

DW^{The} Wood Duck

Volume 64 Number 4

December 2010



The 2010 Hamilton Fall Bird Count may have produced some of the lowest species totals ever but there were some great highlights, like this Purple Sandpiper spotted on the rocks at Fifty Point. Read all the results of the count on page 81.

*Photo: Purple Sandpiper by
Mike Veltri*

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Thinking Big about Ecosystems, Evolution and Life

by Louise Unitt

Several years ago, naturalists John & Mary Theberge made an impressive presentation to the Club about the wolves of Algonquin Park, as many readers will no doubt recall. Hence their return as guest speakers at our October 18 AGM was particularly welcome. The Theberges' research on wolf ecology has earned them worldwide recognition and numerous awards. John recently retired from his position as professor of ecology and conservation biology at the University of Waterloo's Faculty of Environmental Studies.

The evening's lecture and slide show were based on the Theberge's book *The Ptarmigan's Dilemma: An Exploration into How Life Organizes and Supports Itself*. This most recent of their several books was a Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Prize finalist (unfortunately this book didn't win the grand prize at the Nov. 2nd gala). It's an exploration of how life has managed to persist on earth for almost four billion years. The book outlines the processes that produce order in nature and underlie the persistence of life in all its diversity. John led off by leading us back to earth's earliest life form, *Cyanobacteria*, a.k.a. Blue-green Algae, which first appeared when the planet had sufficiently cooled. Alive and well today, *Cyanobacteria's* continued presence is a demonstration of the planet's capacity to self-regulate.

John introduced us to the concept of epigenetics, which deals with "the ability of a characteristic to be passed on to subsequent generations." Offspring inherit from their parents a "biochemical soup," which can be affected by

stress and other environmental factors. Epigenetics makes the argument that genes can be active or inactive, becoming active if triggered by the environment. Unless they are "unzipped," they remain inactive. John referred to a circumpolar species of grouse, the Rock Ptarmigan, to clarify the concept. Because the bird was known to lack a gall bladder, it came as quite a surprise when this very organ was identified in all but one of the captive chicks at the University of Alaska! The explanation lay in the overly rich fatty diet the birds were being fed. The effect has since been replicated in captive Ruffed Grouse. According to epigenetics, the gene for gall bladder development was activated by an environmental trigger—the grouse's diet. Current interest in epigenetics is being driven by attempts to apply genetic research to finding a cure for cancer and other diseases.

During their stay in New Dundee in southern Ontario, the Theberges would often admire the Wood Ducks that lived in a neighbouring Silver Maple swamp. They knew that such beauty and symmetry could not be attributed to chance. Here was natural selection at work, specifically a subset of natural selection known as sexual selection. Whereas natural selection deals with traits that lead to survival, sexual selection concerns traits that lead to reproduction. The criteria by which female Wood Ducks choose a mate imposed selective pressures on males to acquire their dazzling plumage. Such complex changes would have happened incrementally.

As John explained, epigenetics cannot

fully account for the Wood Duck's plumage. Another factor, "order for free," also played a role. The term refers to the physical order underlying all phenomena. By way of example, John cited a mollusc found off the north shore of New Zealand. The Olive Porphyry's shell displays an intriguing pattern of mock scales. Since it lives on the floor of shallow seas, subject to predation by starfish, these markings may well serve as protective colouration. However, that is unlikely to be the sole explanation. The laws of atomic and molecular bonding dictate which substances can and cannot bond to each other, producing "order for free." The Olive Porphyry's patterning is not random, but the work of complex systems.

John shifted discussion from the level of individuals to that of populations. A pair of American Robins occupying a 40-hectare subdivision could theoretically produce 74,000 robins within 10 years. Although reproductive activity is a geometric progression, inescapable pressures limit growth and prevent populations from attaining their biological potential. Predation, starvation, disease and social stress serve to regulate populations.

In Alaska, the Theberges studied the consequences of social stress, using the Rock Ptarmigan as a subject. They observed the birds' reactions to their reflection in a mirror. One group displayed aggression by attacking the image, while a second group displayed curiosity by scratching at the mirror. A third group simply "buggered off," never to return. The three behavioural

morphs were replicated in experiments with chicks within their first hour of life. The phenomenon was also examined in Algonquin Park, where mirrors were placed on the drumming logs of Ruffed Grouse. Again the same three responses were noted. When an animal population is in an expansion phase, there is selection for aggression. As aggressive members drive the timid out of the colony, the population starts to decline, until selection for non-aggression eventually kicks in. Numbers again increase, and the cycle begins again, the population alternately rising and falling.

Mechanisms for self-organization operate at every level of complexity. John moved up the biological hierarchy from populations to ecosystems, which are “orders of magnitude” more complex than individuals and populations. In his words, “Life is the emergent property of ecosystems.” John foresees major advances resulting from a holistic approach to nature. At present, however, most biologists still believe that natural selection only operates on individuals, ruling it out at higher levels. John’s view that “ecosystems act like super organisms” is a contentious statement.

