

What's Inside

President's Message
 Future Outings
 Past Outings
 Cranberry Marsh Hawk Watch
 Marching for Wetlands
 Ontario Nature Report
 The Great Backyard Bird Count
 The Shagbarks of Grandview Hill
 Nature FYI – Attracting Hummingbirds

Executive Committee

President/Publicity: Lois Gillette
 dlgill@sympatico.ca

Vice President: Kristen Osborne
 kristen.osborne@hotmail.com

Secretary: Satu Pernanen
 spernanen@gmail.com

Treasurer: Ted Crichton
 tedcrichton@rogers.com

Programmes: Otto Peter
 opeter@rogers.com

Membership: Diane Peter
 opeter@rogers.com

Outings : Don Docherty
 annanddon@bell.net

Ontario Nature Contact: Maria Prisciak

Conservation: Rayfield Pye
 raypye@interlinks.com

Newsletter: Nancy & John Muzik
 john_nancy_m@rogers.com

THE NATURALIST

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

President's Message

Well, it's been a year since we had to cancel our March meeting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was looking back in my emails and noticed, that when we cancelled the March meeting, we originally said we would be back together for the April meeting, back when we thought this thing would only last a month. Then we ended up cancelling that meeting as well and managed to pull together a virtual meeting for our AGM in May of last year. By the fall we were full swing into virtual meetings.



While virtual meetings aren't the same as meeting in person, they do have some benefits. We had a great turn out for our January and February meetings, which are typically lower attendance months especially when the winter weather is bad. Hopefully we might be able to meet together in person again this fall.

While it might feel like our lives are on pause, nature never pauses, and so the seasons continue. Spring is a time for new beginnings, the plants begin to reawaken, the chipmunks stir from their burrows and the birds begin to sing. On my daily walks in the neighbourhood, the Northern Cardinals are in full song, and the Red-winged Blackbirds have returned to fill the creek with their calls. My bird feeders are overrun with Common Grackles and European Starlings and the American Robins have returned to bathe in the bird bath. The local Great Blue Heron has returned to the pond, and I am waiting for the Killdeer and Northern Flickers to return any day now.

It won't be long now before the spring wildflowers begin to bloom and then the warblers will return marking another year of growth and renewal.

Kristen Osborne

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

March 29, 2021

Beth Gilhespy, MSc, Guelph University, Geomorphology/ Environmental Science

“The Geology of the Niagara Escarpment”

April 26, 2021

Dan Strickland

“Everything you ever wanted to know and then some, about the Canada Jay (A.K.A. Canada Jay and Whiskey jack) of Algonquin Park”

May 31, 2021

AGM and members night.

Geoff Carpentier: Breeding Bird Atlas

Newsletter

Submissions

Please submit your pictures and articles for the May newsletter no later than May 15, 2021. Email all submissions to Nancy Muzik at john_nancy_m@rogers.com

Future Outings

**Saturday, April 10 at 9:00 AM
Thickson's Woods – Spring Walk**

Leader: Don Docherty

Difficulty: Easy walking.

This was not a hard winter in terms of snow and cold temperatures but the wind was destructive at times. We'll walk the woods and meadow checking for signs of spring and early migrants.

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

Some black oil sunflower seed or a few peanuts would be appreciated by many of the residents.

**Saturday, May 01 at 9:00 AM
Stephen's Gulch Wild Flowers and Nature Walk**

Leaders: Our DRFN Plant Experts

Difficulty: Easy walking.

Stephens Gulch is a little jewel in Spring with a wide assortment of wild flowers

Meet at the Stephen's Gulch parking lot. Parking is limited and CLOCA charges \$6.00 unless you have a year pass which costs \$75.00. Visit <https://www.cloca.com/parking-pass> for more information.

Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area is located northeast of Bowmanville. To reach the Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area parking lot, following these directions.

If coming from the south: From Liberty Street North, turn east (right) on Concession Road 4, turn north (left) on Bethesda Road, turn east (right) on Stephen's Mill Road, proceed along Stephen's Mill Road to Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area parking lot.

