



American Kestrel by Lois Gillette

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## Newsletter Submissions

Please submit your pictures and articles for the March newsletter no later than March 15, 2020. Email all submissions to Nancy Muzik at [john\\_nancy\\_m@rogers.com](mailto:john_nancy_m@rogers.com)

# THE NATURALIST

DURHAM REGION FIELD NATURALISTS  
CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION

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## President's Message

Happy New Year! I hope you enjoyed the festive season. We certainly did. Out of all the hustle and bustle it was a treat to participate once again in the Christmas Bird Count. I find it is a day where one can just put aside all the holiday activity and concentrate on finding birds. At least the weather cooperated this time. We have had some horrible weather over the years - gale force winds, biting cold, freezing rain. So clear blue skies and temperatures hovering around -4 C was not bad.



During the year end I took time to reflect on the year that was. Yes, I know it was filled with many disheartening news about nature and the future of our planet. The outlook for 2020 and beyond is not good and will be a challenge. But as I love to take photos, lots of them, these pictures allowed me a chance to refresh my memory of the things my family and I have done during the year. I took the time to gather the ones I liked best and put them together in a small photo booklet dividing them up into months. There are the usual family ones and the travel ones. But I came to notice many of my favourite photos and events had to do with nature.

The first picture in January was one of a female Red-tailed Hawk that we spied during a walk around our neighbourhood. It was glorious, probably the largest one of its kind I have ever seen. While the male of this widespread buteo can grow to a length of 22.1 inches, the female can grow to 25.6 inches. Then there was the cruise in the Caribbean. I happened to find and take a lovely photo of an American Kestrel, the smallest of our American falcons. February found us feeding Chickadees at Lynde Creek C.A. My son's Italian girlfriend was ecstatic to have birds come to her hand. That same month we went to Florida and enjoyed visits to local nature areas, our binoculars and camera always in hand.

March took us to Presqu'île P.P. with DRFN seeking out the many species of ducks crowding the protected waters of the bay. We were to visit the park 3 times last year. May took us to Prince Edward County, our favourite location to enjoy spring migration. We camped at Sandbanks P.P. The woods were alive with spring wildflowers. It was a productive few days of birding. My favourite photo is one of a Northern

## Upcoming Meetings

*Meetings: last Monday of each month except June-August and December*

*Time: 7:30 p.m.*

*Place: Civic Rec Complex, Bobby Orr Room, 99 Thornton S., Oshawa.*

*Come a little early to enjoy conversation and refreshments ('lug-a-mug')*

### **January 27, 2020**

Stephanie MacEwan

“Soper Creek Wildlife Rescue, how it started the work they do”

### **February 24, 2020**

Tyler Weeldon

“Prince Edward County coyote study and its findings and the natural history and taxonomy of coyotes”

### **March 30, 2020**

Peter Thoem

“The Owl Foundation - A fly-by-night organization?”

### **April 27, 2020**

Martyn Obbard

“How Black and Polar Bears Prepare for the Winter”

### **May 25, 2020,**

Members Night and Annual General Meeting



Parula. This small colourful wood-warbler prefers to build its nest out of tree lichens. We returned to the area in June for the annual DRFN Spring Outing.

Other outings of the year included Stephen's Gulch in May, Carden Alvar in June, a butterfly outing in July at Heber Down C.A. (I got some great butterfly photos and a nice photo of a Savannah Sparrow.) During a family camping trip in July to Emily P.P. my son and I took my five-year old granddaughter out canoeing on the lake. We saw a myriad of creatures – Great Blue Herons, Green Herons, frogs, a family of Pied-billed Grebes and, most importantly, a River Otter. We were so close we could hear it making piggy-like noises. We were all mesmerized. Didn't have the camera with me! But I did reimagine our watery adventure in ink and watercolour, a gift for my granddaughter. We continued to enjoy nature throughout the fall and early winter. I got some nice Mallard photos during the Christmas Bird Count.

So, I guess you can see that nature is very important to me and my family. And DRFN is a big part of our life. It is my sincere wish that you enjoyed a year of nature and will enjoy it again in the coming year.

*Lois Gillette*

## Future Outings

### **Monday, February 17 at 10:00 AM** **Thickson's Woods – Winter Walk**

Leader: Don Docherty

Difficulty: Easy walking.

February is a challenging month but the birds we will see are tough ones that know how to survive the winter months. The Chickadees will expect an entrance fee in seed. Our walk will check the woods and meadow.

