

April 2011



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## Next Club Meeting:

**April 18, 2011 at 7:30PM**

**Wing 404/Rotary Centre, Dutton Dr., Waterloo**

Pelee Island and the Spring Reverse Migration of Songbirds at Fish Point, Pelee Island – May 2010

Ken Burrell

Every spring, birds are seen in the early morning flying south off of many of the sandspits on the north shore of Lake Erie. This phenomenon is most commonly regarded as 'reverse migration'. While 'reverse migration' has been observed by many people, very little has been studied on this topic. From April 26<sup>th</sup> – May 19<sup>th</sup> 2010, Ken conducted daily watches recording songbirds flying south off Fish Point, Pelee Island, as part of research for his undergraduate thesis at the University of Waterloo. The goals of his research were to determine which species participate and what weather variables influence 'reverse migration'. While Pelee Island maybe an important area to witness 'reverse migration', it's also designated as an Important Bird Area, rivalling the likes of Point Pelee, Rondeau and Long Point in terms of numbers and diversity of migrant birds, so come and check out 'reverse migration' and see what Pelee Island has to offer!

Ken Burrell is a member of the KWFN and a well-known local birder.

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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

### Plant Exchange

Do you have any extra plants, seedlings, cuttings or bulbs? Bring them, labeled, to the club meeting on May 30. Someone will provide them with a happy new home.

### Baillie Birdathon 2011 - Neil E. Taylor

I have been proud to be a participant in the Baillie Birdathon for about 30 years. I am ever so grateful for the generosity of all who have supported this worthy cause over the many years that I have been a participant.

Last year, I was able to forward more than \$2000 to Bird Studies Canada. 25% of that amount (\$500+) was returned to the KWFN Sanctuary Fund. Many pledged directly on line using the internet. This is a completely safe, secure and easy method to pledge. All you need to do is link to:

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/support/birdathon/donate.jsp?number=17129>

Each sponsor from other years has been given an ID #. I would be pleased to forward yours. Simply email me: [neiletaylor@sympatico.ca](mailto:neiletaylor@sympatico.ca)

This year I am seeking to raise at least **\$3000** in pledges to make it a new high. I am asking each sponsor to consider a higher amount according to the means of each. Please consider supporting once again. Thank you so very much.



### Amphibian Monitoring Volunteers Wanted

The City of Kitchener is currently recruiting volunteers to assist with seasonal amphibian monitoring in Kitchener's Natural Areas. Monitoring will be completed between April and June and takes place during evening hours. Volunteers will be asked to visit a set monitoring location 3 times during the season and record information about amphibian species. Some additional training will be provided. If you are interested in assisting with the monitoring this spring, please contact:

**Josh Shea, City of Kitchener**  
**(519)-741-3400 ext 3349**  
**[Joshua.Shea@Kitchener.ca](mailto:Joshua.Shea@Kitchener.ca)**

Once again my sons and I will be participating in the Baillie Birdathon. This is an annual fundraiser of Bird Studies Canada, a portion of funds raised comes back to KWFN. Our Birdathon will take place during the week of May 8 to 14 on Pelee Island. At each of the next 2 Club Meetings, I will have sponsorship sheets for you to complete. You may also pay at those times or wait until we have completed the outing and pay at the May meeting. KWFN has always been generous in their support and we look forward to this annual support.

Thank you in advance.

Jim, Ken and Mike Burrell

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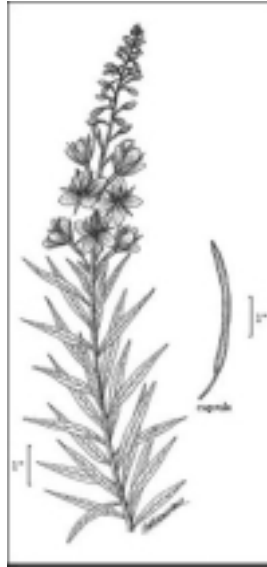
## Will the Real Fireweed Please Stand Up

