracks and scat and a couple of insects. Things that were found included a mouse hole with scat and pee as well as, later on in the

journey, a woodpecker pellet full of ant skeletons. To sit in a warm little cottage and eat felt pretty important, so we did that and wrote everything down in our notebooks. We stood around a beaver lodge in the middle of a frozen pond for a while listening for possible sounds of movement or communication. (They weren't exactly talkative right then).

We then started work on identifying different kinds of forests using the Ecological Land Classification for Southern Ontario. Forests are divided into coniferous, mixed and deciduous. Within each of these categories, the forest is divided into fresh, moist or dry and then into the various species compositions. We identified an FOC1-2 which is a coniferous forest with dry to fresh soils and white pine. We measured the DBH (diameter at breast height) of some pines to get an idea of the size composition of the stand. We then checked out a deciduous fresh to moist oak-maple forest (FOD9-2) for comparison

This is what the weather was like (generally, since the whole day was changing): -5 Celsius, 27 centimeters snow, sun with cloudy patches. By the time we were on the way home, I was getting tired and out of food so I'd

consider it a good trip. Here is a list of the trees and animals that we found.

#### TREES

WhitePine  
 WhiteCedar  
 SugarMaple  
 White Ash  
 American Beech  
 RedOak  
 White Oak  
 BlackCherry  
 White Birch  
 YellowBirch  
 Hop Hornbeam (Ironwood)  
 Shagbark Hickory  
 Basswood *Note- You can eat the Basswood buds (tastes like peanut butter)*

#### ANIMAL TRACKS AND SIGNS

Mouse  
 Woodpecker  
 Deer  
 Weasel(?) tracks  
 Squirrel  
 Dog  
 Coyote  
 Fox(?) tracks  
 Chickadee  
 Stonefly

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### KFN Field Trip to Presqu'île March 11, 2007

#### Owen Weir

The spring waterfowl trip to Presqu'île, led by Owen Weir and Howard Bridger, took place on a beautiful spring-like day for March. We saw several thousand ducks including about 17 species. The trip included one rare species for this

area: a Barrow's Goldeneye, with everyone having great looks. Many thanks to Fred Helleiner for his hospitality by allowing us into his backyard to enable viewing.

## Field Trip to Amherst Island April 1, 2007

*Peter Good*

We boarded the 7:30 ferry, about a half a dozen cars in all. The sky was overcast, but the forecast promised that the rain would hold off until after noon. The ferry channel was wide open, but as far as you could see to the east and to the west the lake was still frozen. Two Double-crested Cormorants flew over as we left the dock. The plan was to visit the Owl Woods first but the road in from the north was still blocked by snowdrifts, so we proceeded along the North Shore Road towards the KFN property. At the northeast corner we observed two Snowy Owls on the ice, two Common Loons flew over and there were lots of diving ducks, most of which were too far away to be identified, in open leads out towards the Brothers Islands,

On the KFN property, an Osprey sat on one of the platforms and Tree Swallows flitted around just about every nest box. At the corral, we scanned the open lake and observed lots of Common

Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Long-tailed Ducks. We also had a second pair of loons and two Wood Ducks. The drive into the Owl Woods from the south shore was OK but muddy. Things were very quiet; a Purple Finch at the feeders and a flock of about a dozen Fox Sparrows moving along the north edge of the woods were the only birds of note. A Northern Flicker crossed our path as we drove out.

We then drove the rest of the South Shore Road all the way to the fishing village. There were a lot more ducks and one more Snowy Owl. At the Ducks Unlimited project at the southwest corner of the island there was a Pied-billed Grebe spending more time underwater than on top and a Great Blue Heron on a nest in the heronry off to the northeast. We concluded the day here with a very entertaining Carolina Wren that sang and showed off for several minutes

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## KFN Field Trip Prince Edward Point April 29, 2007

*Paul Mackenzie*

Dawn was overcast and drizzling, but the rain stopped and blue sky swept in as 14 hopefuls arrived at the Point in 6 vehicles. The leader would like to congratulate those who remembered to bring their binoculars and to retrieve all their belongings from the vehicles.

Along the back roads Eastern Towhee and Brown Thrasher were sitting up singing. We soon added Horned Lark, Savannah, Field and Chipping Sparrows, Meadowlarks, Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe. The winds were light (west), so we had good views of the

ducks along the north shore as we progressed. The two commonest were Red-breasted Merganser and Long-tailed Duck, the latter in every plumage conceivable. Common Loons, Cormorants, and White-winged Scoters were also diving and we soon picked out some Surf Scoters, Horned Grebes and 2 Red-necked Grebes.

As we drove along, White-throated Sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers were the main songsters until a House Wren bubbled at the roadside and this was a first for the year for most. The expected pockets of migrants were scanty. A Blue-headed Vireo showed well, but was alone. Even the woods at Point Traverse were rather quiet despite the hoards of midges. We found one Nashville Warbler, several Palm Warblers, 2 Pine Warblers, Winter Wrens, Hermit Thrushes and finally a

Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher. We observed activities at the banding station where many birds were being processed and the hummingbird feeders were awaiting their first visitors of the year. Maybe tomorrow!!

Lunch at the Lighthouse was glorious. Cliff Swallows were busy repairing their mud nests. High against the clouds was a small hawk flight that included Vultures, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk and some unidentified buteos. Another walk produced Sapsuckers and a Fox Sparrow. The bird species count was about 82. Non-feathered species included Cottontail Rabbit, Smooth Green Snake, Mourning Cloak Butterfly, Dutchman's Breeches, and Spring Beauty. Despite tick warnings, none were reported to the leader. Some of us enjoyed an ice-cream fix en route home.