Wear appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast. Wear appropriate footwear for walking conditions.

### **Saturday, March 14 at 7 AM** **Algonquin Park**

Leader: Rayfield Pye

Difficulty: Snow and ice may make walking difficult at times

This trip is contingent upon good road and weather conditions. Early departure 7:00AM. Meet to car pool at the North parking lot at the Northview Seniors' Centre at Ritson and Beatrice Roads. (Alternately, meet at the Dwight park entrance at 10:00 AM.)

We'll be looking for birds that are more common in the boreal forest. There are good possibilities of Evening Grosbeaks and

other northern specialties. Spruce Grouse and Black-backed Woodpecker nest in Algonquin but finding them is the challenge.

Bring a lunch. (Include something for the Canada Jays!)

Dress warmly! Bring sunscreen if there will be sun. (Sun plus snow reflection can produce a bad burn!)

***Don Docherty***

## Past Outings

### Niagara Gulls, November 30, 2019



White-winged Scoter by Lois Gillette

Considering the time of year, we had excellent weather for our outing. We started at Dufferin Islands where we failed to find Tufted Titmouse. It seems that these birds are no longer easy to find on the Canadian side of the Falls. We did see a Northern Flicker before walking the area above the Falls.

At first look, it was obvious that water levels were high. Areas where we normally saw gulls loafing were submerged but there was still a lot of birds present. We identified about 5 Greater Black-backed and a lesser Black-backed Gull as well as many Herring and Bonaparte's gulls. Common Goldeneye and Buffleheads were also present. Further up river, I located a Cormorant and about 80 Tundra Swans. We walked along the parkway towards the falls and saw a small number of Hooded Mergansers and some

Gadwall. We were given directions to see a Harlequin Duck but it could not be conclusively identified as it sat behind some rocks and a tree.

After lunch at Chez Tim's, we drove to the Whirlpool where we saw more of the same species. Our next stop was the Sir Adam Beck facility where we had good looks at an Iceland Gull. Our last Niagara stop was at Queenston Heights Park where we scoped Lewiston, New York's tall buildings for Vultures. I counted 8 Turkey and 2 Black Vultures. It seems that dining, for vultures, is better in New York.

Most of our group headed to Gray's Road in Stoney Creek. From the lake view at the end of the road, they saw all three types of Scoters and a Barrows Goldeneye. I went to the lift bridge and saw a King Eider, Surf Scoter and numerous Long Tailed ducks and Goldeneye ride the ferocious waves while a Peregrine Falcon guarded the bridge nest site from a sheltered spot.

Thanks to everyone who attended.

***Don Docherty***

### 65th Oshawa Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 21, 2019.

Weather: It was -5 at 7 AM and it reached 0 at midafternoon. Snow depth was less than 5 cm. Still water was frozen over and moving water was mostly open. Winds were light.

Greater White-fronted Goose-	cw	Canada Goose	4963
Mute Swan	46	Trumpeter Swan	7
Wood Duck	1	American Black Duck	64
Mallard	1158	Northern Pintail	cw
Redhead	51	Greater Scaup	6701
Harlequin	cw	White-winged Scoter	14

Long-tailed Duck	1186	Bufflehead	176
Common Goldeneye	803	Hooded Merganser	2
Common Merganser	34	Red-breasted Merganser	351
Ruffed Grouse	1	Wild Turkey	112
Horned Grebe	1	Double-crested Cormorant	1
Great Blue Heron	2	Turkey Vulture	1
Bald Eagle	5	Northern Harrier	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Coopers Hawk	9
Northern Goshawk	1	Red-tailed Hawk	49
Rough-legged Hawk	2	Ring-billed Gull	415
Herring Gull	153	Iceland Gull	1
Great Black-backed Gull	4	Rock Pigeon	1677
Mourning Dove	823	Great Horned Owl	2
Snowy Owl	1	Barred Owl	1
Long-eared Owl	1	Northern Saw-whet Owl	4
Belted Kingfisher	6	Red-bellied Woodpecker	6
Downey Woodpecker	117	Hairy Woodpecker	28
Northern Flicker	3	Pileated Woodpecker	4
Eastern Phoebe	cw	Merlin	2
American Kestrel	8	Peregrine Falcon	3
Northern Shrike	5	Blue Jay	182
American Crow	165	Common Raven	21
Black-capped Chickadee	955	Red-breasted Nuthatch	16
White-breasted Nuthatch	51	Brown Creeper	6
Winter Wren-	4	Marsh Wren	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet-	14	Hermit Thrush	2
American Robin-	89	Gray Catbird	1
Northern Mockingbird-	10	European Starling	1847
Cedar Waxwing-	4	Snow Bunting	2
American Tree Sparrow-	177	Chipping Sparrow	2
Song Sparrow-	23	Swamp Sparrow	3
White-throated Sparrow-	33	White-crowned Sparrow	5
Dark-eyed Junco-	443	Northern Cardinal	245
Common Grackle-	3	Brown-headed Cowbird	176
House Finch-	168	White-winged Crossbill	6
American Goldfinch-	281	House Sparrow	370
Total Species	80 (plus 4 for count week)	Total birds counted	24114