In his play, *Romeo and Juliette*, Wm. Shakespeare wrote: "What's in a name? That, which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." A few weeks ago I decided to stratify some Fireweed seeds so as to be ready to grow some plants in the spring. Our son, Graham, the plant guy, saw it and was puzzled by the names I had written on the bag; Fireweed, *Erechtites hieracifolium*. He politely informed me that *E. hieracifolium* was not the correct name for Fireweed. This all started last August, when Larry Lamb, Graham, Pat Deacon and I, visited the newly clear-cut Drynan Tract site where the dead and dying Red Pine plantation next to the road had been removed and nodes of indigenous trees and shrubs had been planted by local high school students and MNR Rangers. We were pleased at the large number of trees and shrubs that had survived. It looked so different, with all of the large trees removed, and sunlight flooding the area previously in deep shade. We were eager to see what plants would germinate on their own, the seeds of which may have lain on the ground for a number of years, waiting for the warmth and light energy from the sun to release them from their dormancy. Larry Lamb's sharp eyes spotted a plant that looked and smelled somewhat like the Sow Thistles we see growing everywhere in late summer. He called it Pilewort (Great name, eh?), and said its scientific name was *Erechtites hieracifolium*. He said it was uncommon and was not noted

# Native Plant Nuts

By Wayne Buck

for being at Drynan. We theorized that the seed had germinated in response to the increase in the amount of sunlight reaching the soil, somewhat akin to what happens after a fire.



Now I was confused. So, looked up some information on this plant (*E.*

*hieracifolium*) and found that several websites (e.g. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture) call it Fireweed due to its propensity for germinating in large numbers after fires. I then looked it up in Grimm's plant guide and it, too, called it Fireweed. This was not the plant that I know as Fireweed. The information on an herbal seller's homepage indicated that all parts of Pilewort were used for various naturopathic remedies.

I continued to search, and, after some searching, came across a plant called Great Willow-herb, (*Epilobium angustifolium*) that looked like the plant that I call Fireweed.

This plant has large mauve-coloured flowers and also germinates abundantly after fires. It stands about 1.0 m tall, but it can be much taller. It spreads underground quite rapidly and is not recommended for small garden areas, being better suited to larger naturalization projects. The leaves

were eaten by First Nation people in salads or soups. Roots were eaten raw. Medicinally it was used as a treatment for prostate and urinary problems including benign prostatic hyperplasia or enlarged prostate, and for various gastrointestinal disorders such as dysentery or diarrhea. It is closely related to a plant that grows abundantly on our property, especially in damp areas, called Hairy Willow-herb.



Both Fireweed and Pilewort can be found at Drynan. There is no danger of confusing them. They look so different. If you are a Native Plant Nut, the next time you are at Drynan, in July or August, take a plant field guide with you, just in case you have an opportunity to see these plants and add 1 or 2 plants to your life list.

I have been asked and have agreed to do the sightings portion of the KWFN meeting in the month of April. By then, a lot of you will have been out on local trails and walks and will have seen some indigenous plants in bloom. We're not after imported species such as tulips or daffodils. I would encourage you to share these with us at that time.



~ Fraser Gibson

**Ontario Nature-Great Lakes West-Spring Regional Meeting**

KWFN is hosting the next Regional Meeting which will be held on Saturday April 9, from 10:00 to approximately 3:00. The meeting will be held at the Laurel Creek Nature Centre.

This is an excellent opportunity to learn a little more about Ontario Nature’s Regional structure, hear about the activities of other clubs in our region and be updated on Ontario Nature activities. It’s a wonderful opportunity to meet other naturalists and share ideas among our network.

Members are welcome to attend this meeting. Please contact me for further details, by April 2, if you are interested in attending.

**Ontario Nature's 80th AGM**

It is already five years since KWFN held Ontario Nature's 75th AGM here! Now is the time to mark your calendars for Ontario Nature's 80th Annual General Meeting and Gathering on June 11 – 12, 2011.† It will be held at Ganaraska Forest Centre in the heart of the Oak Ridges Moraine [north of Port Hope]. The festivities will include a gala dinner, a variety of informative field trips and nature workshops, and a kids' nature camp. Registration information can be obtained at: [www.ontarionature.org/wild](http://www.ontarionature.org/wild) or by calling Lauren Wright at 1 800 4402366 ext. 271.

**Long Point – Carolinian NatureFest!**

The Long Point Biosphere Reserve Foundation, along with partner organizations is excited to announce the upcoming

1st Annual Long Point – Carolinian NatureFest to be held in Norfolk the weekend of May 27th to 29th! To see a schedule of events, visit their website at [www.naturefest.ca](http://www.naturefest.ca)

**2011 Youth Summit for Biodiversity & Sustainable Living**

*Submitted by Sarah Hedges, Ontario Nature*  
Circle September 23-25 on your calendar. This is the date of the 2011 Youth Summit for Biodiversity and we'd love to have you involved! Our newly formed Youth Council will be hosting the Summit this year and once again, we will have a great roster of conservation-focused workshops and activities. For more information on how you can join the fun, please contact Sarah Hedges at [sarahh@ontarionature.org](mailto:sarahh@ontarionature.org).