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## Odonate Sightings 1 May to 15 June 2007

*Kurt Hennige*

The warm, often summer-like, weather over most of the period resulted in the emergence of many species by the middle of May. Almost a month separated the first sightings of some species near the Lake Ontario shoreline from their earlier emergence only 20 km to the north in the Canadian Shield. First sightings of species for 2007 are listed below. Since very little is known about their flight season, last sightings of the year are also important and can be sent to [Khennige@sympatico.ca](mailto:Khennige@sympatico.ca).



Twin-Spotted Spiketail

**New Species**

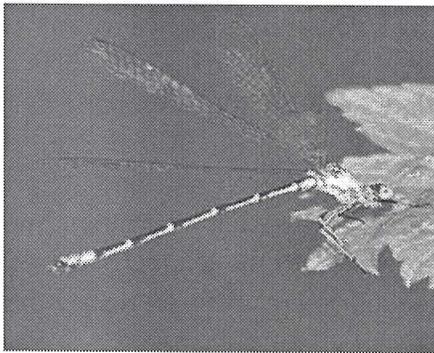
Beaverpond Baskettail (*Tetragoneuria canis*): 4 records; first Dragonfly observed this year

Kennedy's Emerald (*Somatochlora kennedyi*): 1 record - Leo Lake Road

Swift River Cruiser (*Macromia illinoensis*): 2 records - Salmon & Napanee River

Twin-spotted Spiketail (*Cordulegaster maculate*): 1 record - Maple Leaf Road

Horned Clubtail (*Arigomphus cornutus*): 2 records - Helen Quilliam Sanctuary

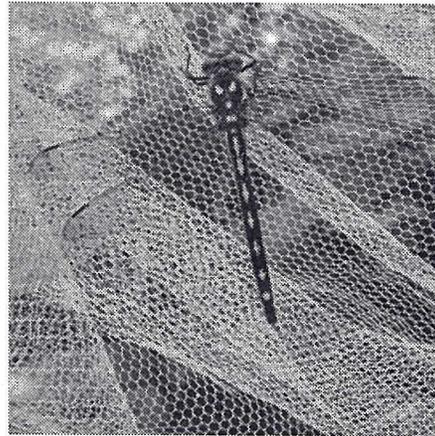


Aurora Damsel

Aurora Damsel (*Chromagrion conditum*): 1 record - Salmon River

**Rare Species**

The provincially rare Arrowhead Spiketail (*Cordulegaster oblique*) was observed in two locations in Frontenac & Leeds County with four individuals



Arrowhead Spiketail

in each location.

**First Sightings for 2007**

DATE	LATIN NAME	COMMON NAME	COUNTY	LOCATION
07/05/2007	<i>Tetragoneuria canis</i>	Beaverpond Baskettail	Lenn	Newburgh
09/05/2007	<i>Tetragoneuria spinigera</i>	Spiny Baskettail	Fron	Verona
09/05/2007	<i>Leucorrhinia hudsonica</i>	Hudsonian Whiteface	Fron	Verona
09/05/2007	<i>Cordulia shurtleffi</i>	American Emerald	Fron	Verona
10/05/2007	<i>Ischnura verticalis</i>	Eastern Forktail	Fron	Verona
09/05/2007	<i>Anax junius</i>	Common Green Darner	Fron	Verona

10/05/2007	<i>Basiaeschna janata</i>	Springtime Darner	Fron	Bedford
11/05/2007	<i>Gomphus spicatus</i>	Dusky Clubtail	Fron	Bedford
13/05/2007	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Four-spotted Skimmer	Leeds	Lansdowne
13/05/2007	<i>Leucorrhinia intacta</i>	Dot-tailed Whiteface	Leeds	Lansdowne
14/05/2007	<i>Ladona julia</i>	Chalk-fronted Corporal	Lenn	Odessa
23/05/2007	<i>Tetragoneuria cynosura</i>	Common Baskettail	Lenn	Newburgh
23/05/2007	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	Northern Bluet	Fron	Lake Opinicon
23/05/2007	<i>Didymops transversa</i>	Stream Cruiser	Fron	Lake Opinicon
23/05/2007	<i>Enallagma boreale</i>	Boreal Bluet	Fron	Lake Opinicon
24/05/2007	<i>Dorocordulia libera</i>	Racket-tailed Emerald	Fron	Lake Opinicon
24/05/2007	<i>Coenagrion resolutum</i>	Taiga Bluet	Fron	Perth Road
26/05/2007	<i>Leucorrhinia glacialis</i>	Crimson-ringed Whiteface	Fron	Cat. Trail between Hwy. 10 and Opinicon Rd.
27/05/2007	<i>Calopteryx maculata</i>	Ebony Jewelwing	Lenn	Millhaven
29/05/2007	<i>Erythemis simplicicollis</i>	Eastern Pondhawk	Lenn	Kingsford
29/05/2007	<i>Plathemis lydia</i>	Common Whitetail	Lenn	Napanee
29/05/2007	<i>Libellula pulchella</i>	Twelve-spotted Skimmer	Lenn	Napanee
30/05/2007	<i>Arigomphus furcifer</i>	Lilypad Clubtail	Lenn	Depot Lakes
30/05/2007	<i>Leucorrhinia frigida</i>	Frosted Whiteface	Lenn	Depot Lakes
30/05/2007	<i>Gomphus exilis</i>	Lancet Clubtail	Lenn	Depot Lakes
30/05/2007	<i>Leucorrhinia proxima</i>	Belted Whiteface	Lenn	Depot Lakes
30/05/2007	<i>Nehalennia irene</i>	Sedge Sprite	Lenn	Depot Lakes
30/05/2007	<i>Lestes inaequalis</i>	Elegant Spreadwing	Lenn	Moscow
30/05/2007	<i>Ischnura posita</i>	Fragile Forktail	Lenn	Moscow
04/06/2007	<i>Enallagma civile</i>	Familiar Bluet	Lenn	Amherstview