Feeder Watchers: Yvonne Dodgson, Dianne Pazaratz, Judy Pell, Diane Peter, Marie Wannamaker, Andrew McCallum, Irene Warren, Maureen McVarish, Brian Reid, Mike McEvoy, Tyler Hoar and family, Cory Muzik.



Field Counters: Kristen Osbourn, Don Docherty, John Wilson, Charmaine Anderson, David Worthington, Mary Beth Worthington, Brian Steele, Margaret Carney, Dennis Barry, Glenn Coady, Tyler Hoar, Mike Ferguson, Geoff Carpentier, Peter Hogenbirk, Brian Henshaw, Otto Peter, Diane Peter, Jancie Wilton, Samantha Miller, Jim McKnight, Dianne Pazaratz, Joan Ellis, Nancy Muzik, John Muzik, John Foster, Ted

Submitted by Lois Gillette

Crichton, Marie Wannamaker, Satu Pernanen, Randy Parisien, Rayfield Pye, Joshua Knox, James Kamstra, Mark Saunders, Greg Moon, Dave Bland, Lois Gillette, Derek Gillette, Jim Robinson, Kristen Robinson, Elaine Mendosa, Fiore Mendosa,

Thank-you to Diane and Otto Peter for hosting the wrap-up party.

The data will be sent to the Audubon Society.

***Rayfield Pye***



Merlin by Kristen Osborne

## Ontario Nature Report

As we start this new decade, Global Climate change has certainly been making the headlines. Monumental wildfires in Australia have the world watching, and reacting these past few weeks. It has spotlighted the importance of awareness, conservation, and the need for action. We would like to take a moment to thank you - our members and supporters - for all that you have done to support our vital conservation efforts in 2019. Click on the Ontario Nature blog or go to our website and read up on these efforts, and don't forget to check all the upcoming events for this year. Let's get involved, advocate for nature, and act to do something about climate change.

### **Protecting your piece of nature**

We're nearly there! Thanks to the generous support of our members and donors, we are on track to acquire three properties totaling 417 acres in the globally important Frontenac Arch. This will expand our Lost Bay Nature Reserve and create a new nature reserve on Gananoque Lake. Our dedicated Board of Directors, Quest Nature Tours, and an anonymous donor generously matched gifts made by donors on Giving Tuesday. We've now reached 86% of our fundraising goal of \$700,000 to acquire and steward these rare habitats. Help us reach our target and protect these properties forever.

### **Great Backyard Bird Count**

You can join in the 23rd annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a free and fun event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Running from February 14-17, 2020, participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes on one or more days of the four-day

event and report their sightings. Anyone, from beginning bird watchers to experts can participate from your backyard or anywhere in the world! Each checklist submitted helps researchers at Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn how birds are doing and how we can better protect them.

***Maria Prisciak***



## Financial Statement Dec 31/2019

Cash Balance as of Dec 31/2018 - \$3,140.31

### ASSETS

Bird Studies Canada  
Donation Received  
Float In  
Memberships  
Raffle  
Refreshments

\$1,181.25  
\$277.00  
\$100.00  
\$1,940.00  
\$265.00  
\$112.00

### LIABILITIES

Bank Fees \$24.06  
Communications \$423.34  
Donations Out \$1,626.15  
Dues \$83.00  
Float Out \$100.00  
Miscellaneous \$348.44  
ON Insurance \$925.56  
Rent \$435.80  
Speakers \$350.00

**TOTAL ASSETS**

**\$3,875.25**

**TOTAL LIABILITIES**

**\$4,316.35**

$\$3,140.31 + \$3,875.25 - \$4,316.35 = \$2,699.21$  cash balance on hand as of Dec 31/2019

Investment: CIBC GIC (as of Nov28/2019) - \$2,354.77 @ 2.0000% Matures Nov 30/2020

***Ted Crichton***

## 2019 Youth Summit

Ontario Nature's 2019 Youth Summit for Biodiversity and Environmental leadership had 120 participants from 71 communities in Ontario. The Durham Region Field Naturalists sponsored three youths. Below are the thank you letters we received from two of the participants.

