

DECEMBER 2009  
JANUARY 2010



# *The Heron*

KITCHENER-WATERLOO  
*Field Naturalists*

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**Next Club Meeting:**  
**January 25 , 2010 at 7:30PM**  
**Wing 404/Rotary Centre, Dutton Dr., Waterloo**

### A YEAR ON THE GRAND

Join Record staff photographers David Bebee and Mathew McCarthy as they undertake a year-long project they call "a celebration of four seasons on the Grand River". We will see a spectacular collection of nature photographs that they have taken over the past year.

Coffee and Tea Available  
at the Meeting



Please remember to bring  
Your Mug!

## KWFN Contacts for the 2009/2010 Season

### Directors

#### President

Mary Ann Vanden Elzen (519 741-8272)  
mave@microverse.on.ca

#### Vice President

Dale Ingrey (519 884-3667)  
ingreyda@hotmail.com

#### Past President

Levi Moore (519 747-2080)  
lcmoore\_04@yahoo.ca

#### Conservation

Valerie Hill (519 578-8113)  
vhill@therecord.com

#### Treasurer

Irena Baltaduonis (519 699-4520)  
irenastclements@gmail.com

#### Membership

Larry Hamel (519 894-5140)  
hamell@sympatico.ca

#### Secretary

Katharina Walton (519 954-6478)  
hamptonstreet@rogers.com

#### Programs

Jim Cappleman (519 885-0380)  
jim@mcdesigns.com

#### Publicity

Neill Stewart (519 954-5991)  
kingjarrah@yahoo.ca

#### Outings

Mary Voisin (519 884-6881)  
maryvoisin@rogers.com

### Other

#### Editor

Deb Fowler (519 576-2788)  
deb.heron\_editor@rogers.com

#### Mailing Team

Marco and Donna DeBruin  
marco\_debruin@sympatico.ca

#### ON Representative

Fraser Gibson (519 576-9287)  
fn.gib@sympatico.ca

#### Young Naturalists

Pat Bigelow (519-888-7516)  
bigelow@sympatico.ca  
Kiirstin Maki (519 745-5899)  
kiirstin@uc.org

#### Noteworthy Bird Sightings

Ken Burrell (519 699-4695)  
kenard89@hotmail.com

#### Librarian Archivist

Betty Cooper  
(519 743-3827)

#### Native Plant Nuts

Wayne Buck (519 662-2529)  
wbuck@golden.net

#### KWFN Webmaster & Waterloo Stewardship Committee

#### Representative

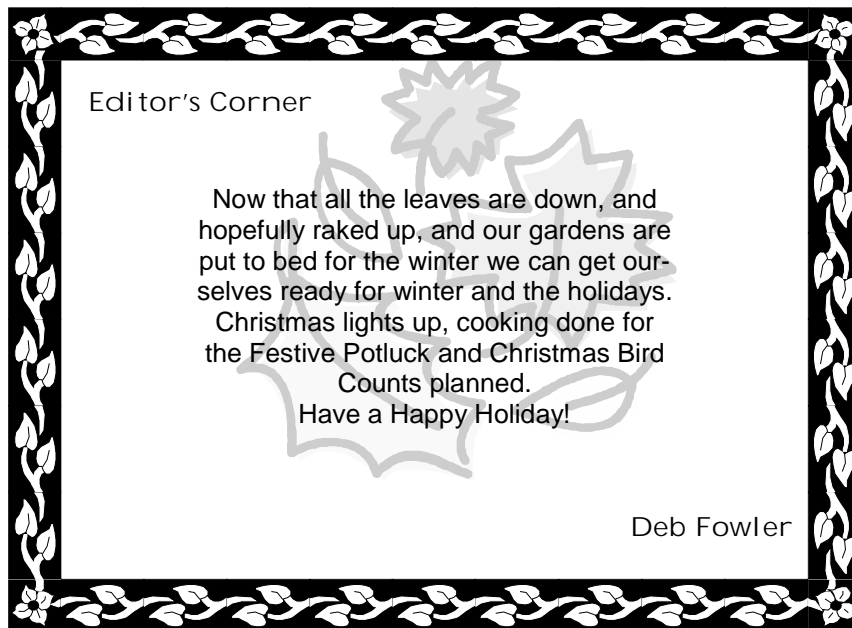
Neil E. Taylor (519 893-6469)  
neiletaylor@sympatico.ca  
[www.kwfn.ca](http://www.kwfn.ca)

#### Kitchener's Natural Areas Program

David Hunsberger 519-886-5588, dph@golden.net  
Fraser Gibson 519-576-9287, fn.gib@sympatico.ca

Submissions for the Heron need to be received by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Submit via email,  
<deb.heron\_editor@rogers.com>  
or mail to 30 Calmcrest Drive,  
Kitchener N2E 1V3



## Information for everyone

### Streamlining Club Meetings

- 1) If you have an announcement to make, please contact the president at least 3 days in advance of the club meeting.
- 2) Announcements should be no more than 2 minutes in length.
- 3) If volunteers are being sought, two clipboards should always be used - one for each side of the room. At subsequent meetings, the collection of additional names can be done at a back table.
- 4) An attempt will be made to adhere to the following timeline for club meetings:
  - 7:30 - meeting begins, announcements
    - welcoming new members and first time visitors
    - sightings (Waterloo Region and Ontario only, please)
  - 8:05 - break begins
  - 8:20 - break ends
    - motion to pass previous club meeting minutes, if required
    - speaker introduction, presentation and Q + A
  - 9:30 - approximate end of meeting
  - 10:00 - end of KWFN's Wing 404 hall rental time. Hall must be vacated**

### Announcements and Clipboards at Club Meetings

Do you have an announcement to make to the membership? If so, please contact the president, either by phone or e-mail, at least 3 days in advance of the club meeting. You will then be put on the agenda. Contact information can be found on page 2 of *The Heron*.