The earth has undergone five major global extinctions, each of which reduced life by at least 50%. Yet we still live in an era of rich life, for “things bounce back” after extinction, often lushier than before. John backed up his point by taking us back to an era when dinosaurs lived on Utah’s rock strata. Iguanadons, non-territorial herd animals that once occupied the area, were flooded out by a rising inland sea, along with their ecosystem and all its processes. Thirty million years later, their place was taken by another dinosaur, *Gryposaurus*, also a non-territorial herbivore and a denizen of open forests, went extinct as well. The dinosaurs may be long gone, but the niche remains. Today the same locale is occupied by

elk, which share with their predecessors a large body size, non-territoriality, and an affinity for open forests. John mounted a sequence of four artistic recreations of the region’s ecosystems, representing a span of 85 million years: the landscapes were almost identical!

John expects “life resilience” to keep our planet habitable until it runs out of carbon dioxide—a considerable irony from today’s perspective, when we are so concerned about excessive greenhouse gases! However, carbon dioxide’s disappearance isn’t expected until 500 million to a billion years from now. The earth would still have four million years left in which to recreate life, before being consumed by the Sun when it turns into a red giant in five billion years. Nevertheless, John advised against complacency, whereupon Mary took the podium to elaborate on the perils that confront our planet in our immediate future.

Mary discussed several of the spectacular places she and John have explored across the globe, and exposed the vulnerability of their most emblematic species. The Monarch Butterflies that winter in Mexico exemplify a finely balanced ecological integration between species and environment. But the practice of logging at crucial elevations is potentially catastrophic. The Oyamel forest habitat that Monarchs require to survive the winter is increasingly rare. When forced to cluster either higher or lower along the mountainside, “their fate is sealed.”

On the Platte River, a critical stopover for Sandhill Cranes, key environmental and biological variables have aligned themselves to create abundance. For centuries migrating cranes have gathered there in vast numbers, to fuel up on their long journey. Mary foresees the elimination of staging areas on the Platte, as a result of degradation and loss of river and wetland ecosystems.

Pelagic seabird populations of islands in the Bering Sea—Tufted Puffins, Crested Auklets, and Storm-petrels—are “in free fall,” largely because of diminishing food supplies and predators. The latter include rats, domestic cats, and feral escapees from fur farms. In central Africa, the water quality of alkaline Lake Nakuru, upon which flamingos depend, has been compromised by toxic waste and environmental manipulation.

The biomass in the seas surrounding the Antarctic Peninsula is so abundant that it makes up half of life on the planet. This region of “supreme isolation” is nevertheless far from immune to the effects of climate change, and is today one of the earth’s fastest-warming places. Melting ice dilutes the sea’s salinity and raises water temperature, resulting in a die-off of diatoms, the optimal food for krill. This causes a decline in krill numbers, to the detriment of penguins and other consumers of krill. Among penguins, Adélie Penguins are undergoing the most severe decline of all.

The Serengeti is home to vast numbers of ungulate herds, including zebras, giraffes, gazelles, impalas and wildebeest. Each year, over a million wildebeest forsake the dry Serengeti plains in search of new grasses produced by annual rains. Large tracts are essential for free movement and genetic flow. The herds appear to be en route to extinction, their migration corridors squeezed out by plantations.

Alaska’s annual salmon runs attract concentrations of Grizzly Bears, which are otherwise solitary creatures. They are struggling to survive the impacts of roads, hunting, and other human incursions. For centuries, Polar Bears followed seasonal migration routes; they are now hindered by ever-diminishing sea ice and its increasingly late formation. The shortened hunting period prevents adults from storing sufficient fat,

leading to higher mortality.

Places of superabundance are hot spots of biodiversity. No better example exists than the Amazon rainforest, which has the greatest biodiversity on earth. It is home to an estimated three to five million insect species, and barely one percent of its plant species have been analyzed to date. Clearing for cattle pastures is the largest driver of Amazon deforestation. Oil and gas development, logging, mining, ranching, and cultivation also contribute significantly to environmental degradation. Lamenting the sustained destruction, Mary posed a heartbreaking question: "Can nature stand to be ripped from its fabric?"

A properly functioning ecosystem is characterized by harmonious interaction. A "dynamic but ever-changing equilibrium" is observable in every type of ecosystem, from the low-productivity Sonoran desert to Indonesia's high-productivity tropical forest. We need to stop interfering and allow natural selection to operate. "Ecosystems worldwide are grieving...Biodiversity is decreasing." Nature is being rapidly destroyed, often out of ignorance rather than malice. The burden of responsibility rests with us. "The challenge is to save this natural world...most of all for the evolution of future species." Mary concluded her segment of the lecture with a quotation from John Muir: "The world, though made, is yet being made...This is still the morning of creation."

