

## It's Time to Renew Your Membership.

Complete the form on page 10 and pay using one of the acceptable methods.

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# THE NATURALIST

DURHAM REGION FIELD NATURALISTS  
 CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION  
 www.drfn.ca      drfn1955@hotmail.com

## President's Message

Hello DRFN members, in the September newsletter Lois mentioned that I would be taking on a role of Co-President to learn the ropes and help with some of the responsibilities. So, I thought I would take this opportunity to tell you all a little about me.



I grew up in Durham Region and spent many hours outside in our local parks and conservation areas. I went to the University of Guelph to study Wildlife Biology and this is where my love of birdwatching developed, as well as an interest in all things nature. Later I went to Lakehead University for Teachers College, in the hopes that I could combine my passions for education and the natural world in some sort of outdoor teaching opportunity.

Currently in the summers I work as a Park Naturalist at Presqu'île Provincial Park in Brighton. I help visitors explore and discover the natural world around them. In the off season I work in Whitby at a local retail store.

In my spare time I love to get outside and explore our natural areas. I like to contribute to citizen science projects and so am always using eBird and iNaturalist to record my sightings from birds to insects and everything in between. I also enjoy wildlife photography and never travel far without my camera.

It is quickly approaching one of my most favourite activities of the year - the Annual Christmas Bird Count! The Annual Christmas Bird count was one of the first activities I participated in with DRFN before I was even a member of the club. I love spending the day counting and looking for more species to add to the list, it is also a great way to discover new areas to birdwatch in your own backyard. I have been doing the same area in Whitby for a few years now and so it is cool to see the changes year to year. You can even participate in the Christmas Bird Count from the warmth and safety of your own home, by counting birds in your own backyard! I encourage you to contact Rayfield if you are interested in participating this year.

I have been working on the DRFN Executive since the fall of 2018 as Vice-President. Helping to run the Facebook page as well as coordinating the Bird Box Project with Central Lake Conservation Authority. I look forward to future projects with DRFN. If you have any ideas of things you would like to see the club do or ways we can grow as a club I would love to hear them.

## Upcoming Meetings

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

*Time: 7:30 p.m.*

*Place: **To be held via Zoom.***

**Invitations to the video conference meetings will be sent by Otto Peter with instructions on connecting, via computer, tablet or phone including the URL and access code**

### **November 30, 2020**

Martyn Obbard

“How Black and Polar Bears Prepare for Winter”

### **January 25, 2021**

TBA

## Newsletter Submissions

Please submit your pictures and articles for the January newsletter no later than January 15, 2021. Email all submissions to Nancy Muzik at [john\\_nancy\\_m@rogers.com](mailto:john_nancy_m@rogers.com)

While we cannot meet in person right now, we hope you will continue to join us each month via Zoom.

***Kristen Osborne***

## Future Outings

### Upcoming Outings and COVID-19 Guidance

These are challenging times due to COVID-19. DRFN will follow the guidance, laws and regulations of Canada, Ontario and local municipalities to limit the spread and minimize the danger. Although we have resumed outings, limits on group size and social distancing will still apply. We will not car-pool or share optics, so bring your own. Be prepared that washrooms may not be as available as in the past. Bring hand sanitizer. Bring your own drinks, and food since restaurants may not be available.

### **Sunday, December 20 Durham Christmas Bird Count**

Contact Rayfield Pye to participate @ 905-436-7998 or [raypye@interlinks.net](mailto:raypye@interlinks.net).

Social distancing will be necessary and all public health guidelines followed. No after party will be held this year. All counts should be tallied and email to Otto Peter at [opeter@rogers.com](mailto:opeter@rogers.com).

Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly.

### **Saturday, January 16 at 9:00 AM Annual Winter Bird Feeder Tour**

This is our annual opportunity to check our favourite feeders in north Pickering and Whitby in search of local birds, northern visitors and those who normally would have headed south by now. Due to COVID-19, we will miss our delicious potluck but look forward to 2022.

Meet at Mount Zion United Church. (Drive north on Westney Road past highway 7 to Concession 8 and turn right (east). Address is 3000 Concession 8 just east of Salem Road.)