04/06/2007	<i>Libellula luctuosa</i>	Widow Skimmer	Lenn	Enterprise
06/06/2007	<i>Nannothemis bella</i>	Elfin Skimmer	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
06/06/2007	<i>Libellula incesta</i>	Slaty Skimmer	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
06/06/2007	<i>Celithemis elisa</i>	Calico Pennant	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
06/06/2007	<i>Pachydiplax longipennis</i>	Blue Dasher	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
07/06/2007	<i>Somatochlora kennedyi</i>	Kennedy's Emerald	Fron	Leo Lake Road
07/06/2007	<i>Epithea princeps</i>	Prince Baskettail	Fron	Leo Lake Road
07/06/2007	<i>Enallagma geminatum</i>	Skimming Bluet	Fron	Leo Lake Road
09/06/2007	<i>Lestes vigilax</i>	Swamp Spreadwing.	Fron	Collins Creek north of Talyor Kidd Rd
10/06/2007	<i>Cordulegaster obliqua</i>	Arrowhead Spiketail	Leeds	Burn's Lane
11/06/2007	<i>Argia moesta</i>	Powdered Dancer	Lenn	Millhaven
12/06/2007	<i>Enallagma exsulans</i>	Stream Bluet	Lenn	Napanee River Camden East
12/06/2007	<i>Macromia illinoensis</i>	Swift River Cruiser	Lenn	Napanee River Camden East
12/06/2007	<i>Arigomphus cornutus</i>	Horned Clubtail	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
12/06/2007	<i>Cordulegaster maculata</i>	Twin-spotted Spiketail	Fron	Maple Leaf Road
12/06/2007	<i>Nasiaeschna pentacantha</i>	Cyrano Darner	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
12/06/2007	<i>Aeshna canadensis</i>	Canada Darner	Fron	Helen Quilliam Sanctuary
13/06/2007	<i>Calopteryx aequabilis</i>	River Jewelwing	Lenn	Napanee River Camden East
14/06/2007	<i>Chromagrion conditum</i>	Aurora Damsel	Lenn	Salmon River 1 km west of Forrest Mills

### Contributors

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## The Dead Owl

*Terry Fuchs*

Late in the afternoon of the first warm spring day, the crisp golden sunlight entices me into taking my first recreational bicycle ride of the season. I have been cycling the two miles back and forth to work for a few days, but now, after work, I change into an old plaid mackinaw and swing my bike out of the subdivision where I live, onto the country road that separates it from sway-backed page wire fences, fields, and wood lots.

The roofs of the houses quickly recede behind the brow of a hill as I coast down the road. The subdivision probes east of the city in a postage stamp of arterial streets and oxbow crescents. As yet it has not managed, in forest-fire fashion, to leap the side road, although a large green sign in the fields beyond advertises another development scheduled to begin construction this spring. The sign announces a future community of luxury homes grouped under a name which implies that erecting houses will transform an empty field into a park. It seems no one is satisfied any more to buy the modest houses that my parents' generation set its sights on. We grew up in three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and one shared bathroom. Today the philosophy is a bathroom for every bedroom; we must have main-floor family rooms, fireplaces, master bedrooms as big as ballrooms, and two-car garages. However, in the case of the prospective neighbouring subdivision in the illusory park, it is now spring and, at

this writing, there is no evidence of any sod being turned.

When you turn into my subdivision from the highway, it has a countryish flavour, despite the shoulder-to-shoulder houses that appear to be clones of three or four prototypes. An ample green belt has been sliced from the field that these houses and streets now decorate, and, heading up the gently sloping avenue, you can see untouched fields and the crest of a wooded ridge behind the row of houses at the top of the street. On a sunny day the houses stand outlined against the sky as they might on the prairie.

The subdivision has a sweet country quiet, too. In the afternoons, with the sunshine glowing on the brick, the houses seem almost meditative. The first night I slept in my house, I was struck by the blackness and stillness of the August night outside the open window. After seven years of living in an apartment on a busy, well-lighted corner, I had stopped noticing the noise. Now I noticed the quiet. It made the trilling of the crickets sound like a clamour. The haunting, hammering throb of a distant freight train's diesels drummed close. Lying there in the dark, I was suddenly back in my grandparents' house, also on the edge of the country, listening to the same types of night sounds outside the window beside my bed: the sigh of leaves, the regular, indifferent chirp, like a

monitoring system, of the crickets in the inky well of lawn.