A portion of the authors' proceeds from *The Ptarmigan's Dilemma* is being donated to the World Wildlife Fund Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The book has been described as "a groundbreaking explanation of evolution for non-scientists." John believes that the study of science is well worth the effort, for the deepest connection one can make with nature is through science. That is exactly what

the Theberges have done in merging their scientific understanding of ecosystems and evolution with extensive experience in the field. Their willingness to share their discoveries in person and in print is affording non-scientists an opportunity for "Thinking Big about Ecosystems, Evolution and Life."



Photo: John and Mary Theberge



Photo: Rock Ptarmigan

Mystery of the Christmas Star

By Mario Carr



As the Christmas season approaches, it's time to ponder an astronomical mystery that scholars have been debating for centuries. What exactly was the great star of Bethlehem?

Could it have been a comet, meteor or exploding star such as a super nova? Probably not since none of these were recorded around 1 AD. John Mosley, in his book *The Christmas Star*, speculates that it might have been a conjunction of planets. A conjunction occurs when celestial objects move so close to each other in the night sky that they appear to be a single bright object.

Based upon records and computer simulations, there were a number of conjunctions between 2 and 3 BC. On Aug. 12, 3 BC, there was a conjunction of the two planets Venus and Jupiter that moved close to the star Regulus in the constellation Leo. On Sept. 14 during that same year, Jupiter had a conjunction with Regulus. Afterwards, the planet appeared to move backwards until it passed Regulus for a second time on Feb. 17, 2 BC and then for a third time on May 8.

Jupiter's backward motion was just an illusion since it follows a straight line as it orbits the Sun. It only appeared to be moving backwards from the Earth's point of view. This is because the Earth moves faster than Jupiter as they both orbit the Sun. It's like passing a slow moving car on the QEW. Once you pass the car, it appears to

move backward against the background. Then on June 17, 2 BC there was a conjunction of Venus, Jupiter and Regulus. The objects were so close together that they could have appeared as a single shining light that sat in the west towards Jerusalem as seen from ancient Babylon.

Mosley's theory is interesting but by no means ends the debate about the great star of Bethlehem. I'm sure the debate will continue.

Here are some important dates for December stargazers.

Dec. 5 – New Moon

Dec. 6-19 – The Geminids Meteor Shower is best viewed in the east after midnight and will look as though they are coming from the constellation Gemini. The best time to see them is Dec. 13 and 14. From a dark sky you may see up to 100 meteors per hour.

Dec. 10 – Hamilton Amateur Astronomers meeting with speaker Dr. Doug Welch at 7:30 pm, Hamilton Spectator Building, 44 Frid St., Hamilton

Dec. 13 – Quarter Moon.

Dec. 21 – This evening you will have a rare opportunity to see a total lunar eclipse with the full Moon at 3:17 a.m. The last time this happened was back in Feb. 21, 2008.

A total lunar eclipse is caused when the Earth's shadow is cast upon the moon darkening it completely. It

begins when Earth's partial shadow or penumbra crosses the Moon turning it orange. Then the full shadow of the Earth, called the umbra, covers the Moon completely, making it invisible for about a minute. Then the Moon brightens as the Earth and Moon move out of alignment. The whole process will take about 72 minutes. If you have never seen a lunar eclipse don't miss it. Just book off work the next day!

The **Winter Solstice** or the first day of winter also arrives on this date at 6:38 pm.

Dec. 25 – Christmas Day. Astronomer, physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton was born on this date in 1642.

Dec. 27 – Last quarter Moon.

For more information, please see the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers web site at www.amateurastronomy.org or call (905) 627-4323.

Mario Carr, the author of the report, is a HNC member and the director of public education, Hamilton Amateur Astronomers. He can be reached at mariocarr@cogeco.ca.

HNC's Newest Nature Sanctuary

by Jen Baker

Thanks to a generous gift of land from George Amaolo, the Hamilton Naturalists' Club now has its 5th nature sanctuary. The Club was pleased to recognize George's donation at the November 8th monthly meeting and presented him with a custom-made plaque created by John Sedgwick, as well as a special donor t-shirt.

The 39 acre Amaolo Nature Sanctuary is located southwest of Lynden and is partially forested, both naturally and aided by George, who has planted thousands of native trees and shrubs. The property provides both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat and serves as a wildlife corridor. It includes two seasonal streams and a larger stream which are tributaries of Fairchild Creek, within the Grand River Watershed.

There is an eight acre abandoned field on the property which the HNC will begin restoring in the spring before non-native invasive species have a chance to become established. The field will be restored to a more native Bur Oak savannah with the help of restoration experts, volunteers and students through the ECO Art program. A management plan will be developed over the winter to help guide the restoration project.

The story of the donation began a few years ago when George Amaolo approached the club with his desire to ensure his land is permanently protected. The HNC's Head-of-the-Lake

Land Trust program was interested in accepting the donation to protect the land. Part of the HNC's interest in the land is to restore the abandoned field and to help make natural connections with surrounding natural areas.