Sanctuary Fund

In response to queries about the Sanctuary Fund, the purpose of it is printed here for clarification, taken directly out of the club’s Sanctuary Fund document, updated November 2008.

“The Sanctuary Fund can be used as follows:

- to acquire land;
- to help others acquire property;
- to maintain our properties;
- to pay taxes on our properties.”

**KWFN MONTGOMERY PROPERTY COMMITTEE**  
**ANNUAL REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS & MEMBERS**  
March 2011

**MANDATE**

In accordance with The Management Plan for the property, the Conservation Director of the club is asked to submit an Annual Report about the property to the Board. The Montgomery Committee is to prepare the report. This reporting requirement has been included in the Directors' Duties Manual. This report covers the period from March 2010 to March 2011 and will be published in the Heron for the information of the members.

**REPORT OF ACTIVITY – PERIWINKLE ERADICATION**

A work party on 14 May 2010 re-laid all the available tarps on live patches of periwinkle. A number of tarps were cut into smaller pieces to allow for better coverage. The previously covered sites showed some incursion of garlic mustard, but the periwinkle had been killed. This project is in need of extra tarps and a campaign to solicit donations from the membership is underway.

**REPORT OF ACTIVITY – Other Invasives**

Two small test plots of garlic mustard were established in June 2010. The intention was to compare results from pulling, vs. cutting the plants. The Committee is concerned that the plots are too small, that trampling will mask results, and that the literature is already clear that either method is effective given proper timing and repetition for 5 to 7 years. The Committee does not have the resources to tackle this invasive at this time.

Manitoba Maples are increasingly present in the wetter areas. As time and manpower allows, these trees are being cut out.

**REPORT OF ACTIVITY – INTERPRETIVE TRAIL**

The Trail was cleared by the work party in May 2010. The trail has been used by outings and visiting members.

**TRAIL GUIDE**

The Trail Guide has been well received. An Additional \$24 of member donations for the Guide has been returned to the club as a donation from the Committee.

**SIGNAGE**

In response to Committee and Board concerns about public liability for trail users, a "Caution" sign has been installed near the start of the trail but not visible from the road. Thanks to Jim Cappleman and his company that designed, supplied and installed the sign.

## **REPORT OF ACTIVITY – OUTINGS**

Marco DeBruin led an outing in June 2010. It was well attended.

## **MONTGOMERY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A printed file copy of the Management Plan has been made available to members on the information tables at the monthly KWFN meetings since the last meeting of the 2009/2010 season. Judging by the condition of the document it has been read by many members.

The Management Plan contains the Biological Inventory of the property. The Inventory has been almost entirely focussed on the botany of the property. This is consistent with the original reasons for the purchase of the land and the interests of those involved at the time (Montgomery et al, Larry Lamb etc). However the inventory listing of the fauna has been casual at best. The Committee recommends that, while new plant discoveries are being added as found, we need to focus more on the fauna in the coming years. Outings to the property (and individuals visiting) should make an effort to record these observations and leaders should be chosen with these species in focus. Photography of animals is proposed as an outing feature.

## **ACQUISITION OF THE ABUTTING RIVERSIDE LAND**

The owner had made an informal offer to donate his segment to KWFN in return for a tax receipt. The costs to the club for legal and administrative fees to create the land severance and other matters necessary to allow the KWFN to receive such a donation are deemed by the Committee to be a poor use of volunteer time and club funds. The additional protection of this small lot would be minimal compared to the status quo, and the land is often trespassed by fishermen. The KWFN should not be exposed to this additional liability. The Committee has recommended that the offer be declined and a letter is to be sent to the owner by the President, thanking for the offer.

## **INSPECTION REPORT**

The Board has requested that the Committee conduct, and report to the Board, a property inspection once a year. A form for this purpose is in preparation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

Thanks to all who lent tools and donated supplies. Above all, thanks to all the committee members for donating their time and effort throughout the year, both on site, in hosting and attending meetings, and in recording the work.

Respectfully submitted, The Montgomery Property Committee:  
(in alpha order) Pat and Paul Bigelow, Wayne and Lynda Buck, Marco DeBruin, Fraser Gibson, Valerie Hill, David Hunsberger, Graham & Marg Macdonald, April Morrissey.

Report compiled by Graham Macdonald, March 5, 2011.