To keep club meetings within reasonable time frames, announcements should be no more than 2 minutes in length.

As well, concern has been raised regarding the overuse of clipboards at club meetings. To remedy this, two clipboards should always be used - one for each side of the room. If an individual wishes to collect more names at subsequent club meetings, a short announcement can be made and the collection of additional names can be done at a side table (without sending the clipboards around again).

#### Winter Weather Notice to Members:

In the situation where a winter storm may arise, please tune to 105.3 Kool FM for meeting cancellation notices. Information will also be available on our website, [www.kwfn.ca](http://www.kwfn.ca)

#### CONESTOGO BIRD FEED

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**Also at St. Jacobs Farmers Market  
\*\*And now at the Stratford Farmers Market\*\***

## More Information for everyone

### **Conservation Report**

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is currently seeking a permit for a large project in the Windsor-Essex region. MTO intends to rebuild a border crossing plaza and link it to Highway 401 via a six lane highway, which will have a severe impact on more than half a dozen threatened and endangered Carolinian species and the habitat they depend on. If granted, this will be the first permit of its kind under the new Endangered Species Act.

On behalf of the KWFN, a letter was sent to the Ministry of Natural Resources expressing concern about major flaws in the first permit to come out under section 17(2)d of Ontario's Endangered Species Act.

### **Nominations for Conservation Award**

This award acknowledges the contribution(s) made by an individual or group, organization, corporation or office toward the conservation/preservation of the natural environment of the Region of Waterloo.

The nominee shall have participated in or instigated or increased public awareness of (an) endeavour(s) that has/have contributed to the conservation/preservation of the natural environment of the Region of Waterloo.

Nominations for this award shall be submitted in writing by any member of the KWFN to Mary Ann Vanden Elzen, 40 Edgewood Dr., Kitchener, ON, N2M 2A1 or email [mave@microverse.on.ca](mailto:mave@microverse.on.ca). Nominations should be submitted no later than Feb. 15.

### **The Walks in Huron Natural Area (HNA) –November 14 and 15, 2009** Submitted by Neil Taylor

Sunshine and blue skies favoured the 15 who accompanied me on the Saturday and in this 107 hectare (360 acre) park. They were greeted by Black-capped Chickadees near the start of the hike. Temperatures got up to about 13<sup>°C</sup> as I led interested participants through a diverse habitat including kettles, ponds, upland maple/beech forest, cultural meadows, as well as pine plantations. While the number of bird species was low, the Green-winged Teal seemed to be a highlight. On Saturday, three continued on with me in an impromptu visit to the Mannheim Weir in Hidden Valley. They were pleased to see Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes and a Belted Kingfisher. Visitors were part of each group. Sunday was close to the same temperature, but the gray skies and dampness made it seem cooler. This stalwart group of 13 was able to see a small flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets as they explored some areas off the beaten path. How lucky each was to explore this special area in such weather in mid-November!

## In Memoriam – Loretta Aileen Vera Hiller



**December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1915 - October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Most current KWFN members will not have met Aileen Hiller, but you have met her through the direct contributions she has made. Aileen was a much loved and appreciated member of the KWFN for over 30 years. She served as an Officer on the Board as Secretary from 1972 – 1975. It is the service of these past members and directors such as Aileen that has permitted our naturalists' club to exist and continue to be an important part of this community for over 75 years.

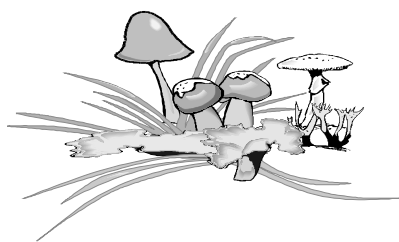
Aileen participated in many annual Christmas Bird Counts for years. She is credited for her effort in various editions of *American Birds: Annual Christmas Bird Count* publications.

In 1988, the KWFN was a partner with Guelph and Hamilton Field Naturalists in obtaining peregrine chicks and successfully "hacking" them at the Dana Porter Library at the UW. The Peregrine Falcon project was an exciting summer for Aileen. Marion Scholz, a former Director of the KWFN and a long time friend reported that, "Aileen, Edith and I would do the early watch routine for the peregrine release. I would pick them up around 6:30 and we would stop at Tim's for a coffee and a bran muffin and then head for the U. of W. for our peregrine watch at 7 a.m. We did this a couple of days a week until the end." She loved those four female birds: Ada, Agnes, Catharine, and Mabel. She enjoyed their individuality and excitedly shared their daily development with relatives and friends. There is no doubt that she felt this mission of helping to bring back the peregrines was important. She often reminisced about that event. Indeed, the importance of the KWFN in the life of Aileen was well-understood by her family and was mentioned in the obituary as well as in the eulogies at the funeral service. I have searched through bird records for the region and found nearly 60 reports that she submitted.

On a personal note, permit me to include a couple of comments. When our boys were young and accompanied us to Point Pelee, more than once they asked, "Will we see the ladies from Kitchener?" Well we did. They included Marion Scholz, Edith Hunsberger, Aileen Hiller, Dorothy Russell, Gloria Zimmerman, and Ann Ross. They were not always there together, but when Aileen was there, she welcomed Titia and me as a mother and our boys like a grandma. She would ask us what we had spotted, and accompany us for some time to share what she had seen with her "eagle eyes". Marion Scholz also shared a short anecdote about one of those times, "...when in Pelee in my camper Edith Hunsberger and Aileen had the same colour pjs and long johns (people would have to know the difference in size between Edith and Aileen for this to be funny) but somehow or other their long john and pj bottoms got mixed up (they were sleeping in the same bunk in the camper, so not hard to do). Needless to say Aileen could not get into Edith's longjohns when bedtime came and could not figure out why. We all had a good laugh over this."