The donation process has taken quite a while for several reasons, primarily the need for a severance to divide the land being retained by Mr. Amaolo from the land being donated to the HNC. A condition of the severance was that the land being donated to the HNC needed to be rezoned from Agriculture to Conservation to prevent future development on this newly created lot. This is a lengthy and costly process. The City of Hamilton recognized that the land was being donated for conservation and was willing to work with us to develop a solution that suited everyone's needs.

The precedent setting solution was to have the City hold a conservation easement over the land being donated to the HNC. This reassures the City that no development will occur on the property while still allowing the HNC to follow through on its restoration plans. This allowed George and the HNC to avoid the time and cost of the rezoning process and it should be easier for all future landowners interested in donating their land.

The Hamilton Naturalists' Club appreciates the incredible generosity and patience of George and looks forward to furthering his 'green' legacy by restoring the field to native trees and

shrubs. By making a donation to the Habitat Preservation Endowment Fund, you too can contribute to this legacy and help the club continue to steward its nature sanctuaries.

Club members will be able to see the new sanctuary in the spring when the birds and wildflowers return. If you would like more details about the Amaolo Nature Sanctuary and how you can contribute to the restoration project, please contact Jen Baker at 905-524-3339 or land@hamiltonnature.org.



Photo:George Amaolo

2010 HAMILTON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT with Tom Thomas

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

A reminder to pencil in Boxing Day December 26th for the Christmas Bird Count.

If you enjoy being out in the fresh air and looking at birds, or just watching your bird feeder for a few hours, why don't you give me a call at 905-689-5920 or email me at TThomas@cogeco.ca and we will try to set you up.

Count Week

Three days prior to count day and three days after, participants and birders are encouraged to report their sightings.

Species seen on December 23, 24, 25, 27, 28 and 29th are included in the count report as "Count Week" species, if they are not seen on count day. If you are watching your feeder on any of those days, please keep track of what you see, in case we need to include one or more species.

If you see a species on one of those days, but not on "Count Day", mark count week in the numbers column beside the species name, or report it separately if your report has already been sent in.



*Photo: Immature Bald Eagle by
Tom Thomas*

Reporting birds in the three days prior to "Count Day" helps to pinpoint these birds for count day on the 26th.

Christmas Bird Count Participants Fee

Just a reminder that all participant 18 years of age or older, who are not members of Bird Studies Canada are required to pay a \$5 fee – bird feeder watchers are exempt.

Bird Studies Canada remits half the \$5 fee they collect to the National Audubon Society, and uses the remaining \$2.50 towards mailing costs and other expenses.

Hamilton Fall Bird Count

by Bill Lamond

The 2010 Hamilton Fall Bird Count (HFBC) on 7 November produced at total of 126 species. This is the lowest total since 2000 when 125 species were recorded. The results were disappointing as expectations were high that some northern species might be recorded. I was expecting someone to find a Boreal Chickadee, considering their modest invasion into southern Ontario this fall. Moreover, I was more intrigued by the possibility of a Gray Jay, another species that is on the move southwards. However, neither of these species was noted. I was also expecting a fairly high species total in the range of 140+ species as there had not been any intense cold weather to push lingering birds out. So to me, the results were quite a disappointment. It seemed that a lot of birds must have cleared out in the week before the count. Having the count on the last day possible in the count window (November 7th) did not help either. I think most observers were disappointed in their totals. These are some sample comments:

"Needless to say it was a poor count as most birds had migrated";

"It was a pretty dull count with nothing too noteworthy, probably my lowest species total for the area";

"A very disappointing count this year. Some areas that normally produce were devoid of birds";

"Bird numbers were down significantly this year";

"A very slow day";

"The weather was good and we expected good numbers. However, the birds must have had something better to do than hang around waiting for us to count them. We spent the day wondering where they were";

"After 4 hours of very frustrating searching I came up with very few birds...it was almost scary!!";

"Pretty sad numbers. Birds tended to be fewer this year than last"; and

"Worst in years".

Ok, ok enough, we get the picture. However, not everyone was as pessimistic about the count. I found my area in Brantford to be about as "birdy" as it usually is and another nearby observer stated *"it was an excellent day"*. Mind you, he saw a Golden Eagle.

There were some significant highlights on the count. There were two new species for the HFBC in 2010. Most significantly a Le Conte's Sparrow was seen in the Clappison's Corners Wetland behind the Rona store in southwest Waterdown. This bird was originally found by Tom Thomas on the previous Thursday (Nov 4) and was seen on count day by Owen Novoselac and many others. This was only the 7th record ever for Le Conte's Sparrow for the Hamilton Study Area (HSA). The other new count bird was a first winter Thayer's Gull at the Stoney Creek lakeshore at Grays Road seen by Bill Smith, Alf Senior and Peter McParland.