If coming from the north: From Taunton Road (east of Liberty Street North), turn south on Bethesda Road, turn east (left) on Stephen's Mill Road, proceed along Stephen's Mill Road to Stephen's Gulch Conservation Area parking lot.

Bring appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast. Portions of the area may be slick and muddy depending on the weather so bring appropriate footwear.

Bring water and insect repellent (just in case).

Weather permitting, consider bringing a lunch.

Don Docherty

**Butterfly Garden Spring Clean-Up
Saturday, May 29, 10:00 a.m.**

This is my annual plea for help at the Rossland Road Butterfly Garden. If we're still social-distancing by May 29, don't worry - there's room for everyone!

There's lots to do to get the Garden ready for summer – edging, spreading wood-chips, weeding, pulling grass, pruning, cutting dead stalks, planting marigolds and zinnias, cleaning up litter, etc. etc. Please come and lend a hand to keep this garden thriving. The pollinators will love you!

Bring garden tools, gloves, drinking water and dress for the weather.

Park on side streets Glencairn or Ansley, then walk a short distance to the garden on Rossland Road just west of the Oshawa Creek.

Note: Help is also needed over the summer – a couple of hours as often as you can come. Contact Dianne to arrange.

Questions: Dianne Pazaratz 905-433-7875 or dpazaratz@sympatico.ca.

Dianne Pazaratz

Past Outings

Frenchman's Bay, March 6, 2021



Ten hardy DRFN members gathered in sub-zero temperatures at the foot of Liverpool Road in Pickering to search for water fowl in Frenchman's Bay. Our leader, Rayfield Pye, reported that about 50% of the bay was frozen. This meant that most of the birds would be a fair distance out from shore and the use of scopes would be necessary to accurately identify species.

After a brief chat, we took a short walk to observe birds in the Frenchman's Bay Marina. There were a variety of waterfowl here, including Greater Scaup. Rayfield gave us a quick tutorial on how to identify the difference between a Greater and Lesser Scaup. The majority of Scaups

in this area are Greater, so the default is Greater. The Greater has a more rounded head and longer white wingstripe. The Lesser is smaller and has a thinner and straighter bill.

Before we all froze to the ground, we headed back to our cars, and took the short drive to Progress Frenchman's Bay East Park. It was here that we saw one Tundra Swan amongst the Mute and Trumpeter Swans. We also observed many Red-headed Ducks and a few Canvasbacks. Jean Iron was at the park and helped us spot 2 Glaucous gulls. Off in the distance, Otto managed to get his scope on the Snowy Owl that had been hanging out at the yacht club.

After about an hour, all but one of us hopped back in our cars and headed for Rotary Park where we hoped to get a better look at the Snowy Owl. As we started our walk along Beachpoint Promenade, a Red-winged Blackbird was heard calling in the marsh beside the Frenchman's Bay Yacht Club. Even though we were closer to the yacht club, we were at a different angle and had a hard time finding the Snowy Owl. Just as Nancy

spotted a man carrying either a camera, or a scope, walking to the end of the pier, the owl got spooked, flew off and landed on the ice right in front of us.

Kristen had spotted a Ruddy Duck earlier in the week in the channel at the end of the promenade. Four more people decided that they had had enough and went home. So, the five remaining participants headed down the promenade to look. Unfortunately, the Ruddy Duck was not there. We did however, get a closeup look at some Long-tailed Ducks. On the way back to our cars, we took one last look at the Snowy Owl, then headed home, cold but satisfied. All in all, 33 species were observed.



Story and Photos by John Muzik

Cranberry Marsh Hawk Watch-2020 (Season 31)

Thanks to Covid 19 the hawk watch season was not a normal one. On days with a large hawk flight and lots of visitors, the watch was moved to the beach. We also had to deal with large numbers of families looking for things to do outside.