While Aileen was a person who displayed great dignity, warmth was one of her most endearing qualities. At any rate, our mutual affections were irreversible and genuine. This was made more manifest when Aileen gave me some bird prints from renowned Canadian artist Fenwick Lansdowne. I was, of course, flattered and pleased to be the recipient. While being an earnest collector of such, I felt that they deserved better. I made a pledge to Aileen that these would not reside in a drawer. I suggested that the Cruickston Charitable Research Reserve (*rare*) might be a worthy repository of these prints. She was pleased with this suggestion. I have reserved my forwarding these on for several reasons, not the least of which is that I do not wish them to be stored in another file cabinet. It would be my hope that getting these

Concluded on page 10



# Native Plant Nuts

## Happy Trails to You

We, in Waterloo Region, are blessed with many interesting walking and hiking trails. Valerie Hill wrote an interesting article in the October 8, 2009 RECORD describing 8 natural areas in the region. The article described several areas that KWFN outings visit regularly such as The Sudden Tract, The Dickson Wilderness, and The Drynan Tract that have walking trails. In my opinion, these 3 areas, all located in North Dumfries Township south of Cambridge, are among the most diverse and beautiful in the region. They are at the northern terminus of the Carolinian Zone, an area of incredible diversity unmatched anywhere else in Canada. All have walking trails that are accessible to walkers of almost any ability. There were a few in Valerie's article with which I was not familiar, such as the Gibney Forest located on the Baden Sandhills. Jim Castleman had an outing there on October 6, 2009, but I was unable to attend. I plan to go later on my own.

Then we have the hiking trails. My companions, Fraser Gibson and Ken Quanz, and I have hiked several that traverse the region end-to-end.

The Avon Trail runs between St. Marys and Conestoga. A portion transverses the beautiful property of Fred and Jane Schneider, both long-time members of the KWFN. The Kissing Bridge Trail goes between Wallenstein and Guelph. It's most easily accessed on the north side of Elmira. The Grand Valley Trail runs from the mouth of the Grand River on Lake Erie in Dunnville to Alton in the Orangeville area. I really enjoyed the Carolinian (i.e. southern) part of the Grand Valley Trail; so many large White Oaks, Eastern Bluebirds and Northern Mockingbirds in January. So much history is evident along this trail like the series of old canals we encountered that we never knew existed.

I also enjoy walking on portions of the Walter Bean Trail. I run with a group that runs parts of this trail regularly. It is very easy walking in most areas. There is usually a beautiful view of The Grand River close by.

By far, the most interesting hiking trail in this part of Ontario is the Bruce Trail. Although you have to travel east to the Milton-Campbell area to access the trail from the 401, it is well worth the drive. I think this is one of the most diverse

and interesting trails in Canada, if not North America. The Bruce Trail follows the Niagara Escarpment which runs north to south like the backbone of a giant between Niagara Falls and Tobermory for almost 900 km. The Escarpment has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site; and with little wonder. The beautiful vistas seen from the top of the Escarpment overlooking the various valleys such as the Beaver Valley are breathtaking. The diversity of plant life is also incredible. On 2 separate hikes in October, we identified 15 species of fern. Some were repeats, to be sure, but many were not. All were found growing alongside the trail. Just imagine how many we might have found if we had gone farther afield.

Then there are the world-famous orchids in the Peninsula section. But they bloom only for a short period of time and you have to be there at the right time to see them. You can go walking on these trails in the spring, summer and fall. And, in the winter, some are suitable for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Happy trails to you.



~ Fraser Gibson

### **Ontario Nature-Great Lakes West-Fall Regional Meeting**

The Guelph Field Naturalists hosted our Regional Meeting on Saturday November 7 at the Guelph Lake Nature Centre. It was a pleasure having five KWFN members join me at the meeting (Graham and Margaret Macdonald, Mary Voisin, Mary Ann Vanden Elzen, and Elsie Taylor. Clubs shared their ongoing projects and speaker lists and Ontario Nature staff brought us up to date on many of their projects. ON continues to be our valued provincial voice for nature.

### **Ontario Nature plans to expand its Nature Reserves again**

Last month I told you about Ontario Nature receiving a 23 acre

donation from John Grandy and Meg Salter for an addition to Ontario Nature's Petrel Point Nature Reserve near Olifant.

Ontario Nature is now in the process of purchasing a block of land, in partnership with the Bruce Trail Conservancy, on Malcom's Bluff, just north of Wiarton. The property is being purchased in 3 parcels over a few years and includes 4 km of Bruce Trail. This is a magnificent section of the Bruce Trail and well worth saving.

Consider making a donation to either the Bruce Trail Conservancy or Ontario Nature.

### **Conservation Authority Wins Esteemed International Thiess Riverprize**

Submitted by Barbara MacKenzie-Wynia, Ontario Nature

For the second time in less than ten years, one of Ontario's Conservation Authorities has won

the esteemed International Thiess Riverprize. The Grand River Conservation Authority won in 2000.

The award, presented annually in Brisbane, Australia, was awarded to Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. Considered the 'Nobel Prize' for outstanding environmental work in watershed management, it is the most highly regarded and valuable river management award in the world.

The annual prize is awarded to organizations that are engaged in the very best practices in watershed management. It is presented to the project that represents the world's best effort to conserve natural watershed resources for future generations.

For more information on this year's winner of the International Thiess Riverprize 2009 go to the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority website at: [www.lsrca.on.ca/News/prlakeSimcoeWins.html](http://www.lsrca.on.ca/News/prlakeSimcoeWins.html)

### Update from the Board of Directors

The Board met November 2 for its monthly meeting. The following topics were discussed:

- Membership survey and further implementation of suggestions.
- A lapel microphone will be bought for the use at club meetings.
- A website policy and webmaster job description are being established for the KWFN website.
- A research award is being set up with the University of Waterloo.
- Funds for the Montgomery Committee were discussed, as well as maintenance of the property.
- Christmas potluck.
- Size and weight of *The Heron*.
- Protocol for welcoming new members.
- City of Kitchener's Blanding's turtle project.
- Directors' and committee reports.