There were a few other highlights to report as well. The count's second ever Pine Warbler was observed by Jacob Bruxer, Tom Crooks, Dave Don, and Tom Ford along a hydro right-of-way between 1st and 2nd Concession north-east of Hagersville. A Purple Sandpiper was observed on the rocks at Fifty Point C.A. by Andrew Keaveney. This was only the 3rd record for the HFBC. There were some high counts that are worth noting here. The seven Tufted Titmice bested the previous high by one bird. Red-bellied Woodpeckers continue to increase with a 7% increase over last year's previous record. Of course the distribution of this woodpecker is uneven in the HSA, but it is more common than Hairy Woodpecker in most of our birding circle.

Also of note was a record-high count of seven Northern Saw-whet Owls. This is just a chance occurrence, most likely due to dedicated birders looking for roosting birds in suitable habitat. Sandhill Crane numbers reached an all-time high with 30 individuals in the HSA on count day. This species is definitely on the increase. Both Golden and Bald Eagle totals were record-high. The five Golden Eagles, although certainly noteworthy, is really no surprise. Numbers of fall migrant Golden Eagles through Ontario have been exploding in the past two decades. This year alone, as of Nov. 24, there have been 181 Golden Eagles reported at Hawk Cliff with an amazing 40 individuals observed on the first day of November! Likely a good percentage of these birds migrate through the HSA. Likewise

the seven Bald Eagles on the count is no surprise to me. This species' population continues to increase throughout Ontario and it is increasing in the HSA as a migrant, as a breeder and as a wintering bird.

Speaking of eagles, it was a bit of a challenge to try to accurately record the number of both Bald and Golden Eagles in the HSA on count day. If I just recorded all eagles without any scrutiny, there would have been eight Golden Eagles and 15 Bald Eagles. Eagles are large, conspicuous, sought-after birds which are prone to be re-counted as they move across territory boundaries. There were three juvenile Golden Eagles over Joe Sam's Park in Waterdown between 9:45-10:15am. Based on discussions with observers, one of these birds was seen later over the Rona store in Waterdown and two of them were seen over Ancaster Creek in Dundas based on timing. Another Golden Eagle was seen over the Dundas Valley along Martin's Road but was determined to be a separate bird as it had a distinctive trailing flight feather and it was seen at 11:30am. The other Golden Eagle in north Brantford may have been one of the Dundas-Waterdown birds but it is likely a different bird and has been recorded as such. With the Bald Eagles it was more difficult to determine actual numbers. There were four adults along the Grand River in the Brantford area but conservatively, I have left it as two to correspond with the pair that nested there. In the Hamilton Harbour-Cootes Paradise area, 11 Bald Eagles were reported by four adjacent parties. However, careful attention to plumage differences, timing of observations and discussions with the four parties, pared this group down to five birds.

The 2010 HFBC had six "Significant Species". I have outlined in the past the definition of a "Significant Species"

which is a species that has been seen on 20% of counts or less. With this being the 37th count, species seen on seven or fewer counts are considered significant. The number of "Significant Species" can be a measure of how "good" the count is. This year with six "Significant Species", the same total as last year, but well below the record total of 14 in 1975, the count is about average in this respect. The other "Significant Species" seen this year are Great Egret (6th count record) and Common Raven (7th count record). Both of these species will undoubtedly come off this list in a few years as Common Raven has been recorded for seven consecutive years now that it is a HSA breeding species. Also, the Great Egret is being recorded more frequently now (six years since 1992) and it will soon come off the list.

Also of note this year was the recording of six finch species including White-winged Crossbill and Evening Grosbeak. Evening Grosbeak has really declined across Ontario and this is only the second record of this species on the HFBC in the last nine years.

There were lots of negatives on this year's count. Topping this list is the paltry number of shorebirds. Only five species were recorded, an all-time low. There have been four other years with only six species. Additionally, only 112 individual shorebirds were counted. Both woodcock and snipe were missed for only the 3rd time each and Pectoral Sandpiper was missed once again. This is becoming a familiar pattern with shorebirds on the fall count. The numbers of almost all species keep on dropping due to actual declining populations and/or decreasing habitat in the HSA. The number of Great Black-backed Gulls on fall counts continues to decline. Back in the early-90s, the average count for this species on the HFBC was around 190. Since that time num-

bers have gradually decreased such that a low water mark was reached this year with only 10 birds. However, this species population in North America is apparently stable and the reduction on the fall count seems an anomaly. Potentially this species is just migrating into our area later and later each year from the east coast, possibly due to warmer fall temperatures. The Hamilton CBC numbers do not show this same declining trend.

One other negative seems to explain a lot about the 2010 count, at least to me. I have heard someone in the past say that a good indicator of lingering insectivorous birds is the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The story goes that if you have lots of Ruby-crowned Kinglets on your count, it is a good sign that there will be lingering swallows, vireos, warblers, phoebes, gnatcatchers, *etc.* This year we had none of the aforementioned species save for the usual Yellow-rumped Warblers and the exceptional Pine Warbler. On this year's count we had only six Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a record-low total. Maybe there's something to this.