### **Sidney, Age 16 from Markham**

As you probably already know, I'm 16 years old and live in Markham. I have been fortunate enough to have been exposed to nature growing up, even living in a densely suburban area. Although I am already quite involved in the environmental community through the Bluedot movement and other programs, I have been mostly focused on the social aspect of climate change. The Ontario Nature Youth Summit has connected me to so many other remarkable individuals and has opened my eyes to the biodiversity of Ontario. In fact, before the summit, I didn't even know that there were more than two snake species in Ontario! It was a packed weekend (in fact I got very little sleep) but every second was fun, educational and inspirational! As I mentioned in my letter, my favourite parts of the summit was playing man hunt in the dark and just getting a chance to fully appreciate the nature we have in Ontario.

Below I've attached some photos that I took at the summit. Thank you again for sponsoring me.



### Maya age 17 from Ottawa

My name is Maya and I am a grade twelve student at Lisgar Collegiate Institute in Ottawa Ontario. I have always been interested in the environment and when I heard about the Ontario Nature Youth Summit from a friend, I knew that I was meant to attend.

It was amazing to have the opportunity to speak to other like minded youth who all had the same passion for nature and environmental activism that I do. Some of my highlights from that weekend were:

- seeing and getting to hold Ontario snakes
- a nature photography course where I had the chance to appreciate the small wonders in nature. I have attached some photos that I took in that course.
- talking about advocacy ideas with other high school students

I am very grateful for your sponsorship. The summit was really inspiring and has lead me to be more mindful in my own daily choices. In addition, the summit gave me lots of great ideas to help with the club I founded at my high school called the Lisgar Local Awareness Club.



## Nature FYI

A new educational section of the newsletter was suggested at our last executive meeting. It will consist of articles on various nature topics such as plants, animals, insects, birds and fish. Our first article is a piece on leucism and

albinism in birds. The March issue will be on Snow Fleas. I am looking for ideas and articles for future additions. Please let me know any ideas you may have and articles you may want to submit.

## Leucism and Albinism

Otto Peter noticed an unusual bird at his feeder for several weeks and took the photograph below. Much discussion about the bird ensued at the Christmas Bird Count wrap up party. What was it? Definitely a



leucistic sparrow, possibly a Chipping Sparrow. It was seen hanging out with a group of Chipping Sparrows at the Peter's feeder and was the same size.

**What is Leucism?** Bird Studies Canada defines leucism as an "abnormality in the deposition of pigment in feathers". The lack of pigmentation causes pale or muted colours on the entire bird or the condition can cause irregular patches of white. Birds with white patches are sometimes described as "pied" or "piebald." Leucistic birds have normal coloration of the eyes, bill, legs, and bare parts.

**What is Albinism?** According to Bird Studies Canada, "Albinism is a genetic mutation that prevents the production of melanin (but not other pigments). Some colours come from pigments other than melanin, such as carotenoids. Albinism only applies to an absence of melanin;

Submitted by Otto Peter

consequently, it is possible for a bird to be albinistic and still have colour, although most consider true albinism to be an absence of all pigment." Birds with albinism have pink legs and feet, light bills and pink eyes. In all animals with albinism the eye lacks melanin and what we are seeing is the pink coming from the blood vessels behind the eyes.



Grackle with white tail by John Mcfeeter

To make things even more confusing, occasionally a bird will lose feathers in a close call with a predator. When this happens the new feathers sometimes grow in white and then change back to the normal colour at the next regular molt. This kind of white colouring looks like leucism but is not and most frequently happens in the tail, causing a bird that lost its tail feathers to a predator to have an all-white tail like the Grackle in John Mcfeeter's picture.

Birds with leucism and albinism face challenges. The lack of camouflage makes them vulnerable to predators. Since their feathers lack melanin, they are weaker and wear out more quickly. This may make flying difficult and the bird vulnerable in harsh weather.

Hopefully this mystery piebald sparrow fueled up at the Peter's feeder and made it south to a warmer climate.

*Nancy Muzik*