If you are interested in reviewing the minutes of the Board meeting, they will be available in the library next month, once they are approved by the Board. The next Board meeting will be held on December 14.

# Outings Schedule



By Mary Voisin

From time to time, some members may schedule impromptu outings not advertised in the Heron. These additional last minute outings are posted on the Kitchener Waterloo Field Naturalists' website. Occasionally check the website for these outings by googling KWFN for details. By the way, if you would like to lead an outing anytime, email [maryvoisin@rogers.com](mailto:maryvoisin@rogers.com).

**Searching For Gulls at Niagara**  
**Saturday, December 5, 2010**  
**Jim, Mike, and Ken Burrell**  
**519-699-4696**

**Meeting Time/Place:**  
**8:00 am Homer Watson Blvd.**  
**Fountain Street 401 Carpool lot**

Join Jim and sons Mike and Ken for this all day outing to the Niagara River in search of various species of gulls that congregate there for the winter. Rare species of gulls are sometimes present as well as other interesting waterfowl. The boys will head to Hamilton first then onto Niagara River and the Falls. It is always cold so wear layers of warm clothing and good boots. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scopes and field guides. Walky talkies may be useful, too.

**Christmas Bird Count – Learn the Basics – Part I**  
**Saturday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009**  
**Neil Taylor 519-893-6469**

**Meeting Time/Place:**  
**9:00 a. m. Parking lot of Doon Presbyterian Church (with permission) at 35 Roos St., Kitchener, (off Old Mill Rd. in Doon).**

The annual Christmas Bird Count for Kitchener will take place later on December 20<sup>th</sup>. New participants are needed to complete this census

and make it successful. If you would like to take part in the count but are unsure of what's involved, then join Neil to learn the basics and gain self-confidence to volunteer for this year's CBC. Dress warmly and bring your binoculars, field guide, notepad, and pen/pencil. To volunteer, see the notice elsewhere in this month's Heron or see the Web Page for contact information. Neil confesses that he is also using this outing as a means of scouting out his area for rare birds in advance of the count itself. You may and really should register for the CBC in advance of this event. Sturdy hiking footwear is suggested. (3 hours)

**Christmas Bird Count – Learn the Basics – Part II**  
**Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009**  
**Neil Taylor 519-893-6469**

**Meeting Time/Place:**  
**1:00 p. m. Parking lot of Pioneer Memorial Tower. From Fairway Rd., take King St. E. past Riverbank Dr. and Highway 8. Turn right onto Deer Ridge Dr. and follow to the end, ignoring Pioneer Tower Road. Turn right onto Lookout Lane and proceed to the parking lot.**

This is a repeat of the December 13<sup>th</sup> outing, but in a new location in the area of Doon Pioneer Tower. See the earlier information.

**Wintertime in Bechtel Park**  
**Sunday, January 10, 2010**  
**Jan Ozaruk 519-893-0490**

**Meeting Time/Place:**  
**1 p.m. Bechtel Park. Enter off Bridge Street East, head south (left) to large parking lot at baseball diamond and playground.**

It's snow wonder that Bechtel Park

should be an interesting place to visit in the winter. With a mix of hardwood forest, open field, pond, and river, we'll try our luck at spotting over wintering birds, animal tracks and identifying winter weeds and trees. Who knows what we will see?

**Tuesday Travelers**  
**Tuesday, January 12, 2010**  
**Riverside Park in Cambridge**  
**Marco DeBruin 519-658-5372**

**Meeting Time/Place:**  
**9:30 am at the Entrance to Riverside Park (off King Street) in Cambridge, just outside the gate along the wall.**

Join Marco for a refreshing walk in Riverside Park in Cambridge. Weather permitting, this could be a good opportunity to see up close and photograph some of our winter birds. The terrain is fairly level with a good portion of boardwalk. If time permits, we could take a short walk along the Speed River and check out some of our over-wintering waterfowl. Dress appropriately and don't forget your binoculars and your camera.

**Wellesley Winter Birding**  
**Sunday, January 24, 2010**  
**Jim and Ken Burrell 519-699-4695**

**Meeting Time/Place:**  
**8:30 a.m. at the Beechwood Plaza in the corner closest to Erb and Fisher Hallman.**  
**We should be finished by noon.**

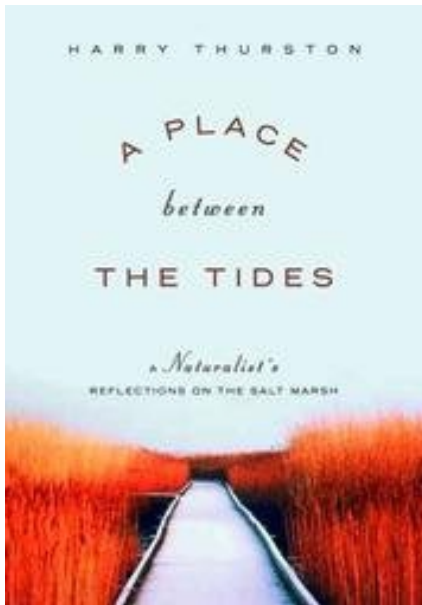
Join Jim and Ken for a morning drive around the countryside of Wellesley and Peel Townships, in search of winter raptors such as red-tailed and rough legged hawks. Some other possibilities are Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings and Horned Larks on this half-day outing.

**Book Review:**

Submitted by Kiirstin Maki

***A Place Between the Tides* by Harry Thurston (Graystone, 2004)**

I've had the idea of reviewing books here in *The Heron* for quite some time now, but it's taken a little gentle encouragement from the board to actually sit down and write one! My hope is to advertise books that KWFN members may find worth reading because they meet two criteria: 1) they contain natural history or environmental themes, and 2) they're good.