# Outings Schedule



By Mary Voisin

## Laurentian Wetlands

Friday, April 15, 2011

Fraser Gibson 519-576-9287

### **Meeting Time/Place**

9:30 am at Sunrise Centre

(corner of Fischer Hallman and Ottawa) in the Home Depot parking lot closest to Caseys.

The property surrounding the wetland and belonging to the City of Kitchener totals 55 acres and the wetland itself totals 22 acres. The area includes 13 different Ecological Land Classification types. Very little walking is involved but a few vantage points can be visited. In past years, waterfowl seen at this time have been Redheads, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeon, Buffleheads, and American Coots. There is a good chance of seeing other returning migrants as well. Bring your scope and binoculars for some easy viewing.

## Crown Land Woodlot

**Good Friday Afternoon Walk-about**

Friday, April 22, 2011

Janice Bock 745-3296

([traveljb@hotmail.com](mailto:traveljb@hotmail.com))

### **Meeting Time/Place:**

2 pm at the small parking lot, or roadside, on New Dundee Rd. (Rd. 12) at the SE corner of the junction with the Hwy 7 & 8 Expressway. The Crown Lands (Ontario) Woodlot is opposite Alam Wood Products (2676).

We will look for the Wildflowers of Spring along the trails in this mixed woodlot of deciduous and pine and spruce trees. There are also some farm building ruins. Prepare

for a few gentle ups and downs early in the trail and some possible wet spots on these Crown Lands under the Ministry of Natural Resources.

## Guelph Radial Trail

The Algonquin of Southern Ontario

Saturday, April 23, 2011

Valerie Hill 519-578-8113 or

Cell 519-841-3228

### **Meeting Time/Place**

9:00 am at Canadian Tire parking lot for car-pooling on Victoria Road N.

This is one of my favourite trails, discovered on my mountain bike several years ago. The first part of the trail follows an old electric railway bed, flat and lined primarily with conifer forest. After 20 minutes, we'll come to a dam over the Eramosa River, which we can cross to explore the trails and abundant wildflowers on the opposite side - if the water levels are not too high. Returning back over the dam, we continue east where the trail suddenly veers upward toward a small bluff. It's a steep but short hike up, leading to a rolling trail that meanders through several different forest types. Bring some snacks: we can stop for a few minutes at the gorgeous lookout and view miles of forest unimpeded by any sign of civilization. You'll think you're in Algonquin!

This is a loop trail that will take at least 2 hours and does not require a high level of fitness or ability.

## KNAP Earth Day Celebration Huron Natural Area

**Easter Weekend on Saturday  
April 23, 2011**

Fraser Gibson and Josh Shea

### **Meeting Time/Place**

1-4 p.m. Huron Natural Area (Trillium Dr. between Bleams and Strasburg Rd., Kitchener)

Come and celebrate Earth Day at Huron Natural Area in Kitchener during the afternoon of April 23. KNAP is the joint venture of KWFN, City of Kitchener and the Waterloo Stewardship Network.

The program, though still in its planning stages at the time of printing, will be much the same as previous years and is expected to include events such as live birds of prey, nature walks, chickadee bird box building and bristol board bird silhouette construction. There will be activities for the whole family to enjoy.

## Baden Sandhills Evening Walk

Monday, April 25, 2011

Jim Burrell/Jim Cappleman

### **Meeting Time/Place**

5:30 pm - meet Jim Burrell at Highland Hills Mall near the Beer Store. We will travel from there.

Jim Burrell will lead a spring walk through Jim Cappleman's woodlot at 2774 Sandhills Rd., Baden, on April 25 at 6:00 p.m.. We would expect to see migrating songbirds, spring flowers and other wildlife on this leisurely jaunt through an ancient glacial kame. Jim will provide some light refreshments for anyone in need of the same afterwards.

Wild Ontario, a program run by volunteers at the former Wild Bird Clinic at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC, University of Guelph), brought a novel form of presentation. Instead of computers and projectors, the audience was given the opportunity to see four live birds of prey up close. The presentation fascinated adults and children alike. All the individuals presented were either accident victims or individuals turned into the clinic for other reasons.

It was noted that raptors are generally defined as birds that kill their prey through the use of their feet. This family of birds includes eagles, owls, falcons, hawks, and others. Vultures are also included.

The first raptor brought out and described was an American Kestrel named Artemis. This falcon is about the size of a chocolate bar (7-8 inches), but with its ability to dive at 389 km/hr, it holds the speed record in the animal kingdom. Artemis is a very powerful, agile flyer who can quickly change direction and stop. She can hover as well, something which few other birds can do.