Dress warmly!

### **February Outing: Date-To-Be Determined**

Durham Gulls with Rayfield Pye

*In the event of a forecast of bad weather, an email will be sent to those on the DRFN distribution list on the evening before a trip with trip cancellation or re-scheduling information. If you are not on the list, you may check the DRFN website or call the outing leader.*

***Don Docherty***

# Past Outings

## **Butterfly Garden Maintenance Day, Saturday, May 30**

Six intrepid volunteer gardeners (plus me) came to the Rossland Road Butterfly Garden annual maintenance day. There was a lot of cleaning up to be done in all three gardens, so lots of room for 'social distancing'. After days of humid weather and plenty of rain, it was a cooler, sunnier day, great for gardening.

The gardens looked so much better after dead stocks were broken off, edges weeded and wood-chipped and soon-to-be-colourful annuals planted. A sudden surprise downpour around noon soaked us all, but also the new plants which needed it. No manual watering required this time.

A Great Crested flycatcher and an oriole serenaded us, as they usually do. A Red-tailed hawk soared overhead and scolding robin parents flew back and forth between the gardens. Song sparrows were also singing and chipping which, according to Otto, indicates a nest is nearby.

We saw only two Cabbage White butterflies, but many more butterflies and other pollinators are expected when more flowers are in bloom. The common, swamp and butterfly milkweed were all poking their leaves up, food for all the Monarchs hoped for.

Thank-you so much to Antonia Dizhevski, Lois Gillette, Falmai Page, Randy Parisien, Satu Pernanen and Otto Peter for coming out to help and working so hard. You gave the gardens a great beauty treatment.

*Dianne Pazaratz*

## **Durham Forest Fall Forest and Mushroom Appreciation Walk, October 17**



*Trametes Versicolour (True Turkey Tail) by John Muzik*

Upon our arrival, we found a parking lot full of vehicles. Most belonged to those who bicycled the Durham Forest trails. We managed to find parking spots and started walking. Thankfully, there are a lot of trails and we managed to go on trails that were less frequented by bikes.

The next thing that we noticed was that there were very few mushrooms to be seen. Part of this may have been related to our dry summer and fall but, most likely, the mushrooms had been picked by foragers. We did manage to find a few representatives of several mushroom families.

Even without the mushrooms, we had a pleasant walk in excellent conditions.

Everyone had an opportunity to chat while respecting social distancing guidelines. I think that these opportunities help everyone to survive the affects of spending most of our time at home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Lake Ontario Marshes, November 7th



Hudsonian Godwit by Rayfield Pye

Cranberry Marsh was not as productive we originally expected since drought conditions left just a small pond at the north end. We concentrated on the trails and managed to see a good assortment of Sparrows including Song, White-throated, White-crowned, American Tree and Fox. Some managed to see a lingering Kinglet and most welcomed some Boreal nesters, Bufflehead, to Lake Ontario where they will spend the winter.

Our plan had been to go to Pumphouse Marsh but Rayfield Pye saved us a trip when he informed us that there was little to be seen there. He did have some good suggestions though and we headed east in search of a Snowy Owl. Unfortunately, we missed it but expect it or others of its species to be found in the area throughout the winter. We went to the bridge near Whitby Harbour where we located a Hudsonian Godwit a short distance from

the bridge. This large shorebird is not commonly seen in the area so the find was special for everyone. It had a bad foot but otherwise seemed healthy. Nearby were both species of Yellowlegs and a Kingfisher.

Time permitting, we could have gone to Corner Marsh. It's highly recommended to go there since declining water levels have made it a popular spot for tens of Great Blue Herons, as well as lingering Great Egrets. Many Hooded Mergansers, dabbling ducks and shovelers were also present. If you have a chance take a short drive and you will be well rewarded. Add extra time if you plan to count numbers of ducks because there are a lot.

*Don Docherty*

## Ontario Nature Report

### **Ontario Nature Report: 2020 AGM**

Ontario Nature's 80th AGM was held virtually this year, which was a wonderful opportunity for those who can't usually travel to attend. Summarized below are the key accomplishments for the year 2020 as reported by Caroline Shultz (Executive Director).