To start this adventure, I thought it might be appropriate to highlight one of my favourite books. The author, Harry Thurston, is a poet, freelance writer and dedicated naturalist who lives in Nova Scotia; his house backs on to the Tidnish River and the associated salt marsh. *A Place Between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflections on the Salt Marsh* is an autobiographical piece collecting ten years' worth of observations made largely out his back window. It is set up in a chronological format, with one chapter for each month. One of the best things about this book is that though we hear about the big events – the beaching of a minke whale, hurricanes, the sighting of a peregrine falcon or a seal – Thurston also spends a gratifying amount of time on the little things too, like the “ordinary” ecology of a salt marsh, the importance of the different marsh grasses, or the spawning habits of the marsh minnows. Intertwined with his stories are some very cool facts about the marsh's inhabitants. Thurston is clearly fascinated and delighted by nature, and his eloquent writing ensures that the book is never dry or boring.

His descriptions are vivid; for example, anyone who has ever heard a spring frog chorus or encountered a June bug will recognize this:

“This is the night music of spring, and an anthem to evolution. We listen a long while, until the night chill descends. As we make our way back to the house, June bugs splutter out of the grass, crashing blindly into the clapboard.”

Overall, this is a wonderful book about the rhythms of nature, about history and homecomings, about a very special Canadian place, and one man's deep and abiding love for the world around him. Drop holiday shopping hints about this book to friends or family. Highly recommended.

*A Place Between the Tides* is available for purchase at Words Worth Books in Waterloo, or through your chosen online bookstore. It's also available at the Waterloo Public Library, but currently not at the Region of Waterloo, Kitchener or Cambridge Public Libraries. If your library doesn't have a copy and you would like one, ask your librarian about Interlibrary Loan.

Attention all KWFN Members

Plan to attend our CHRISTMAS POTLUCK

MONDAY DECEMBER 7, 2009 from 6:00 – 8:30 pm

This will be an informal social gathering for all members and a wonderful opportunity to join in some festive fellowship. We will be having a sing along so bring your musical instruments and singing voices.

Tea, coffee, punch and dinner rolls will be provided. The rest is up to you! We rely on members and guests to contribute a dish and suggest surname

A-E = Dessert                      F-O = Entrée                      P-Z = Salad

In order to reduce waste, we ask that you bring your own plates, mugs and cutlery.

We always appreciate any assistance with this event, so if you are able to help out in any way (setting up tables, decorations, clean-up etc.) please sign the Small But Vital Task List or contact Jim Cappleman 519 885-0380 (day), 519 634-9711 or email Jim@mcdsigns.com.

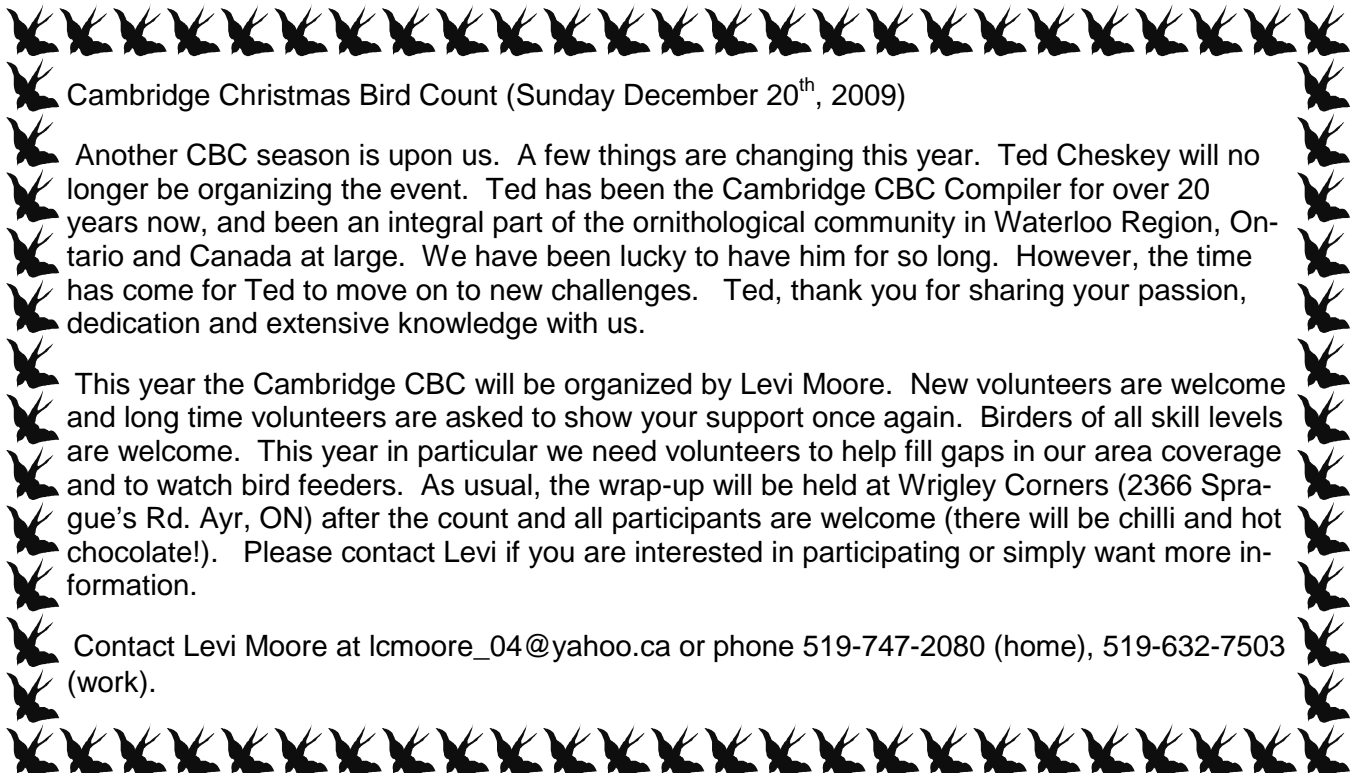
framed might become a project of the KWFN and a further permanent legacy of Aileen Hiller.