So all in all, pretty much an average count with the species total of 126 being below the all-time count average of 130. Some were expecting more but it is noteworthy that we added two new species to the count in its 37th year. It is also worth noting that for the first time we had over 140 observers on the count. The HFBC just keeps getting more popular which is a very good thing. I want to thank everyone for getting their results to me so quickly and concisely and for promptly answering any questions that I had. I hope to see all of you back next year.

2010 RESULTS

Area Covered: selected areas within a 40.2km radius (25 miles) of Dundurn Castle, Hamilton, Ontario (Hamilton Study Area-HSA) including: the Lake Ontario shoreline from Port Credit to Beamsville; The Conservation Areas of Berry, Binbrook, Burns, Christie, Felker's Falls, Fifty Point, Mountsberg, Valens, Dundas Valley, and Spencer Gorge; Islay, Puslinch, Mohawk and Dunmark Lakes; Scotch Block Reservoir; Cootes Paradise; Woodland & Holy Sepulchre Cemeteries; King's Forest; Esquesing and Frank Tracts; Bronte, Rattray, Middletown, and Van Wagners Marshes; Courtcliffe Park; Rock Chapel Sanctuary; Waterworks Park; Joe Sam's Park; Shell Park; Green Lane Wetland; Brantford and Tom Howe (Hagersville) Landfills; Six Nations I.R.; Beverly Swamp; Hamilton Harbour; Windermere Basin; Mill, Milton Town & Tollgate Ponds; Smithville, Grimsby, and Cainsville Sewage Ponds; Borers, Ancaster, Stoney, Bronte, and Oakville Creek ravines; Red Hill, Dundas, and Hendrie Valleys; and the Grand River from Cayuga to Cambridge.

Sunday, November 7, 2010: 12:00-1:30am (owling), 2:45-6:30am (owling), 6:30am to 5:15pm. Weather: Temperature -2-0 C at dawn increasing to a high of 8-9 C. Winds calm at dawn with great visibility at Lake Ontario in early morning. Winds gradually increasing to moderate speeds of 20kph from the SW by late afternoon. Partly cloudy in the morning but almost completely sunny in the afternoon. No precipitation. 142 observers in 68 parties. Total party hours: 443.7.

Species: Underlined totals represent record-high numbers unless stated as

record-low. Numbers in brackets following underlined totals give the previous high count (or low count) followed by the year(s). Underlined species require documentation for the Hamilton Bird Records Committee either as date or geographic rarities (see *Date Guide to the Birds of the Hamilton Area*). Species in bold and underlined require documentation to the Ontario Bird Records Committee.

Brant 1; Canada Goose 12,654; Mute Swan 212 (211-05); Trumpeter Swan 64; Tundra Swan 31; Wood Duck 107; Gadwall 372; American Wigeon 134; American Black Duck 292; Mallard 4,452; Blue-winged Teal 2; Northern Shoveler 106; Northern Pintail 54; Green-winged Teal 535; Canvasback 65; Redhead 91; Ring-necked Duck 388; Lesser Scaup 1,643; Greater Scaup 3,458; Surf Scoter 289; White-winged Scoter 677; Black Scoter 254; Long-tailed Duck (Oldsquaw) 37,627; Bufflehead 1,043; Common Goldeneye 601; Barrow's x Common Goldeneye hybrid 1; Hooded Merganser 362; Common Merganser 231; Red-breasted Merganser 1,328; Ruddy Duck 840; Ruffed Grouse 4; Wild Turkey 100 (95-09); Red-throated Loon 9; Common Loon 14; Pied-billed Grebe 9; Horned Grebe 2; Red-necked Grebe 39; Double-crested Cormorant 140; Great Blue Heron 84; Great Egret 1; Black-crowned Night-Heron 18; Turkey Vulture 55; Bald Eagle 7 (5-09); Northern Harrier 35; Sharp-shinned Hawk 26; Cooper's Hawk 34; Northern Goshawk 2; Red-shouldered Hawk 1; Red-tailed Hawk 433; Rough-legged Hawk 9; Golden Eagle 5 (4-99); American Kestrel 48; Merlin 4; Peregrine Falcon 3; American Coot 1,109; Sandhill Crane 30 (22-99); Killdeer 97; Greater Yellowlegs 9; White-rumped Sandpiper 1; Purple Sandpiper 1 (AK); Dunlin 5; Bonaparte's Gull 2; Ring-billed Gull 7,163; Herring Gull 1,986; Thayer's