#### **A Year in Review**

##### **Protected Places Campaign**

This has been an ongoing process to protect, and conserve at least 17 percent of Ontario for nature. It involves building partnerships with our over 150 nature networks across the province as well as indigenous groups for the common goal of identifying, then protecting wildlife valuable lands permanently.

September 10, 2020 – Ontario Nature congratulates Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Jeff Yurek, on his announcement that the government intends to permanently protect more than 3,200 acres of provincial Crown Lands on the South Shore of Prince Edward County as a Conservation Reserve – namely Point Petre Provincial Wildlife Area and Ostrander Point. These lands form part of the Prince Edward County South Shore, a globally-significant Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, and provide critical habitat for migratory birds and at-risk species such as the Blanding's turtle. This is a huge success for our Nature Network member

group, the Prince Edward County Field Naturalists, and the South Shore Joint Initiative, that have worked tirelessly to champion this ecological gem.

### **Youth Summit for Mother Earth**

From August 22 to September 19, 2020, environmental leaders from across the province gathered virtually over a series of livestreams highlighting cross-cultural learning and knowledge sharing.

In partnership with the Youth Council, our Youth Circle for Mother Earth partners and Coordinating Circle, this re-imagined gathering brought 92 young leaders and 12 youth mentors representing 55 communities across Ontario as far as Windsor, Cornwall Island and Kenora, with youth identifying from Indigenous communities across Turtle Island and cultures around the world.

### **Citizen Science**

The Amphibian Atlas is transitioning into a new era, with Ontario Nature wrapping up the data collection phase of this project as of December 1, 2019. There were in total 41,745 submissions, and the atlas should be finished in 2021.

Snake monitoring protocol developed by Ontario nature is now being used on 21 sites in South Western Ontario.

### **Ginseng Conservation**

ON is holding workshops to get a better picture of ginseng populations, and obtain a predictive model in order to test a new approach for conservation.

### **Nature Reserves**

Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve: This trail now has 615 meters of wheelchair, and vision impaired accessibility with guide ropes, toe rails, on wide paths that will help to connect people of all ages and abilities with nature.

Stone Road Alvar: ON is monitoring wildlife populations before and after the prescribed burn this year.

Sydenham River: Sixty acres of farmers' fields are being reverted back into Carolinian habitat.

Gananoque: 417 acres of the Frontenac arch are now protected thanks to all the hard work of local groups and individuals. Endangered Cerulean Warblers have 3 identified territories in this reserve.

### **Action Alerts: Natures' Watchdog**

ON action alerts are an important way to get involved in conservation.

**Piping Plover:** Thanks to ON's successful lawsuit in South Bruce Peninsula, there will be no raking on the beach to help protect the plover's habitat.

**Bill 66:** ON action alerts have helped hold the line on greenbelt expansion

**Provincial Policy Statements:** The government now says no aggregate extraction in natural heritage features.

### **MZO a New Threat**

Just recently, the Government of Ontario is showing its true colours with recent moves to ride roughshod over protections for Provincially Significant Wetlands (PSWs). The first sign of trouble was a Minister's Zoning Order (MZO) to demolish three PSWs on agriculturally zoned land in Vaughan so that a Walmart distribution facility could be constructed. The second was a decision to destroy a large coastal PSW in the City of Pickering to make room for a warehousing facility, again through an MZO. We have signed on as a group for DRFN, already we have 5 317 signatures! This has all happened so quickly which shows the need for ON, and our groups to organize a speedy response. Please help protect our vulnerable wetlands, go to the ON website to add your name to the list.

<https://ontarionature.good.do/psws/email/>

Don't forget December 1st is Giving Tuesday, a day for Canadians to give to the causes that mean the most to you. Ontario Nature will be dedicating our Giving Tuesday efforts towards the conservation and restoration of the Sydenham River Watershed in the diverse and fragile Carolinian Zone.

***Maria Prisciak***

## Watching Birds for Science!



It's that time of year again! The weather is changing, and the flurries are starting to fall. It's time to fill the bird feeders and get out the suet blocks!