At Aileen's funeral, I met her family. They have generously forwarded a copy of a 3 page piece of prose entitled, "THE SEASONS AT OUR FEEDER". She starts out by describing their feeding station in Waterloo and then moves on to the fall migration starting with White-throated Sparrows. She wrote, "It is early October and they are on their way south. They stay with us two or three weeks, joined on many occasions by their cousins, the white-crowned sparrows, with their sleek grey feathers and black and white caps. Standing on long legs they remind me of little girls holding up their skirts to walk through wet grass." She moves on to the arrival of American Tree Sparrows and then, "Now the cardinal, with his crest held high, comes cautiously to the feeder, remembering that it was here he found the sunflower seeds only last spring. He is ignoring his summer mate, even chasing her away. Frost is in the air and each morning we skim the ice from the birdbath. We leave it out quite late, always hoping it doesn't crack with the cold. The juncos are here and we eagerly watch for "Lacey" and "Old Droopy". When we see them it makes four seasons for these oddities – one with a white lace collar and the other a misshapen wing." And so Aileen continues to write of the comings and goings using colorful verbs and adjectives to describe motion and sound. She concludes by describing four Golden-crowned Kinglets. "They puff out their feathers, drop their wings to the ground as a prop, and briefly close their eyes. This lasts only a few minutes and when I look again they are gone, time and seasons being as a moment in retrospect. Our summer birds have gone, but we eagerly wait the start of yet another season at our feeder." Aileen was no casual birder. She had a keen sense for detail that escapes many. Reading this whole essay evokes a new appreciation of this true naturalist.

I ended my eulogy to another KWFN member, Dorothy Russell, with the following sentence. "Of this I am certain, if there is a Bird of Paradise or birds in paradise, I am confident that Uncles Frank and Orpheus Schantz, F. W. R. Dickson, Bob Pickering, Lew Jenkins, Fred Cooper, Harry Walker, Marg Lemon, and now Dorothy Russell, along with so many other of her birding friends, will be out there "pishing" for those birds, along with the warblers that she loved so much." Aileen was at that service and enjoyed this sentiment. Marie Walker, Bruce Duncan, John Miles, and now Aileen Hiller join that illustrious birding group. Each is in excellent and extraordinary company. The KWFN has been enriched by their considerable contributions.

Respectfully submitted,

*Neil E. Taylor*



Cambridge Christmas Bird Count (Sunday December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009)

Another CBC season is upon us. A few things are changing this year. Ted Cheskey will no longer be organizing the event. Ted has been the Cambridge CBC Compiler for over 20 years now, and been an integral part of the ornithological community in Waterloo Region, Ontario and Canada at large. We have been lucky to have him for so long. However, the time has come for Ted to move on to new challenges. Ted, thank you for sharing your passion, dedication and extensive knowledge with us.

This year the Cambridge CBC will be organized by Levi Moore. New volunteers are welcome and long time volunteers are asked to show your support once again. Birders of all skill levels are welcome. This year in particular we need volunteers to help fill gaps in our area coverage and to watch bird feeders. As usual, the wrap-up will be held at Wrigley Corners (2366 Sprague's Rd. Ayr, ON) after the count and all participants are welcome (there will be chilli and hot chocolate!). Please contact Levi if you are interested in participating or simply want more information.

Contact Levi Moore at [lcmoore\\_04@yahoo.ca](mailto:lcmoore_04@yahoo.ca) or phone 519-747-2080 (home), 519-632-7503 (work).

On October 26, 2009, Kyle Horner and Jenny Pearce of Scienstational Sssnakes brought their menagerie of reptiles to the KWFN meeting and delivered a fast-paced and informative presentation on the current status of Ontario's various reptile species. Sponsored by Environment Canada and MNR, this program travels to schools and other interested groups across Ontario and Canada to promote awareness of reptiles at risk.

Of the seventeen snake species in Ontario, we were introduced to six, beginning with the familiar Eastern Garter Snake named after men's garters which used to be striped. All snakes are ectotherms, ie. they naturally take on the temperature of the surroundings so that on a hot summer day a snake's body will be quite warm. The term "cold-blooded" often used to describe snakes is therefore a misnomer. Another myth, that snakes are slimy, was also dispelled by pointing out that snakes have no oils whatsoever on their skin (unlike humans) so they are actually clean and dry to the touch.

We were also introduced to the Northern Water Snake which preys on fish and frogs and has some effective defensive measures if picked up in the wild. Besides secreting musk this snake will also regurgitate and defecate

all over an attacker (or curious human). Snakes breathe through two nostrils on the head but they smell by sticking out their forked tongue and "reading" the source of the smell through the Jacobson's organ in the back of the mouth. Their sense of smell is 10 times better than a dog's which is itself 200 times better than humans. Snakes are near-sighted however, and will probably travel around you if you remain immobile. Because they have no external ears, they also have very poor hearing, unlike turtles who have a keen sense of hearing.

Another myth, that milk snakes drink milk from cows, was dispelled when Kyle pointed out that snakes cannot stand on their tails (and of course they have no legs) so it would be impossible for the Eastern Milk Snake to actually drink milk. A more logical explanation for their occurrence on farms is the abundance of mice and other rodents. In fact all snakes are great for rodent control since rodents are their main diet and are swallowed whole. A snake's double-hinged jaw is uniquely designed for this purpose.