She eats small birds, insects, and rodents. She arrived bedraggled at the clinic and had been domesticated, thus rendering her unsuitable for returning to the wild. Her life expectancy is 15-20 years.

Kestrels can see the same daytime colours that humans can, but additionally they see UV light. This ability enables them to observe the UV fluorescence of the proteins in mouse urine. As mice run on their pathways, they release a droplet of urine each time they stop to look around. So, to Kestrels, the murine pathways are clearly marked, as if by fluorescent spray-paint. This enables them to focus their hunting efforts.

The second raptor was a Broad-winged Hawk named Whistler. She is substantially larger (16 inches long, with a 38-inch wingspan) than Artemis. Her impressive wings have the classic falcon shape: long, pointed, and tapered. Their form hints at function: these hawks are famous for riding the rising columns of sun-heated air known as thermals. They are equipped with tiny

pressure-sensitive feathers at the edges of their wings that enable them to find and track thermals efficiently. So, they circle lazily up one thermal, and when that cools, they fly down to the next one and ride that upwards. This enables them to cover long distances with scarcely a wingbeat.

Broad-winged Hawks like to perch on a branch (at the edge of a forest, for protection against eagles), and watch for signs of a meal in the meadow in front of them. When something comestible appears, they swoop down to the forest floor after it. Sometimes they fly in search of prey. They relish small rodents as well as frogs.

Like most raptors, these hawks are solitary, but they migrate in groups known as kettles. Migration occurs during the first week in September. It was noted that these birds cross Lake Ontario at Point Pelee because there are no thermals over the lake. (The water simply absorbs the sunlight and does not increase significantly in temperature on a per-day basis because of its high heat capacity.) Point Pelee is used as a bird-migration route for hundreds of avian species.

Broad-winged Hawks are not considered to be in danger of becoming extinct, but ongoing fragmentation of their forest habitat due to road construction and urbanization remains a serious concern. Whistler was found dishevelled and malnourished in a farmer's field, apparently stolen from a nest. Like



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## Wild Ontario – Raptors in the Hand

Artemis, she had imprinted on humans and thus was unable to return to the wild.

The next guest was Einstein, a Great Horned Owl. This was the only nocturnally active bird of the show. Her large, forward-facing eyes, fixed in their sockets, bring excellent depth perception and are perfectly designed to see in the faintest moonlight. If humans had eyes proportionally the same size, ours would be the size of grapefruits. The fixed-in-socket design necessitates head-turning in order to see directionally, and a flexible neck brings a 270-degree rotation capability.

Outstanding nocturnal vision is only one of Einstein's strengths. She can also hear very faint sounds, such as the rustle of a mouse. Her ears are set at angles, so that one ear points upwards and the other points slightly downwards. This enables her to quickly pinpoint the source of the faintest sound vertically as well as horizontally.

Her 50-inch wings, with feathers superbly designed for silent nocturnal approaches, and accompanied by razor-sharp talons (two forwards, two rearwards), enable her to nail scurrying rodents with uncanny accuracy. Einstein became orphaned when the tree in which she was a nestling was cut down. She imprinted on humans, thus rendering her unsuitable for release into the wild. Her life expectancy is about 20-30 years (a record for this species in captivity is 53

years).

The final bird presented was a Turkey Vulture named Socrates. Turkey Vultures are common but underappreciated. By consuming dead flesh that is in the early stages of decay, they ensure a timely cleanup and disposal of end-of-life animals. Their excellent sense of smell, honed specifically for ethyl mercaptan (released almost immediately as flesh begins to rot), can detect a corpse from up to 5km away! This attribute is also useful in detecting leaks in natural gas pipelines, where mercaptans are used as a scenting agent.

Perhaps the most striking attribute of Socrates is his bald head. This attribute is ideal for feeding on carrion, especially since this bird focuses its efforts on eating the organs (lungs, liver, heart, kidney) due to their high nutritional value. With no knife nor fork at his disposal, Socrates can only insert his head into the cavity. Even though blood and other offal can end up on body feathers, he can let the material dry and then clean it off because he can reach it.

Socrates has pinkish feet that are well-adapted for work around corpses. To guard against pests (e.g. lice) from swarming up his feet and into his feathers, he regularly dispenses highly alkaline urine on his feet as a disinfectant. Additionally, he has the remarkable ability to ingest a wide variety of pathogens (E.Coli, Salmonella, botulism, and rabies, all of which can be extremely dangerous to humans) without harm! And, a short digestive tract enables maximum nour-

ishment to be extracted efficiently before the food spoils completely.