We counted a total of 13,059 hawks, which is above the recent average. Bald Eagles set a new seasonal record.

Turkey Vulture- 5827

Osprey- 80

Bald Eagle- 203

Northern Harrier- 97

Sharp-shinned Hawk- 891

Coopers Hawk- 93

Northern Goshawk- 3

Red-shouldered Hawk- 42

Broad-winged Hawk- 3643

Red-tailed Hawk- 1736

Rough-legged Hawk- 10

Golden Eagle- 7

American Kestrel- 292

Merlin- 33

Peregrine Falcon- 27

Unidentified Hawks- 74

Total- 13059

Hours- 253

Counters: Rayfield Pye, Jean Irons, Charmaine Anderson, Jerry Ball, and Jim McKnight

All data was entered into the HMANA website and eBird.

Rayfield Pye

Marching for Wetlands

On Saturday March 6th, members of DRFN participated in a demonstration march in Pickering to protest a pending development on the provincially-designated Lower Duffins Creek Wetlands. The March was organized by Environmental Action Now Ajax Pickering (EANAP). By my count, over 300 people braved the cold, windy conditions to make their opposition to this development known.

For those not familiar with this matter, the provincial government recently granted a Ministerial Zoning Order to the City of Pickering to allow developer Triple Properties Inc. to construct a warehouse on the wetlands. This of course will have the effect of destroying a sizeable portion of this environmentally sensitive and important area. MZO's are a highly controversial "blunt instrument" intended to fast track development projects. They circumvent normal policies and mechanisms for consultation and protection of the public interest.



Provincial Green Party leader Mike Schreiner and Oshawa NDP MPP Jennifer French addressed the crowd before the march itself began. The 90-minute march along the major streets of Pickering was conducted in a socially responsible manner with the marchers divided into smaller groups and spaced to allow for social distancing. All participants of course wore masks. Each group stopped briefly at the constituency office of Conservative MPP and Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy and at Pickering City Hall.

Judging by the high number of participants and by the honking of vehicles in support of the marchers, it is clear that there is a significant degree of public opposition to this development. It remains to be seen if the provincial government is listening.

Post Script: Since the writing of this article Amazon, the proposed tenant of the warehouse complex has stated that it is no longer considering this site. For other developments on this issue, please see the Ontario Nature Report below.

Article and photos by: Brian Reid

Ontario Nature Report

This spring is bringing all sorts of challenges for our protected areas, and the wonderful biodiversity they protect. Many people during the covid epidemic, have looked to our wonderful green spaces as a way to enjoy the outdoors, and revive their lagging spirits. So why has our provincial government chosen this time to attack what little protection there is for many of our valuable spaces. Ontario Nature in conjunction with many environmental groups is fighting hard to stop this wanton disregard for nature, and the benefits it brings.

MZO's to trump protections for nature and farmland

Buried in Bill 257, Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021, is a proposal to allow Minister's Zoning Orders (MZO's) to override legal and policy protections for farmland and natural heritage features and areas across Ontario. If the changes go forward, lands currently protected under the Provincial Policy Statement would become vulnerable to development at the whim of the Minister of Municipal Affairs

and Housing, without public consultation or any opportunity for appeal. Please log on to the Ontario Nature website and look under action alerts to see what you can do to protect our precious natural areas.

<https://ontarionature.org/take-action/advocate-for-nature/>

March 15, 2021, Environmental groups secure halt to impending destruction of Lower Duffins Creek Wetland

Pickering Developments has committed to not destroy the Provincially Significant Wetlands and other natural features at Lower Duffins Creek in Pickering, Ontario. The commitment will remain in place until the Divisional Court hearing of the groups' full Judicial Review application regarding the legality of the proposed development.

Laura Bowman, Ecojustice lawyer said: "We are pleased to get the resolution our clients wanted without the need to argue the motion. The wetlands will be protected by the undertaking to the Court until the decision in our clients Judicial Review. Our clients are continuing the Judicial Review to quash the MZO in the long-term.