On spring nights, too early in the season for crickets, the stillness is crowded with the impetuous burbling of peepers, a million tiny chimes in the darkness. In the midst of this wild country music the big houses on the crescent behind me loom incongruously, their lighted windows against the blackness suggesting ships anchored on an ocean at night. There are still not enough lights in the neighbourhood to penetrate the night sky. Away from the dome of light that arches above the city across the river, the sky appears lower and, on clear nights, is a vast blueprint of stars and constellations, geometry whose points flicker and pulse. So far nature refuses to recognize our island of houses as suburbia.

On the side road, for the length of the hill, I am skimming through genuine, complete country. The back yards of the subdivision are out of sight, and tawny fields and the dull brown of hardwood bush abut the road. The constraints of property ownership and natural features have prevented and discouraged development. The fields south of the road, behind signs and fences, are part of the local military base and uncultivated; on the north, paralleling the road, a long half-moon of swamp is sandwiched between shallow fringes of hardwood. For the moment it takes to swoop down the hill, there is a blur of scrubby unclaimed land. It is only after I round the bend at the bottom that the countryside turns settled again, with a few widely spaced houses fronting the road. They represent

two periods in the evolution of rural living. (My subdivision represents a third.) They are all on oversize lots, but the older houses, clapboard or insulbrick, enlarged by patchwork additions as their owners could afford them, nestled in a practical, comfortable clutter of machinery parts, lumber, and outbuildings, are from that era after the Second World War when non-farmers built in the country because land was cheaper than in the city. The newer, ranch-style houses, each hidden behind tall, full cones of spruce trees in an acre of manicured grass, illustrate the modern tendency of the affluent to escape city life. Past all the houses, the road dead ends at an old grey farm that must have been its *raison-d'etre* in the first place. Just short of the farm lane, it loops back in a gravel turnaround for the snow plough. I make a sharp U-turn without entering the turnaround, which is littered with dark broken glass and the soggy, flattened contents of automobile ash trays.

Pedaling back up the hill, I go more slowly past the swamp. The creek draining it branches around two sleek boulders and, swollen at this time of year, ponds behind the culvert under the road. A band of woods climbs a slope to the swamp, ending atop a wall of granite that curves into the water. Craggy, the swamp is out of place in this rural landscape, a northern intrusion, a misplaced chip of the bony Canadian Shield surfacing among these rolling fields and wood lots. When I first moved into the subdivision, I would see small boys in rubber boots pedaling earnestly past my house with plastic

buckets liberated from their mothers' laundry rooms dangling from the handlebars of their bicycles. Morning, afternoon, and early evening they scurried back and forth, legs churning, buckets bumping bare knees. But not until I took my first ride down the side road did I find the frog-hunting grounds. In front of the swamp, the shoulder of the road was a tangle of bicycles tipped on their sides. The boys were wading in the creek to the red rims of their rubber boots, or perched on the rocks in the current, crouching over the water, poised to strike.

Today, still too soon for catching frogs, the boys have not yet rediscovered the swamp after the winter. Hushed and calm, it looks so alluring in the rich, smoky sunlight of the late afternoon that I cannot resist laying my own bike in the gravel of the shoulder and leaping the ditch. I hunch and push through the undergrowth to the bank, careful to hop from rock to rock because beneath the matted grass the ground is still boggy. In the slanting light even the muted spring tones are radiant. The brown of the woods has a warm coppery glow, and the rock face shearing into the water a faint blush. Sounds are pitched louder in the calm; the high fluty questioning notes of red-winged blackbirds are liquid and precise. The stillness is expectant, as if awaiting the hum and slap of car tires to tear through it. But no car comes.

I am totally, pleasantly alone. If the swamp has not yet been rediscovered this season, however, there are signs of its popularity in the past. Pop cans are pressed into the spongy grass, and near

the outlet of the swamp a submerged one is disturbingly vivid, as though magnified by the refraction of the light in the clear, shallow water. The undergrowth has snagged chip bags and chocolate bar wrappers. Sodden newspaper pages are plastered against trees. Kleenex has turned to mush under bushes. I feel sorry for the owner of the property; it suffers from its proximity to the road, a common problem, as avalanches of garbage down a scenic roadside ravine often attest. I think of a lake, north of the city, whose steep, rocky shore is just off the road, separated by a screen of pines that seem to quiver in the silver glitter from the water. Round and perfect, the lake is undeveloped; in the sandy bottom fish have flurried dishlike craters in which to lay their eggs. On hot summer afternoons and evenings there are cars pulled in among the trees. The drivers have left the doors open with the radios blaring while they and their passengers take turns swinging out from the cliff on a rope. Letting go, their bodies are momentarily spread-eagled against the sky before plunging like stones into the leaf-green water. Others sit on the ledge and cheer, their legs dangling, their wet bathing suits blotching the rock. Garbage is strewn everywhere, thick windrows of it under the trees, on the shore, beside the rocks. The cars drive over it, squashing the cans, popping the Styrofoam cups. Bottle caps stud the packed earth and pull-ring tabs, indestructible, glint in the grass. Sometimes beer bottles go bobbing down the lake like shooting-gallery ducks in the mellow light of a summer evening. Coming ashore, swimmers

touch their feet down very gingerly and only at the last possible moment, wary of all the broken glass glistening among the pebbly marl.