Because of the hit-or-miss availability of corpses on which to dine, Turkey Vultures must be able to survive for extended periods of time without eating. So, they gorge themselves whenever the opportunity arises. Unfortunately, sometimes they get so heavy that they cannot fly. To deal with predators such as coyotes, they projectile vomit up to 6 metres. The vile-smelling material, which many canids find attractive, diverts attention and allows the vulture to quietly slink away.

About 25 years ago, Socrates was hit by a speeding car while scavenging a roadside carcass. He was left with a broken wing, and was found with feet raw from long-distance walking. He had survived by traipsing from carcass to carcass. He was taken to OVC, where veterinarians valiantly tried to repair a wing that had healed abnormally in a position over his back. The wing proved unsalvageable (hollow avian bones are notoriously difficult to fix), and amputation was needed. Socrates was well-liked, and it was decided to form an education program to give him a home and purpose. Socrates is thus the founding member of what is known today as Wild Ontario ([ourwildontario.ca](http://ourwildontario.ca)). His life expectancy, in captivity, is about 50 years.

Heartfelt thanks to the volunteers from Wild Ontario for providing insight into the unique abilities of birds of prey, and for letting us see these often elusive birds up close.

**Winter Visitors** - (previously printed in the Baden Outlook)

by Ken Quanz

Irruptions of northern birds such as crossbills and purple finches often show up in this area due to lack of food supplies in their winter areas. There is, however, another group of birds which regularly migrate from the north into our area for the winter; birds such as eagles, juncos and American tree sparrows – the subject of this article.

While these birds are mostly seen along fence rows and bush edges, they also frequent platform feeders and the ground under the feeders. An estimated population of 10-20 million pairs of American tree sparrows breed along the edge of the tree line in tundra areas. For Ontario this means only parts of the southern shores of Hudson's Bay. Northern areas of other provinces as well as the territories also provide breeding

American tree sparrow! Along with juncos, they travel in small flocks which I suspect are family flocks. During my time at Wrigley Corners Outdoor Education Centre, we banded hundreds of these sparrows. What I found most interesting were the many birds which we would recapture the next year, and up to seven years later. Obviously, they were using the same winter range each year. Perhaps the most interesting observations

came as we looked through our records and found that birds which were banded on the same day one year showed up together the next year. Usually there were unbanded birds with them which we then banded that second year. Sure enough, the following winter we would often get banded birds from both years coming back together.

On the other

hand, early studies of flock behaviour found that the flocks were loosely formed, showed little structure, and had an average range of  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 kilometres. Perhaps it is time for another study of the flock behaviour of this very common winter bird.



American tree sparrows are easily identified by their sparrow shape and brown colouring. To distinguish them from other sparrows look for a rusty-cap and a large central dark spot on unstreaked breast. You may also note the two-toned bill and black legs.

habitat. During the breeding season insects are the food of choice, but in the winter these birds must switch to seeds. Seed bearing plants in these areas are often heavily snow covered in winter, forcing these birds to migrate. Rarely do you see a single

## **FROM THE MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR**

Submitted by Larry Hamel

### **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

At the March meeting three new memberships were purchased. Please look for and help us welcome Susan Bryant, Annie Robertson and Shannon Walker at each of our meetings. We wish Susan, Annie and Shannon a special welcome and encourage them to seek out the people and information they need to help them benefit from their memberships!

### **DONATIONS**

Andrea Davis of Toronto made a donation to the Young Naturalists Fund in memory of Joyce Wood.

Jay Weiler of Waterloo made a contribution to the Young Naturalists Fund.

The Vanden Elzen Family made a donation to the Operating Fund.

We thank each of these donors for thinking of KWFN and its needs. Your contributions will be put to good use.

### **INCOME TAX RECEIPTS**

Receipts for income tax purposes that were not picked up by the end of the February meeting were mailed to the recipients following the meeting. If you have any concern about your receipt, please contact the Membership Director.



## Chickadees by Ken Quanz

(seen previously in the Baden Outlook)

Another bird feeding season is almost over. Many species may visit the feeder but my personal favourite is the black-capped chickadee! Perhaps this is because I have spent more time banding, holding, hand feeding, and studying them. Or perhaps it is because the chickadee is the adopted symbol of the Waterloo Region District School Board Outdoor Education Department where I worked for 11 years.