Caroline Schultz, executive director, Ontario Nature said: "There's an insidious and accelerating pattern of undercutting environmental rules to facilitate reckless development projects in Ontario. Bill 257, which allows the government to ride roughshod over natural heritage protections, is the latest example. This war against nature has to stop."

"As we grapple with the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, it's unconscionable to pave over any of the Duffins Creek Wetland Complex. It would be contrary to the will of community and the long-term interest of Ontarians, as the public outcry against the destruction of the Duffins Creek wetland has amply demonstrated."

If you would like more information you can go to our Ontario Nature website under "Media" for the full account. <https://ontarionature.org/news-release/halt-duffins/>

Maria Prisciak

The Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count, introduced in 1998, was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and display results in near real time. Now every February for four days the world comes together to watch, count and report the birds they are finding in their own backyards.

This year the count took place on February 12th – 15th, 2021 and 97 species of birds were observed in Durham Region. In total 6447 species were reported from all around the world!

Conveniently here in Ontario, the Great Backyard Bird Count falls on a long weekend. So, I decided to head out on the Monday (Family Day) to see what birds I could discover around Whitby.

I started my day on Halls Road to check out Cranberry Marsh. No sooner had I stepped out of the car and started down the trail when



Bald Eagle



Song Sparrow

I discovered a Bald Eagle sitting in one of the trees on the lakeshore. A nice start to the day!

I continued down to the Hawk Watch platform and found 18 other species including Brown Creeper, Song Sparrows and a Swamp Sparrow. There were mostly Canada Geese out on the lake with a few ducks mixed in but not much variety.

I decided to head to Whitby Harbour next to see if I could find some ducks to add to my species list for the day. A quick scan told me there weren't too many ducks around, but I grabbed the

scope for a careful inspection. Bingo! A Surf Scoter was hanging out against the far break wall. I wonder if it is the same one I saw here in January? I found 8 new species for the day, bringing my total so far up to 27.

Next, I decided to head for Thickson's Woods, to try and find the Northern Mockingbird that had been seen there. On the way I came across an American Kestrel sitting on the hydro wire on South Blair Street. A new species to add to my list and one I don't always find every year.

Arriving at Thickson's Woods I parked down at the parking lot at the bottom of Thickson Road. As I was getting out of the car, I heard the chattering of finches. Looking around I didn't see anyone in the treetops or flying overhead. Then I spotted them, a large flock of Common Redpolls were feeding and moving through the long grasses beside the parking lot! They didn't seem to care about the people walking by and the cars, they kept feeding and moving through the grass (making photos very difficult). At one point they took to the air and I counted at least 30 of them before they descended back into the long grass.

Then I headed up the road and walked the meadow side of Thickson's Woods. There were a few families enjoying the beautiful day but bird wise it was pretty quiet. Only found 6 species on my walk through the meadow.



Long-tailed Duck



Fish Crow

As I was heading back to the car, I get a report that a Fish Crow had been seen/heard over by the Whitby Harbour, so I decided to head back that way to try and find it. I had heard one once before when I lived in Niagara Falls but that was a few years ago now. I arrived at the spot where it was reported and see a crow fly overhead to land on a street light. The easiest way to differentiate a Fish Crow from an American Crow is by their call, so I would need it to call to confirm. Sure enough, it begins to call repeatedly from its perch on top of the street light. A perfect way to end my morning birding adventure!

In the end I saw 38 species around Whitby, not too bad for a morning of birding in February.

Article and photos by: *Kristen Osborne*

POLLINATORS FACTOIDS

Introduced European Honeybees are the only bees in North America that make honey. Some solitary native bees make small portions of a honey like material that they mix with pollen as food for their offspring. They do not store honey for the hive to feed on. Honeybees are native to only Africa and Asia.