Gull 1 (BSm, ASe, PM); Great Black-backed Gull 10 (low) (19-05); Rock Pigeon 2,664; Mourning Dove 1,227; Eastern Screech-Owl 21; Great Horned Owl 16; Long-eared Owl 8; Northern Saw-whet Owl 7 (4-75,82); Belted Kingfisher 34; Red-bellied Woodpecker 132 (123-09); Downy Woodpecker 353; Hairy Woodpecker 79; Northern Flicker 23; Pileated Woodpecker 7; Northern Shrike 8; Blue Jay 1,259; American Crow 3,399; Common Raven 1; Horned Lark 137; Black-capped Chickadee 3,103; Tufted Titmouse 7 (6-93); Red-breasted Nuthatch 60; White-breasted Nuthatch 340; Brown Creeper 37; Carolina Wren 56; Winter Wren 25; Golden-crowned Kinglet 292; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 6 (low) (6-77,78); Eastern Bluebird 129; Hermit Thrush 10; American Robin 3,230; Brown Thrasher 1; Gray Catbird 1; Northern Mockingbird 42; European Starling 30,153; American Pipit 552; Cedar Waxwing 1,888; Yellow-rumped Warbler 37; Pine Warbler (JBr, DDon,TC,TF)1; Eastern Towhee 2; American Tree Sparrow 1,360; Chipping Sparrow 2; Field Sparrow 2; Le Conte's Sparrow 1 (TTho;ON); Fox Sparrow 96; Song Sparrow 107; Swamp Sparrow 24; White-throated Sparrow 352; White-crowned Sparrow 20; Dark-eyed Junco 2,437; Snow Bunting 51; Northern Cardinal 630; Red-winged Blackbird 2,023; Rusty Blackbird 133; Common Grackle 129; Brown-headed Cowbird 60; Purple Finch 35; House Finch 437; White-winged Crossbill 2; Pine Siskin 56; American Goldfinch 1,970; Evening Grosbeak 3; House Sparrow 2,009.

Total: 126 species; 143,989 individuals.

Count Period Birds (seen day before or day after count but not on count day): Pacific Loon 1 (BC,DDon); Short-eared Owl 1.

Observers: Alfred Adamo, Brian Ahara, Phil Armishaw, Anna Baranova, Glenn Barnett, Mary Ann Bastien, Jim Biggar, Jennifer Bock, Peter Booker, Hazel Broker, Duane Brown, Jacob Bruxer, Alvin Buckley, Fran Bullock, Wayne Bullock, Jim Burrell, Ken Burrell, Mike Cadman, Jerry Chapple, Nina Chapple, Barb Charlton, Mark Cranford, Bill Crins, Carol Croke, Tom Crooks, Martin Daly, Ken Dance, Sandy Darling, Donna DeBruin, Marco DeBruin, Rob Dobos, Bill Doekes, Gerry Doekes, Dave Don, Dave Donn, Chris Dunn, Paul Eagles, Cheryl Edgecombe, Gavin Edmondstone, Luc Fazio, Tom Ford, Randy Fowler, Denys Gardiner, Jeff Gilbreath, Alex Gray, Natalie Gray, Jerry Guenther, Jane Hamilton, Bill Harris, George Hentsch, Brandon Holden, George Holland, Frank Horvath, Sandra Horvath, Lukian Husak, Zakhar Husak, Jean Iron, Mark Jennings, Andrew Keaveney, Kevin Kuipers, Bill Lamond (compiler), Sarah Lamond, David Langford, Joyce Lechasseur, Dennis Lewington, Gwen Lewington, Joyce Litster, Rick Ludkin, Garrett Luft, Ron Luft, Rudy Luft, Bruce Mackenzie, Reuvin Martin, Julia Marco Dunn, Arlene McCaw, Jim McCaw, Ian McGovern, Laurel McGregor, Owen McGregor, Sheldon McGregor, Spencer McGregor, Bill McIlveen, Kevin McLaughlin, Don McLean, Peter McParland, John Hannah, Liam Hannah, Chantal Miller, Jason Miller, Matt Mills, Brian Mishell, Dolores Mishell, Frank Morley, George Naylor, Owen Novoselac, Rose Petersen, Ron Pittaway, Brian Pomfret, Mary Pomfret, Norm Pomfret, Jim Pringle, Bill Read, Francis Roberts, Wilma Robertson, Kayo Roy, Alf Senior, Elaine Serena, George Serena, Donna Sheppard, Bill Siverns, George Sims, Joan Sims,

Anna-Marie Smith, Bill Smith, Ian Smith, Nancy Smith, Paul Smith, Doris Southwell, Larry Staniforth, Chris Street, Mike Street, Neil Taylor, Alan Telford, Tys Theysmeyer, Tom Thomas, John Tomins, Michelle Tomins, Rohan van Twest, Rob Unruh, Mary Voisin, Rob Waldhuber, Jim Watt, Reinder Westerhoff, Angie Williams, Ken Williams, Don Wills, Bill Wilson, Dave Wood, Eleanor Wood, Brett Woodman, Bryan Wyatt, Brian Wylie. (Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists, South Peel Naturalists' Club, Guelph Field Naturalists).



Photo: Le Conte's Sparrow by Tom Thomas

RBG Public Programs December 2010

See www.rbg.ca for details and online registration, or call (905) 527-1158 ext 270.