Here by the swamp, the vandalism of careless, thoughtless people is not yet that pervasive. As I step back to my bicycle over the thatched grass, I am placated by the countryside's perennial look of newness once the melting of snow and ice has unclamped it. In their hues of brown and grey the fields and woods stand revealed and fresh, glowing with promise. Labouring uphill, I am tempted to buy a true country house, an old farm. It is a notion I often toy with. In my mind's eye I can see the months-long succession of gentle evenings stretching ahead now into next fall: the yellow-green light under the maple trees, the sense of time suspended in the quiet of the country road on the other side of the fence. Like most people, however, I must have at least one foot in town. As often as I take to the woods and the lakes, on foot, on skis, or in my canoe, I always want to return to town eventually, to the accessibility of friends, grocery stores, restaurants, theatres. My suburban house is my compromise. From my back windows I can see fields, a skyline lacy with trees; in a few minutes on my bike, or even on foot, I can leave houses behind. And yet I am within walking distance of my job and I have the weekends to drive into the Canadian Shield—a drive I might not care to do as a commuter, but which genuine rural living would entail. This compromise is not always a satisfying one; the scraps of countryside on the edge of a city

frequently seem bedraggled, forlorn, diminished by their contact with urbanization.

There is no guarantee, of course, that all of the land around my subdivision will remain rural. It is probably the preference of the municipality, with its sights set on growth and assessment, that it does not. Not far away land has already been designated for an industrial park, and that residential subdivision beyond the side road is still promised. The human proclivity is to build. When I was five our family moved into a new subdivision on the outskirts of the Southern Ontario town where I was to grow up. The recently finished houses occupied what had been prosperous agricultural land for generations, and some of the unsodded back yards blended into a square mile of pimply contours scored by furrows, checkered and smudged by fences and wood lots, and bisected by a plumb-line concession road. After we moved there my father hunted groundhogs in the fields, standing on one bump of a hill to pick them off on the neighbouring bump. With his stubby .22 or his double-barreled shotgun in the crook of his arm, he walked the ground all the way to an elongated swamp at the back of the farmland. The road crossed the swamp on a fat, cavernous culvert, and in summer when the water was low we boys rattled rocks into it, tumbled the hollow, amplified reverberations of our voices through it, and crawled through it, scrambling over the echoey corrugations between discs of brilliant light. The swamp was overhung with willow trees. Their supple, whiplike

withes rained to the grass like waterfalls, enclosing secretive rooms of shade that we used for forts. Pretending to be Tarzan, we swung on the vines, brushing the ground, our hands skinning along them in sprays of sticky green leaves. If we pushed through the curtains of creepers, an ancient barn, grey as a fungus, with finger-wide gaps between its vertical boards, filled a clearing. Once, when I was walking with my father in young woods north of the swamp, we came upon a few horse-drawn farm implements, skeletal, rusted the brittle brown of the dead leaves underfoot. On their broken springs, topped by broad, flaky seats, they were rooted to the earth like stumps.

Over the years the fields disappeared under proliferating factories: first a tool-and-die plant, then a print shop, a potato chip company, a foundry, a door factory. Then industrial malls, warehouses, a lumberyard, electrical supply firms. My friends and I thought all the construction was great. Every summer evening after supper we made our rounds of the shells of walls, the scaffolding and the acres of empty concrete floors, to collect the workmen's discarded pop bottles. With the bottles clinking in the wire carriers of our bicycles, we swooped down to Tatum and Pearsall's service station and redeemed them for two cents apiece to buy Popsicles and ice-cream bars. Most summers of our youth bulldozers clanked over long ribbons of raw, churned earth, decapitating hills; they nosed into wood lots, heaving against the trunks of trees. Blasts of sooty exhaust rasped from the trembling stack on the engine cowling as the blade

curled up a wave of sod or pried snarls of clawlike roots loose.

One sombre, chilly fall Saturday afternoon, in a remnant of woods being cleared for an expansion of the potato chip factory, we discovered a huge white owl dead on the ground. Many of the trees had already been toppled, and the craters left by the exposed roots and the ridged channels incised by the bulldozer treads oozed water. In a file of boys, like tightrope walkers, we were sidling along the felled trunks, using them as an elevated walkway. At the base of a tree I had to step down and there, in the lee of the clotted tangle of roots, was the owl, a stocky mound of dirty white feathers dramatic against the mud. Even in death it was magnificent, its barrel-like body as big as a small child's, its outspread wings enormous, crumpled around it like a collapsed parachute. The other boys jumped off the tree trunk and stood beside me until we formed a spellbound half-circle around the bird. We had never seen any major wild creature that close, in the intimacy of death. Its death seemed monstrous, a perversion, and we looked without speaking. As children often do when confronted with inexplicable calamity, I felt vague shame, as if I had done something wrong. The woods were not all cut down until the following spring, but, as though by tacit agreement, we skirted them in our wanderings that winter.