Maybe the chickadee's behaviour is what captured me. During the majority of the year these birds live in small distinct flocks of 6-14 or so individuals. A flock is made up of mated pairs as well as some individual birds looking for a mate. The mated pairs are ranked in a pecking order from most dominant to most submissive. The dominant pair leads the group and has the first choice of food; a behaviour often seen at a feeder when a chickadee of lower rank will vacate its position in favour of a more dominant bird.

Also in the flock there may be unmated birds which are waiting for nature to remove a mated bird (death) so they can "fly into that position" and maintain the flock hierarchy. It is often advantageous for the unmated birds to move back and forwards between flocks so they are readily available to be chosen by the remaining mate.

You may think that the chickadees depend on you for their winter food supply, but if you watch them, especially on a sunny winter day, you will see them going around and around the outer branches of trees looking for their main source of food – insects and spiders which hide in the bark. If you watch carefully you may also

see a brown creeper doing the same thing while ascending the trunk of the tree, sometimes meeting a nuthatch descending the tree head-first also looking for insects. All three species depend on insect/spider protein for the vast majority of their food. All live in the same trees, but have different roles (niches). All help to control the insect populations which would otherwise grow too large and become pests.

In the spring the chickadees break away from the flock into individual pairs. At this time they look for old woodpecker holes, or rotting fence posts and trunks where they can make a cosy hole in which to nest. Sometimes they will use a bird box, but prefer to clean it up themselves, so partially fill your bird box with wood shavings for them to rearrange or remove. Here they will raise their clutch of young on their own until late August when the flocks start to reform with the same pairs in the same order unless both members of a pair succumbed to the weather, predators, or the rigors of parenthood.

How do we know this? Chickadees look alike and are almost always on the move. When I worked at Wrigley Corners Outdoor Education Centre we were in the midst of conducting a major study of black-capped chickadees. Every fall and spring Ted Cheskey and I would capture chickadees in a large mist net and band them with a numbered metal band as well as three coloured bands – a combination of two coloured bands on one leg and a coloured and metal band on the other leg. We used different colour combinations in each of the areas in which we banded. Careful records were kept of the original site at which each bird was banded. Every day during the winter we had one or two

classes which were studying birds by offering black sunflower seeds in their bare hands. As birds landed the colour combinations were read off to another student who recorded each visit. If a bird left a hand before feeding to allow another bird to feed the dominant/submissive combination was also recorded. This study still continues under the leadership of Levi Moore, giving us over 30 years of local data.

Chickadees feed in flocks. We could always tell which flock we were feeding by the pairs represented. We also found birds which were visiting the flock and would be found in a different location the next day – unmated birds on the hopeful list. Because we recorded information so frequently we could often tell to the day when a particular chickadee supplied lunch to a passing hawk.

All the information was managed in a large database which was compared to other chickadee studies conducted in Canada and the United States as well as data from around the world on related chickadee (*Parus*) species. Professor of biological sciences at Mount Holyoke College, Dr. Susan M. Smith's book *Black-capped chickadee*, 1997 of the Wild Bird Guide series coordinates this research into a very readable and compact book. She will fascinate you with stories of this amazing bird's memory (they store most of the seeds from your feeder for later use and remember the exact location of each!), its ability to survive extremely cold winter nights (they pack into holes in trees to keep warm much like bees in a hive), as well as their amazing abilities to communicate and keep a community viable.

Each species at your feeder has a remarkable story to tell.

# President's Corner

By Mary Ann Vanden Elzen

## Gardening and Local Food

When planting my very first vegetable garden I felt like a rebel. I relished the idea of providing some of my own food independent of large grocery chains and the all pervasive corporate food system. I had an urge to dig in the soil, to nurture, to watch plants grow.

That was twenty plus years ago. A lot has changed since then. According to Michael Ableman, founder of the Centre for Urban Agriculture and author of numerous books, "There is a quiet revolution stirring in our food system. It is not happening so much on the distant farms that still provide us with the majority of our food; it is happening in cities, neighborhoods and towns...in small gardens, next to railroad tracks and under power lines, on rooftops, at farmers' markets and in the most unlikely of places. It is a movement that has the potential to address a multitude of issues: economic, environmental, personal health and cultural." (from his book Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture).

Unknown to me, I was part of that growing groundswell. How this happened is still perplexing to me.

Of course, growing one's own food had always been part of the rural landscape. My parents had a large vegetable garden and, for a while, a milk cow and a few chickens. Very early memories of Mom included her churning butter and canning

vegetables. My dad would plough long single furrows into which we kids dropped sections of potatoes. Although this was not enough to sustain our family for the year, it went a long way to supplement the groceries purchased at the store.