Many people think that the programs to save pollinators are specific to the introduced European honeybees. In fact, one of the only bee species that is not endangered or threatened in North America is the European Honeybee.... ***Otto Peter***

The Shagbarks of Grandview Hill

With its distinctive scraggly bark, Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*) is easy to recognize for anyone who knows their trees. There is no mistaking it from the related smooth-barked Bitternut Hickory, which is fairly common locally. Shagbark is essentially a southern or Carolinian species that is common in some portions of southern Ontario, but generally is not found growing wild in Durham Region. Interestingly, the species occurs within about 50 km both to the east and west of Durham.

The Shagbark is not completely absent from Durham, however. A remnant population survives in a small woodlot in the southeast part of Oshawa. It is at the top of the hill east of Grandview Street, on the north side of Olive Avenue. When I lived in the area in the late 1960s, the woodlot was more extensive and there were no roads nearby. Olive Avenue was pushed through between Grandview and Townline Road in the mid 1980s when the area was being developed for housing. The first time I drove the 'new' Olive Avenue I caught sight of a distinctive shaggy tree near the roadside. I stopped to investigate and was surprised to find several Shagbark Hickories in the woodlot or in the backyards of two of the new houses.

John Foster was also intrigued when he found out about these trees, so he made a close examination of them sometime in the early 2000s. He counted about a dozen Shagbark Hickory trees between 15 and 30 cm diameter at breast height (DBH which is a standard measure of sizing trees) and several hundred seedlings in one patch. In addition, Foster noted an old hickory snag about 60 cm DBH which he thought might be the parent of all the others.

Who was the first to find the grove? Mark Saunders also told me that the great Oshawa naturalist George Scott showed him a large Shagbark Hickory about 1974, somewhere between Townline and Grandview Street, north of the Farewell Creek ravine. Could that tree have been the same as the snag observed by John more than 25 years later?

I decided to take a close look at the stand myself on March 7, 2021 to see how many Shagbark Hickories still grew there. I was able to find 26 individuals ranging from 10 to 45 cm DBH scattered in a 1.5-hectare deciduous woodlot surrounded by a residential development. The woodlot was comprised by a mix of trees including Sugar Maple, Red Oak, White Ash and Black Cherry. I found three other 'shaggies' on the south side of Olive Avenue along the crest of the Farewell Creek valley. A dense cedar forest extended below the crest, which looked too shady to support the shade intolerant nut trees. I could find no others further downslope.



Now that we have that handy resource iNaturalist, at our fingertips, it is possible to look up observations of nearly all types of plants and animals. I checked to see if Shagbark Hickory photos had been submitted from elsewhere in Durham. The only other location was a group of three trees in Walker Woods near Glen Major that I had found. I concluded that those were likely planted as nuts, however, since all were relatively young, growing along a trail, and there were no others growing in the surrounding deciduous forest.



The origin of the Shagbarks of Grandview Hill is an interesting question. A Shagbark Hickory seed is a round nut that does not fall far from the tree. Like walnuts, hickories are almost entirely dependent on squirrels to disperse their heavy seeds. A squirrel can easily move a nut a few hundred metres before burying it, but the rodents are unlikely to carry it for kilometres. Consequently, parent trees cannot be too far away. Since Shagbarks do not occur in other woodlots in Durham, it seems likely that the trees were planted as nuts by someone, but it would have been a long time ago. Unlike Bitternuts, Shagbarks have a sweet edible nut that was readily eaten by First Nations people. Is it possible that some of those people brought some nuts from elsewhere hundreds of years ago? Or did one of the early farmers in the 1800s obtain nuts from elsewhere in the province, plant them around his farm. Later squirrels spread some the nuts into the nearby woodlot where they proliferated in a limited area.

The latter theory is not far-fetched as that is pretty much what happened with Black Walnuts. This Carolinian species did not historically occur in Durham but has been planted widely as an ornamental. Squirrels carried nuts from trees in urban yards into natural areas, and today Black

Walnuts are commonly found growing in the wild in Durham.