Like many of you I enjoy watching the birds at my bird feeders and am always excited when a new species shows up. This year it sounds like we might have some exciting species visiting from up north, species such as Purple Finches, Common Redpolls, and Evening Grosbeaks. So, it is a great time to set up some bird feeders and watch the birds.

Did you know that you can contribute to science by simply watching the birds at your bird feeders? Project FeederWatch is a citizen science

Evening Grosbeak at our feeder by John Muzik

project that is operated by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and

Birds Canada. You simply watch birds for two days a week and record what you see. Project FeederWatch is a chance for everyday people to contribute to science and our knowledge and understanding of birds.

I have been counting and submitting my data to Project FeederWatch for 8 seasons now. One of my favourite things is exploring my data on the website. The website shows you graphs of the birds you report, and you can look back and see how things have changed in your backyard over time. For example, by looking at my data I can see that Common Grackles tend to re-appear back at my feeders in the first couple of weeks of March.

Through the data that people across Canada and the United States submit using Project FeederWatch, scientists can draw pictures of winter bird abundance and distribution across North America. While they are looking at the trends of species being reported, they can also look for what species aren't being reported that should be! So, reports with few to no birds are just as important as reports with lots of species!

If you enjoy watching the birds at your bird feeder, turn your love of birds into scientific discoveries with Project FeederWatch! The project runs November through to the first week of April every year and you can find more information at [feederwatch.org](http://feederwatch.org)

**Kristen Osborne**

John McFeeter says these are the biggest Starlings he has ever seen at his feeder! LOL





Lois Gillette had a flock of Evening Grosbeaks in her yard recently too.

The Winter Finch Forecast has been taken over by Tyler Hoar. He is predicting Evening Grosbeaks, Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills may move through this area. Many species have already been reported on eBird. The full report can be found at <https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020>.

## Observing Owls in Rehabilitation

My husband and I recently had the opportunity to visit the Owl Foundation, to see the rehabilitation work they do with wild Canadian owls that are injured or orphaned. The Foundation is located in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario.

It is a registered charitable foundation that takes in rescued, injured, sick, starving and orphaned owls for rehab and eventual release, once they can survive on their own. They are released back to the area where they were found. If the owl can't be released due to permanent disabilities, they are kept at the centre and once they are healthy, they are used as foster parents to orphaned chicks in natural like enclosures. Some of the permanent residents are also encouraged to breed and raise their own chicks, when possible. The chicks are then released into the area that the parents were found.

The foundation is a hospital dealing with highly stressed birds when they arrive, and so is not open to the public. However, with a minimum \$50 donation, 2 people (over the age of 8) are invited to a guided tour of the compound during 2 weekends in September, at an assigned date and time.

The facility has been in operation for over 40 years, and was co-founded by Kay McKeever, who recently passed away this year. It is the only facility in North America that breeds and fosters wild owls back to release status. The grounds have many outdoor aviaries, as well as a walking path through a treed area where we heard and saw many warblers, cardinals, blue jays, etc. There were many different species of owls at the centre in various stages of rehab, and some permanent residents hiding on the perches.



Snowy Owl by Cyndi Barron

While we were there, we saw many types of owls, as well as a Red-tailed Hawk and a Peregrine Falcon in recovery. Snowy Owls and owlets, a Barn Owl, Long-eared Owl and Great Horned owls were just a few of the owls we observed. The centre currently has over 100 birds, with a total of 141 birds coming through this year. There are many spacious enclosures with perches, and cover for the birds as well as flight corridors for the owls to practice hunting, and build their flight stamina. The various enclosures are built into the hillsides of the property, designed for the specific needs of each owl type. They have mosquito screens on all the aviaries to try to avoid the West Nile virus being passed on to the owls.

The facility breeds mice and also has rats and quail on hand to feed the owls as they are recovering from vehicle injuries, illness, etc. They do not come into human contact while being fed, as the young owlets are trained to eventually feed themselves in the wild when they are ready for release.

They have a dedicated staff who works tirelessly to rehabilitate the owls for eventual release if possible. They also have a volunteer team of drivers across Ontario that bring injured owls to the centre, and release them back to their original habitats throughout Ontario. The birds are all banded before release.