Our fourth specimen, the Hognosed Snake has a unique defensive tactic when threatened. Besides lifting the front part of its body off the ground and flattening out like a cobra and hissing, it will also

strike. But since its mouth is closed the "bite" is harmless. They will also flail around and play dead. In fact they will do this repeatedly, proving that they are at least persistent if not intelligent creatures. They are also a threatened species because their primary habitat along the shores of Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair and Georgian Bay is being lost to development.

The Eastern Fox Snake is an endangered species, ie in danger of being extirpated, for the same reason—habitat loss—since it lives in the same habitat as the Hognosed Snake. Its length of up to two metres also makes it more vulnerable to being killed by humans who mistakenly assume it is dangerous. The alternate names of Hardwood Rattler and Copperhead do not help in this regard. Fox Snakes are incredible swimmers and climbers who have been known to travel 25 kilometres in a summer.

Snake No. 6 was a Black Rat Snake, also endangered on the north shore of Lake Erie, although the population north and east of Kingston seems to be stable. These snakes are flat on the bottom and sides of their body so that they are able to climb up a wall as well as a tree. Unfortunately, they also like to sun themselves on roads and

Concluded on page 12

in fields where they are vulnerable to cars and farm vehicles.

Besides the six snakes, we also met two members of another reptile group—the turtles. The Blandings' Turtle with its solid yellow chin and high-domed shell and the Snapping Turtle are, like most turtle species in Ontario, at risk primarily because of the high incidence of road kill. Since the Blandings' has a lifespan of 80 years and the female begins laying eggs at 15 – 20 years of age (30 eggs per year) one would assume that species survival would not be in doubt. Most of the young do not survive however, due to predation by foxes, weasels, birds, etc. The biggest problem of course is road mortality as the female moves from pond to land in order to lay her eggs. In fact she will travel up to three km. to do this. One way we can help ensure their survival and that of their offspring is to move them off the road whenever we encounter them in the springtime.

You don't want to just pick up our last visitor, the Snapping Turtle, when you find him or her on the road. Better to use a stick and gently drag the turtle to the other side of the road. Although they have no predators in the water where they consume fish, frogs and mostly carrion, Snapping Turtles are vulnerable on land to predators such as raccoons and weasels. Since they cannot pull their

head, arms and legs into their shells, they are helpless when flipped over on their backs. Besides road kills Snapping Turtles are also disappearing because of the loss of their wetland habitat, hence their recent addition to the Species at Risk list.

During question period Jenny and Kyle elaborated on the Species at Risk designations—special concern, threatened, endangered—and pointed out that the Massasauga Rattler is also threatened for the same reasons as outlined before—road kill and habitat loss. We were also informed that we could assist snakes in surviving winter by building hibernacula. Dig a hole below frost line and place building blocks and PUC pipes, etc., and they will be encouraged to spend the winter there.

After question period many KWFN members took advantage of the opportunity to handle the snakes and get over their inhibitions regarding

these fascinating creatures. For more information on the program, check the website: [www.scisnake](http://www.scisnake)



Betty Cooper



Irena Baltaduonis



**Waterloo Stewardship Network**

**“providing Waterloo Region with knowledge necessary to continue responsible stewardship of the natural resources we all share”**

This is a brief report to update KWFN members of some of the highlights of recent activities and some future plans of the Waterloo Stewardship Network (WSN). The report is an extrapolation from the most recent minutes of WSC meeting. Suggestions, comments, etc. are invited from members of the KWFN. The Waterloo Stewardship Council (WSC) is always looking for quality projects to assist with. If you have project ideas or are involved with a project that you feel the WSC could help with, please let me know.

- **Doon Demo Forest Project** – Invitations have been sent to local landowners for a tour on November 28<sup>th</sup>.
- **School Planting** - Karen Buschert has been hired on a contract basis to conduct school visits to help line up seed growing in the winter, and planting in the spring.
- **Evergreen School Grounds** – Plantings have taken place at Trillium and Queensmount schools.
- **Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes** - The launch of the ESL Stewardship Fund application process will be accompanied by information sessions regarding the committee’s activity, Well Aware Program, GRCA’s RWQP, and the Rural Landowner Stewardship Workshops upcoming on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and January 16th. Non-farm landowners are a group whose concerns/interests have yet to be considered.
- **Drynan Forest** - Another site visit was held to further determine management plans. Levi Moore, Wayne Buck, Neil Taylor reviewed options including plans re. a savanna and a commemorative tree grove. The pine plantation near the front, which has mainly dead trees, will be clear-cut in the near future. A burn will take place next year. Plantings will take place as soon as possible.
- **Envirothon 2010** – A very successful training session took place on November 13<sup>th</sup> at *rare*. Neil Taylor assisted in the a.m.
- **Creekside Church Direct Seeding** - Steve May (MNR) visited the church and helped direct seed 2 rows of trees under plastic mulch. Hackberry, black cherry, burr oak and shagbark hickory were in the mix in this experimental demonstration site (each row was about 400m long!). Conifers will be planted in 2 more rows in the spring.
- **Prairie Plant Rescue** – On November 10, plants were rescued from the Detweiller Site (on Glasgow St. near the landfill), that has been a UW research plot for several seasons. These will be relocated to Kyle and Wayneco Prairies where the original seed came from.
- **Coming Events**  
 Latonell Conservation Conference, Alliston - November 2009

Respectfully submitted,

*Neil*

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# President's Corner

-Mary Ann Vanden Elzen

With new members being one of the board's top priorities this year, I thought I'd write the story of...

## How I Came to Be a KW Field Naturalist

How does one become a K-W Field Naturalist?

Results of a 1998 survey found that most new members became aware of the club in one of three ways: through the universities, through the libraries, or in conversation with family and friends.

Unfortunately, no 'other' category was listed. I say unfortunate because that's where my story belongs – in the 'other' category. I was neither faculty nor staff at the universities, and wa-a-a-a-ay beyond the average age of a student. Yes, I frequented the libraries, but I knew no one in the club and, in fact, was barely conscious of its existence.