Whatever their origin, the Shagbarks of Grandview Hill are well established and procreating in a natural situation. They have been there for a long time and are a unique feature in the context of Durham Region.

The small woodlot forms the headwater for a stream. It is not a public park but a hidden remnant patch of nature that supports the only known population of a locally rare tree. It is not known if that land is public or privately owned. Hopefully the woodlot's configuration and steep sides will preclude future development from happening there, but there is no guarantee. The municipality should be made aware and convinced that the woodlot is worthy of protection.

Photos and article by: *James Kamstra*

Nature FYI – Attracting Hummingbirds

How many among us hasn't marveled at the little jewel-like birds that hover in midair to feed voraciously at a nectar feeder or a flowering plant. People in the western world try to attract these pugnacious and fearless little creatures so we can enjoy their antics. This can be done by using one of the hundreds of different types of nectar feeders available or by creating backyard habitats by planting flower varieties that attract hummingbirds in our gardens. It is too bad that there is only one regularly occurring species of hummingbirds in Ontario, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. There have been sightings of other species like Rufous Hummingbirds, but none have been known to breed in Ontario.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Kristen Osborne

FEEDERS: The fastest way to get hummingbirds into your garden is to use a nectar feeder. They can be of any material, plastic, metal or glass but the most important feature is choosing a feeder that can be easily disassembled so all parts can be cleaned. Unless you have many hummingbirds feeding in your yard start with a 4–8-ounce (125-250 ml) feeder. You can always get a larger one if needed. The rule of thumb is to clean the feeders every 3 days, but this can be altered if necessary, during cool weather when it may last a couple more days or during hot windy weather when it may go bad earlier. Regardless of your schedule always clean and refill the feeder if the solution turns cloudy or there are things floating in it and especially if there are bird droppings clinging to the outside. Sugar is an ideal growth medium for bacteria, molds and yeast. The best cleaning solution is 4% hydrogen peroxide solution available at pharmacies and grocery stores. Make sure any cleaning products used are totally rinsed off the

feeder parts before reassembly. You can hang the feeder anywhere you want so you can have the joy of watching them feed. Keep it away from structures that can be used to climb on it since I have seen racoons pick up a feeder and drink the nectar right off it without spilling a drop. You can put up the feeder early in the spring for the early migrants and keep it up until late fall. Don't worry the hummingbirds will leave in time before they succumb to the cold.

NECTAR: Just like humans, hummingbirds love sucrose or regular everyday sugar which is also found in flower nectar. Other sugars like honey, brown or molasses sugars can cause tongue fungus and iron poisoning. The recipe for nectar is one part granulated white sugar to four parts clean warm tap water. There is no need for colouring, nutritional additives or commercial "hummingbird food". As long as the water is clean the nectar does not have to be boiled but can be heated to help dissolve the sugar. Excess nectar can be stored in the fridge for up to 2 weeks. Discard if it goes cloudy.

GARDEN FLOWERS: To start with use plants with brightly coloured flowers that are native to our area. Look for pesticide free plants from locally owned native plant nurseries. These nurseries will likely have compiled lists of regional plants that prosper in gardens and attract and support hummingbirds. A mix of perennials such as red columbine, bee balm, penstemons and woody plants like honeysuckle shrubby sages will provide a reliable source of nectar. Sowing annual seeds such as jewelweeds, red morning-glories and scarlet sage (*Salvias*) will help mid to late summer providing extra food for local young birds and southbound migrants. Do not use broad spectrum pesticides around hummingbirds. Even though hummingbirds use nectar as fuel, they get most of their other nutrients from eating large quantities of insects and spiders. Do not use mosquito foggers or sprays in your garden since they can directly poison the birds.

I know this sounds like a lot of work, but the result is amazing. My wife and I can sit for hours on our deck at the cottage, watching hummingbirds bicker and joust, chasing each other around the four feeders we have and never grow tired of them. They are so addictive that we call to each at home every time one of us notices a Ruby-throat at our feeder in the back yard.

Otto Peter