We enjoyed hearing about the work being done there, in cooperation with veterinary avian specialists, and seeing the many species of birds in recovery. If you are an owl enthusiast, this is the place to tour, during the donor tours in Sept. The donations help rehab owls to a healthy life back in the wilds of Ontario. Donations also help facilitate the maintenance and expansion of the aviary enclosures. If you donate to The Owl Foundation, you will receive a donor tour and a copy of their biannual newsletter, packed with information on what owls are at the centre, the progress that some are making and stories about how they were found, and the work that the volunteers do there. We enjoyed the day exploring the facility and getting a close look at the many species of owls and other birds being rehabilitated.

***Cyndi Barron***



Lois Gillette caught a shot of this Barred Owl while out walking.

# Nature FYI - Squirrels

Hoary Marmot



Thirteen Lined Ground Squirrel



Least Chipmunk



Eastern Fox Squirrel



Eastern Chipmunk



Columbian Ground Squirrel

Squirrels! Yes, I know there are a few of you who like to refer to them as, (cover your ears all squirrels) “Tree Rats”. And, they do belong to the order of mammals called rodents, which is the largest and most diverse group of mammals in the world. Rodents have two pairs of incisors one upper and one lower. They do not have canine teeth.

The squirrel family contains 273 species worldwide. In North America we have two types of squirrels, tree squirrels (3 genera) and ground squirrels (5 genera). Typically, tree squirrels tend to live in nests and cavities in trees while ground squirrels tend to live in burrows. Most are diurnal but there are a few that are nocturnal. Some hibernate for the winter and some do not. In Canada and the USA of the 66 squirrel species only 11 species are found in the east while 65 live in the west. Here in Canada we have 22 species of squirrels, 6 are tree species, while 16 are ground-dwelling species. We have 5 species of chipmunk, 4 marmots, 6 ground squirrels, 1 prairie dog plus 6 species of tree squirrels, 2 of which are flying squirrels.

The most common squirrel in eastern North America is the Eastern Gray Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* which comes in 2 phases, gray and black. The gray phase often has a white stomach and reddish tail and head. Some black ones may have a reddish tail. They are all the same species and one litter may have both phases. Most squirrels are well known for their large bushy tail. According to <https://www.hww.ca/en/wildlife/mammals/eastern-grey-squirrel.html> “the Latin word for squirrel, sciurus, is derived from two Greek words, skia, meaning shadow, and oura, meaning tail. Combining the two means loosely that the squirrel is one that sits in the shadow of its own tail.”

The Groundhog or Woodchuck *Marmota monax* is among the largest members of the squirrel family. It is neither a hog nor does it chuck wood. It occurs all across Canada. Unlike our other local squirrels, it is a true hibernator. The Eastern Chipmunk *Tamias striatus* is among the smallest and is replaced in western Canada by the Least Chipmunk *Tamias minimus*.



Alberts Squirrel

I love squirrels and if I encounter one in my travels, I try to take its photo. So, in going through my squirrel photos for this article I find I have a woefully inadequate collection, maybe a dozen or so in North America. Even though some squirrels such as the Eastern Gray Squirrel are wide ranging many have very tiny ranges mainly in California and Nevada. It would take a lifetime to find them all.

**Lois Gillette**

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## Membership Application Form

Please check the appropriate area to indicate membership type.

For Family membership please indicate the number of family members.

Individual (\$25) \_\_\_\_\_

Family (\$35) \_\_\_\_\_ # of People \_\_\_\_\_

Life Member (\$300) \_\_\_\_\_

Family Life Member (\$450) \_\_\_ # of people

Kindly complete all sections of this information form in order that we can update our address & telephone records.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

The membership year is September to June. Memberships not renewed by November 30th are considered lapsed.

Membership fees may be paid by cheque or e-transfer.

**Cheque:** payable to Durham Region Field Naturalists, and mailed to Box 54031, 8 King St. E., Oshawa ON, L1H 1A9

**e-Transfer:** send your e-transfer with your full name in the notes section to [opeter@rogers.com](mailto:opeter@rogers.com).

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