My story definitely fits into 'other'.

Although interested in birds, I must admit to not being very knowledgeable about them. Oh, I knew the common ones – rob-

ins, Blue Jays, crows. But, in May of 2002, something happened on my way to the Dandelion Festival. There in the shrubbery of the Iron Horse Trail, I spotted what, for me, was a very unusual bird - one I'd never noticed before. It had me wondering, "What is it?" The question lingered as I walked.

I arrived at Waterloo Park and the Dandelion Festival. I viewed the exhibits and the booths and sampled the obligatory dandelion ice cream. But, throughout the entire time, that mysterious bird kept niggling at my brain.

Suddenly, I caught sight of two men in animated conversation peering through their binoculars and pointing enthusiastically to the nearby treetops. Behind them was a Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists display board. "Oh," I thought, "they'll know the name of my bird."

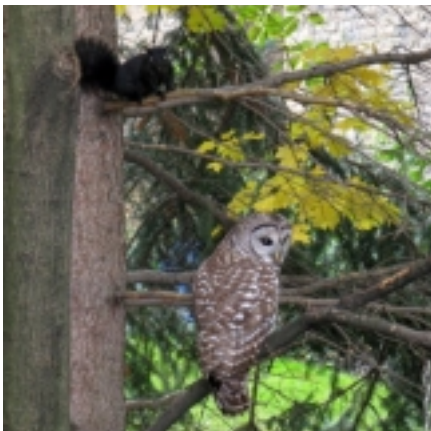
I approached the strangers with my question. The elder of the two immediately asked for a description. "Well, it was brown and had quite a long tail." He wanted to know exactly where I'd seen it and then quickly thumbed through his Peterson Field Guide: Eastern Birds to

page 219. "Is this it?" he asked, jabbing his finger at the bird at the top of the page. I was amazed! "Yes, that's it, all right." The Brown Thrasher. I'd never even heard of the bird before.

He talked about the club and invited me to attend the next meeting – which I did.

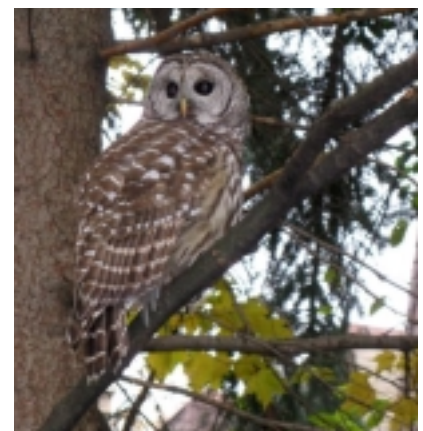
And that was the beginning - my entry into a whole new world - the natural world. I loved the outings and before long was enthusiastically ticking off each new avian discovery on my recently acquired Checklist of Birds. The robins, Blue Jays and crows were now old hat. I had moved on to Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes and Bald Eagles. I became really excited about spotting and identifying birds on my travels - the Greater Roadrunner near Yuma, Arizona; the Magnificent Frigatebird in Baja, Mexico; the Spruce Grouse on the road to Labrador.

So, unlike most new members, I became a field naturalist not because of a connection with the universities or the libraries, nor through the invitation of someone I knew. For me, it was all because of that one, intriguing Brown Thrasher.



The Barred Owl (juvenile ~ 15-18 inches) taken in Autumn Woods (Kingswood/Alpine area) behind my condo on Oct. 21 at noon. In the first, the owl eyed the black squirrel for two minutes then with neither moving chose to ignore the squirrel.

Photos and submission by Janice Bock



Outings at a Glance – refer to page 8 of this Heron for full outing details

December Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5 <b>Niagara 8 am</b>
6	7 <b>Potluck 6 pm</b>	8	9	10	11	12 <b>Bird Count 9 am</b>
13 <b>Bird Count 1 pm</b>	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26

January Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 <b>Bechtel Park 1 pm</b>	11	12 <b>Riverside 9:30 am</b>	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 <b>Wellesley 8:30 am</b>	25 <b>KWFN meeting</b>	26	27	28	29	30

This was the first time our club members visited the Beverly Swamp, a Provincially Significant Area, east of Cambridge Townline. The Nov. 2 outing was led by Jim Lackenbauer and Janice Bock.



1. Dale Ingrey and Dave Buhlman hiking on the Lafarge Trail through the Beverly Swamp.

2. Kathy Buhlman reads the plaque about Fletcher Creek in this area of the Hamilton Region Watershed.

3. Dale Ingrey lingers for another glimpse as KWFN members head on to the boardwalk through the Beverly Swamp wetlands.



317 Highland Road East  
Kitchener, ON N2M 3W6

# Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists

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**Pesticide Policy**  
Nov. 8, 2000

'that it is KWFN policy to  
not use pesticides on any  
club properties or during  
any club activity'.



## Objectives of the KWFN

- to acquire and disseminate knowledge of natural history
- to protect and preserve wildlife
- to purchase and hold appropriate parcels of land for the advancement of conservation
- to support public interest in nature and its preservation by supporting the enactment of wise legislation and by other means as falls within the scope of the Corporation

## General Information

Meetings are held monthly from September to May, on the fourth Monday of the month with the exception of December. Our meetings are free and visitors are always welcome. Outings are scheduled almost every month.

KWFN is a registered charitable organization. Membership fees and all donations are tax deductible. KWFN is affiliated with Ontario Nature (FON) and Nature Canada (Canadian Nature Federation)

[www.kwfn.ca](http://www.kwfn.ca)



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*Copies of "The Heron" are available at meetings but will be mailed (free of charge) to members if not picked up.*

*Articles reflect the views of the authors and are not necessarily the views endorsed by the KWFN club.*