I never took an interest. But, mysteriously, its seed was planted, laying dormant and buried deep. It germinated when I bought my first home. The desire to plant a garden suddenly sprouted to life, seemingly out of nowhere. But back then, in the urban setting, flower gardens - not vegetable gardens - were the norm.

I started out small, reading and learning as I went along. My garden expanded as did my knowledge. It was fun to try at least one new experiment each year - growing a different vegetable, gathering my own seed for next year's crop, overwintering carrots and parsnips. I gradually became more adept at preserving - canning, freezing, drying, storing. Even today, I love the fact that almost every meal at home, all year round, contains some ingredient that I grew in my garden.

And I've had a surprise. Since joining the KWFN, I've been amazed at just how many members are interested in vegetable gardening. Sometimes at club meetings, instead of talking about birds and bees and flowers and trees, we're discussing herbs and seeds and cauliflower and weeds. Some of us have been known to share gardening tips, exchange onion varieties and separate garlic

bulbs for planting. We've swapped canning jars, visited gardens and enjoyed each other's company over a home-grown lunch.

It's not only a subject of conversation during the three fairer seasons. One emailed Christmas greeting I received was more about peas and parsnips than it was about the festive season. And, at the club's December festive potluck, the topic of gardening came up at our table. Maybe that's why we got the lowest score in the bird listing activity!

Waterloo Region has been at the forefront of building a healthy local food system. The number of community gardens is now approaching forty. Involvement in CSAs and food boxes is steadily on the rise. The idea of Foodlink's Buy Local! Buy Fresh! map, now in its ninth year of publication, has been adopted by ten counties throughout Ontario. Sometimes, when planning a trip or a visit, I consult the appropriate map with the idea of picking up some farmgate produce on the way to my destination.

With fuel and transportation costs ever on the rise, the benefits of buying local or growing your own become increasingly appealing. And Mother Nature will thank you!

For a compelling 2:46 minute video on the benefits of sourcing local, google Eat Real Eat Local. It's focus is Canadian and, toward the end, specifically mentions Waterloo Region.

**April 2011 at a Glance** - refer to page 8 of this Heron for full outing details

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Laurentian Wet-lands 9:30 am	16
17	18 KWFN meeting	19	20	21	22 Crown Land Wood-lot 2 pm	23 Guelph Radial Trail 9 am Huron Natural Area 1-4 pm
24 Easter Sun-day	25 Baden Sandhills 5:30 pm	26	27	28	29	30

Update from the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors met March 7 and discussed the following topics:

- Nomination for the Honorary Life Membership Award
- Conservation Award
- New Board members for the next year are still being sought
- An auditor for the 2011/2012 year is needed
- Montgomery Property update
- Founders' Committee update
- Conservation Committee update
- Archives Committee update
- A property inspection form is being drafted
- Noteworthy bird list was received
- Sanctuary Fund's purpose
- Membership Report was received
- Bird Studies Canada is wanting to start a SwiftWatch monitoring program in Kitchener
- Issues raised at club meetings
- Status of the Executive Guide

The minutes of the March meeting will be approved at the Board's next meeting April 4. The approved minutes can be viewed in the KWFN library at club meetings, or you can request to receive a digital version from Katharina Walton.



Kitchener, ON N2M 3W6  
317 Highland Road East

# Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists

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## Membership Fees September to August (After Feb.1/11 - 1/2 price\*)

\* new members only  
(senior = 60 yrs)

Family/Couple  
\$35.00

Senior Couple  
\$30.00

Adult Individual  
\$30.00

Senior Individual  
\$25.00

Student \$25.00

18 and under Free

Bring payment for membership to the next meeting or mail to KWFN at 317 Highland Rd E Kitchener N2M 3W6

## 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)



*"The Heron" is the official publication of the Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists' Club and is produced by volunteer members of the club. It is published nine times yearly from September to June, except for December.*

*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.*

**Pesticides in Ontario** It is KWFN's policy not to use pesticides on any club property or during any club activity. (November 2000) In April 2009 the use of pesticides for commercial reasons was banned in the province of Ontario. This ban overrides all municipal by-laws. The main exceptions are for agriculture, human health and safety, golf courses, sports fields (though not parks), forestry, and in some instances to protect natural resources. Any pesticide identified as Class 9 is not allowed for residential or cosmetic use. To report non-compliance with the ban please contact the Guelph OMNR office at (519) 826-4955. For more information go to: <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/land/pesticides/>