No special clairvoyance is required to predict a similar metamorphosis of the land around my subdivision. The first tentative roads scarring the fields north of the side road are, at best, only weeks

away, and dreams of industrial growth float eagerly, nervously, in the air at council meetings. The time will come when this area is indistinguishable in density from the city across the river, and old-time residents will shake their heads to think that they ever regarded themselves as living on the edge of the country. In retrospect, however, the process of urbanization will seem to have advanced almost imperceptibly, with its own justice and such inevitability that they will hardly have even felt regret. The swamp down what is now the country road may be an obstacle to complete development, but--already showing signs of wear and tear--it will wither and wilt under population pressure. It may not even survive at all. The swamp in my home town held out to the very last, until it was blockaded by industry and business, an oddity among loading docks and neon signs. Constant, interchangeable, like links in a gigantic conveyor, every day thousands of cars paraded past it, bustling in and out of plazas, car dealerships, motels, fast-food restaurants, in a frenzy of traffic at intersections. A McDonald's had

replaced the old barn and, circling for parking spaces, the cars swarmed over the asphalted clearing. As they sat in the paved slots, buffeted and rocked by squalls from transport trucks pounding along the road, they overlooked the swamp. The willow trees, whose drooping withes used to veil the barn, had been pruned back to the stubs of their limbs, and only threads of water winked among the lush grass on the bottom. To an adult revisiting the town it was difficult to associate this rankly overgrown depression with the long ellipse of marsh where, sliding down the culvert to scoop frogs from the algae-flecked water into cupped hands, boys had had their first independent exposure to something wild. Finally the value of even this boggy hollow exceeded the nuisance and expense of reclaiming it. Ditches were gouged to drain the remaining water; dump trucks edged back to slip load after load of fill down the banks; bulldozers creaked over the mounds, worrying them level. Today an office building and a car dealership face each other across the road, their foundations plunging into middens of green memories.

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## Spring Season - 1 March to May 31 2007

*Ron D. Weir*

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive spring, migration was not spectacular but there are some excellent records. Cold conditions during March and much of April delayed arrivals. During the latter half of May, the migration gained momentum and many birds flew over

the area rather than being grounded along the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Noteworthy dates for significant numbers of arrivals are Apr 24 (Bonaparte's Gull, Rusty Blackbird), May 13-15 (Summer Tanager, warblers: Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Magnolia,

Yellow-rumped), May 22-23 (Brant, Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitcher, Forster's Tern, Brown Creeper, both kinglet species, Gray Catbird, Blackpoll and Hooded Warblers, Summer Tanager), May 25 (Ruddy Turnstone), 28 (Dunlin). Rarities during the period

included Great Egret, Sandhill Crane, Eurasian Wigeon, Barrow's Goldeneye, Golden Eagle, Little Gull, Forster's Tern, Black-backed Woodpecker, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat.

### Species Account

**Red-throated Loon** – May 27 (1) Amherst Island, BMD.

**Horned Grebe** – Apr 29 (16) PEPT., KFN, largest group.

**Red-necked Grebe** – May 10 (1) Ivy Lea, JB; Apr 21 to May 19 (4) PEPT., KFN; May 27 (1) Amherst Island, BMD.

**Great Egret** – Apr 9 (1) Mallorytown, CH; Apr 27 (1) PEPT, *fide* RTS; May 31 (1) Bath, *fide* RDW.

**Sandhill Crane** – Apr 4(2) Odessa, CG; Apr 6 (1) Gananoque, JH; Apr 9 to May 22 (8) PEPT *fide* RTS.

**Snow Goose** – peak Apr 22 (80) Kingston, RKE.

**Brant** – strong flight May 9 to 29 with peak day on May 22 (5,500), Kingston, KFN.

**Eurasian Wigeon** – Apr 23 to May 17 (1 male) Amherst Island, J&BM *et al.*

**Ring-necked Duck** – peak Mar 29 (2,500) Kingston, VPM.

**Surf Scoter** – Apr 21 to May 21 (62) PEPT, KFN.

**Black Scoter** – Apr 8 (19) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Barrow's Goldeneye** – Mar 24 (1 female) PEPT., JHE, VPM, BRo, RDW.

**Ruddy Duck** – May 4 to 17 (1) Amherstview Sewage Lagoons, KFN.

**Red-shouldered Hawk** – Apr 22 (21) & Apr 29(21) Kingston, JHE, BAW, RDW. Two of the survey routes.

**Golden Eagle** – Mar 21 (1) Wolfe Island, JHE.

**Peregrine Falcon** – migrants May 8 to 29 (4) Kingston, KFN.

**Whimbrel** – May 22 to 29 (5) Amherst Island, KFN; May 22 (1) Eurasian subspecies Amherst Island, BRi.

**Marbled Godwit** – May 1 to 5 (1) Amherst Island, JHE, VPM *et al.*

**Ruddy Turnstone** – peak May 25 (100) Amherst Island, KFN.

**Little Gull** – Apr 24 (1) PEPT, *fide* RTS, only sighting reported.

**Bonaparte's Gull** – peaks Apr 24 (1500) PEPT, *fide* RTS; Apr 9 (250) Amherstview Sewage Lagoons, PJG.

**Forster's Tern** – May 4 (1), 22 (1) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Snowy Owl** – last bird May 5 (1) Amherst Island, OW, HB.

**Great Gray Owl** – May 7 to 9(1) Bellrock, Mr. Spear.

**Red-headed Woodpecker** – May 24 (1) P.E.Pt., *fide* RTS, only one.

**Black-backed Woodpecker** – Apr 25 (1 female) Charleston Lake PP, AW, HK; May 6 (1) Opinicon, BMD.

**Brown Creeper** – peak Apr 22 (110) PEPT, *fide* RTS

**Golden-crowned Kinglet** – peak Apr 22 (100) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** – peak Apr 23 (400) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Northern Mockingbird** – Apr 23 to May 22 (5 in all), Kingston, KFN.

**Blue-winged Warbler** – May 5 to 18 (9 in all, usual number), PEPT, KFN.

**Orange-crowned Warbler** – May 15 to 23 (4 in all) PEPT, DO.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** – peak May 11 (300) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Kentucky Warbler** – May 9 (1), 19(1) PEPT, RTS *et al.*

**Hooded Warbler** - May 11 to 23 (3) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Yellow-breasted Chat** – May 9 to 19 (5 sightings) PEPT, DO.

**Summer Tanager** – May 13 (1), May 23 (1) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Fox Sparrow** – peak Apr 8 (25) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**White-crowned Sparrow** – peak May 9 (130) PEPT, *fide* RTS.

**Rusty Blackbird** – strong flight Mar 17 to Apr 25, peaks Apr 24 (170), 29 (185), 30 (180) PEPT, KFN.

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Kingston Field Naturalists (3+)

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## Loon's Eerie Cry Spirit of Northern Waters

### *Terry Sprague*

The Rideau Canal is celebrating its 175<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. We can only hope that part of the year-long celebrations will include recognition of the hundreds of great blue herons, ospreys and loons that can be seen along the system's 202 km route. We were amazed at the number in 2003 when a party of us kayaked the entire Rideau Canal system, and noted these birds from Kingston all the way to Ottawa. They seem more or less accustomed to the

busy waterway traffic and pay little attentions to passers-by. Great blue herons often remain poised, like statues, along the rocky shorelines, focussed on their work, and paying little heed to us paddling by only a stone's throw away.

Early in June this year, these species once again did not disappoint, as I led a small group of enthusiastic kayakers from Jones Fall to Newboro, one of five such trips I will be doing this summer

and fall. Despite the boat traffic, all three species seem quite at ease with our presence, and once we managed to approach a loon within a few metres before it disappeared under water, only to pop up to the surface again a few moments ahead of our group. Sources say they can stay under water for as long as three minutes. Nature has provided them with cleverly designed leg muscles that concentrate oxygen to sustain them while diving to depths of up to 200 feet. This loon didn't have to worry as the depth here was only 50 feet.

At Sand Lake near Jones Falls, the mournful wail of the loon ricocheted off the granite rocks, and floated across the calm surface of the lake, not unlike the dragonflies we saw earlier drifting over a reed bed. On a similar trip in 2004, I remember falling asleep to the wails of at least a dozen loons on Big Rideau Lake as we settled in our tents at Murphy's Point Provincial Park. Doubtless it was a communication of some kind as no two birds called at the same time. One can only imagine what the content of the conversation was as the setting sun that evening cast eerie shimmers across the length of the lake. I am sure they were as captivated by the moment as we were that evening.

The loon's haunting cry is the very symbol of wilderness. And while these birds are right at home on the Rideau Canal among the open lakes, occasional reedy wetlands and granite outcroppings, it is Algonquin Provincial Park where the loon symbolizes the meaning of unspoiled wilderness. They were present there too a week earlier

during an interpretive bus tour to this famous park, the tremolo calls dancing across the surface of many of the lakes we stopped at during the tour.

However, our loons are in trouble. The catastrophic events that led up to close to 10,000 loons dying of type E botulism last fall on Lake Ontario are difficult to erase from our memories. Hundreds littered the shorelines weekly from a combination of factors that we have little control over, and can only hope will eventually run its course, and the loon can start to recover. With loons decreasing in numbers, it is difficult to imagine there were even 10,000 loons in Ontario, never mind that many that could die. The growing human population is putting increased pressure on sensitive loon habitat, and their reproductive success is hampered by constant speedboat traffic and wave action. We see loons tangled in carelessly discarded monofilament fishing line, and in past years, hundreds have died from lead poisoning from the birds swallowing lead fishing tackle. We wonder how much more the dwindling population can take before it is beyond the point of recovery.

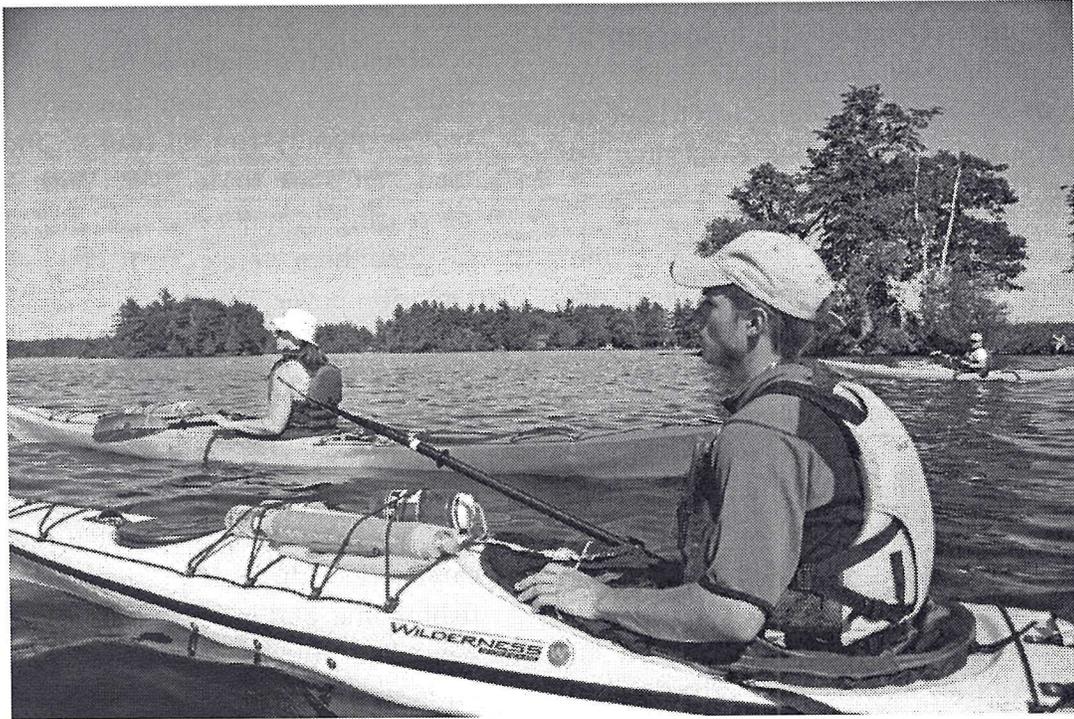
In Algonquin Park and on the Rideau Canal, the species seems to be holding its own, despite the pressures they endure with each passing year. It is such a treat to have an opportunity to paddle with the loons each year. They were with us also on Opinicon Lake, Indian Lake, Clear Lake and even Newboro Lake as we worked our way toward the village of Newboro. A visit to the famous Kilborn's store in the village will

reveal numerous items that feature the loon from coasters to nature sound CDs.

We left that day from the Newboro boat launch with a loon yodelling in the distance, as though sounding its goodbye to us. We can only hope they will be there when we visit these lakes again on another paddle trip, for losing the loon

here during this special anniversary would be like losing the mosaic of tiny granite islands that make paddling this canal system so special.

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Kayakers on the Rideau Canal near Jones Falls pause as a loon swims ahead of them. By Terry Sprague

## Notes on Natural History, No. 194, July 8, 1963

*Helen R. Quilliam*

A dark flat object on the lawn a few days ago drew our attention. Closer examination showed it to be a painted turtle. It had been moving up and down slightly when I first saw it. When we went over to take a better look, it promptly drew its head into its shell

and remained motionless. I could see, however, that it had been preparing a place for its eggs and perhaps was just in process of laying them. There was a little patch of wet earth under it on an otherwise perfectly dry lawn - if the dried up coconut matting underfoot

could be called a lawn. We retired to a discrete distance and after a patient wait of some minutes it stuck its head out of the shell, eyed us for a time and finally continued dropping its eggs into the hole which it had made for them.

The next day I went to see whether I could find the spot. It was difficult to locate because the wet mud had now all dried, but an animal had visited it in the night and one empty turtle egg shell lay on the top, its contents emptied and eaten. This is the fate of many a turtle nest and so often the remains of all that patient effort on the part of the turtle are found strewn around a dry hillside or bank not far from water.

A few years ago, we had watched another turtle from the time it chose a suitable spot until it began laying. It had wandered over our hillside for about two hours early one afternoon and finally found a spot which satisfied all its requirements. Again the ground had been baked hard by the sun but with its back legs it began making its hole. This took the whole of the rest of the afternoon and it was growing dark when it was apparently the size desired. By this time it was large enough so that its entire body almost disappeared into it. The pile of earth growing beside it had all been dampened as it worked and the next morning every bit had been carefully replaced and smoothed over.

Once the eggs have been laid and covered over again, the turtle has no further housekeeping duties. They are left in the warm earth to incubate. If the season is a very cold one or the eggs are laid late in the season, they may not hatch until the following spring. This

period when the eggs are lying in their nests is the most dangerous for the next generation. In spite of the fact that the turtle smooths the earth over carefully and leaves no trace of her work, raccoons, foxes and other predators often find the eggs and after digging them out feast thereon. If you have ever noticed rather leathery looking egg shells lying along the cinders of a railroad track or on a sandy bank they are almost certainly the ravaged remains of a turtle nest. The young, when they hatch, make their way quickly to water where they will be comparatively safe.

The painted turtle is one of our commonest turtles and one of the more attractive ones. On warm summer days they are to be seen sitting on fallen logs, muskrat houses, an old stub or along the banks just out of the water sunning themselves. It takes them but a moment to slide off into the water if they are approached too closely. At this season it is well to look carefully over any small pond or wooded marsh for here they will be found. They are also the easiest of turtles to recognize because of their bright colors - yellow and bright red stripes on neck and tail.

The snapping turtle, of course, is well known because of its large size. The shell underneath the body is smaller than the upper carapace and so it cannot withdraw its head and tail completely. Because it cannot protect itself by covering up the soft parts, its best method of defence is its powerful jaws. Turtles do not have teeth but the jaws do have sharp bony lips, and these combined with the strong jaws of the

snapping turtle give an excellent defence. Their food consists of almost any small animal that comes too close, including insects, crustaceans, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. They also eat small quantities of aquatic plants. It is one of the turtles which cannot swallow unless its head is under the water.

The musk turtle may be more common here than we imagine. Some years ago when the late Charles Broley was banding young bald eagles, he found in the nest no less than 13 shells of these turtles, the meat of which had been completely eaten. Blanding's and map turtles also occur in Frontenac County.

As we go further north the numbers of different kinds decrease. Turtles, like snakes, are cold-blooded and so are restricted to warm and temperate regions.

Algonquin Park for instance has only four kinds of turtles. If you are going there for a holiday this summer, it is worth knowing that the Parks Branch of the Ontario department of lands and forests publishes checklists of birds, flowers, ferns, fish, mammals and butterflies of the park as well as many descriptive booklets on the flora and fauna. They can be had at the gates to the park or at the museum of natural history