HOME-SCHOOLER'S AFTERNOONS

**December 14, Weather
January 11, Winter Birds
1pm to 3pm at the Nature
Centre**

Fee: \$7.50/student. Pre-registration required — online at www.rbg.ca or call 905-527-1158 ext. 270 at least one week prior.

RBG GEO-QUEST

**December 11
2pm to 4pm at the Nature
Centre.**

Members: \$10.50/person (family membership rate \$29); Non-members: \$13.50/person (family rate \$38)

FAMILY SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

**December 21;
7 to 9 pm at the Nature Centre**
\$10 (family membership rate \$25 for two adults and dependent children)
Non-members: \$12 (family rate \$30)

HOLIDAY NATURE CRAFTS December 5; 2pm to 4pm at the Nature Centre

\$10 (family membership rate \$25 for two adults and dependent children)
Non-members: \$12 (family rate \$30)

Dragon's Den

Drugstore Dragonfly

by Bill Lamond

This is an odd story. I often lament how much I have to work and how much I'm missing out from seeing dragonflies and damselflies. Sunday Aug 8/2010 was no different.

I was busy at work when a staff member came up to me and stated "that I let a dragonfly get into the store yesterday". I had no idea what she was talking about and she explained that on Saturday when I had the pharmacy doors wide open, that a dragonfly flew in. I assumed that she had seen a large fly or one of those elongate yellowish flies that we see frequently in the store.

She then said "it is still in the store and is on the ceiling up at the front cash." I went up to the front and sure enough there was a large dragonfly hanging from the ceiling. Naked eye, I thought it looked like a "blue darner" and I could see a prominent thorax stripe and I thought potentially a Black-tipped Darner.

I went to get a tall stool and a beaker to catch the beast and put it outside. Up on the stool I could see immediately that the abdomen was prominently ringed and I could see the separate eyes indicating clubtail. I then realized it had to be a Zebra Clubtail (*Stylurus scudderi*), one of the more exciting dragonflies in the province!

I easily caught it in the beaker and transferred it to a stamp envelope and put it in the fridge for photography at

home. I released the female Zebra Clubtail into my backyard and placed it on a flower stalk in the garden. It remained there until Monday morning when it warmed up enough and it flew off.

This species has been recorded very infrequently in Brant County. Peter Burke informed me that he had found larvae of this species in Big Creek in Onondaga Township, Brant County a few years ago. Outside of Brant County but in the Hamilton Study Area, Bob Curry observed a Zebra Clubtail on 27 July 2010 at Mill Creek at Shade's Mill C.A. near Cambridge. So this species, although definitely rare, can be found at a few locations in the HSA.

The pharmacy in Brantford is at least 2km from the Grand River where there could be a population. Truly a bizarre sighting, especially considering that the *Dragonflies of the North Woods* states that it "is a very wary creature, especially females which are almost never captured or observed". Ironical that it is one of the best dragonfly sightings I have had this year and it was at work, not in the field.

PS. I did manage to see a male Zebra Clubtail "in the wild" at Whiteman's Creek on 10 Sept/2010. It was 300m upstream of Apps Mill Nature Centre on Robinson Road. This too is within Brant County but out of the Hamilton Study Area by a few kilometres.



Dragon's Den will be a monthly column about dragonflies and damselflies. We encourage all those with interesting stories about these fascinating creatures to submit articles for publication - photos are most welcome too.



Photo: Zebra Clubtail by Bill Lamond

Noteworthy Bird Records - June/July 2010

by Rob Dobos



Total number of species recorded in the HSA during 2010 to July 31: 251. Underlined species or dates require documentation by the Hamilton Bird Records Committee. Capitalized species require documentation by the Ontario Bird Records Committee. For species marked with “#”, all reported records are listed. For all other species, only highlights are listed. Note that the species order follows the most recent American Ornithologists’ Union checklist and supplements.

Observers: Steph Alvarenga (SA), Duane Brown (DBn), Jacob Bruxer (JBr), Wayne Bullock (WB), Barb Charlton (BC), Barry Cherriere (BCh), Martin Daly (MD), Sandy Darling (SD), Rob Dobos (RD), Dave R. Don (DD), Dave K. Donn (DKD), Cheryl Edgecombe (CE), Gavin Edmondstone (GE), Sue Edwards (SE), Denise Fell (DF), Amy Fennell (AF), Janet Forjan (JFo), Lev Frid (LFr), Nancy Furber (NF), Eric Harrison (EHa), James Holdsworth (JHo), Kyle Holloway (KHo), Tim King (TK), Karl Konze (KK), Bill Lamond (BL), Cody Law (CL), Rick Ludkin (RL), Laurie Mackenzie (LMK), Christine Madliger (CMa), Sean Male (SMa), Kevin McLaughlin (KM), Matt Mills (MM), Jon Pleizier (JPz), Wayne Renaud (WR), Sarah Richer (SR), Peter Scholtens (PSc), George Sims (GSi), Joan Sims (JSi), Paul Smith (PS), Tom Thomas (TT), Marian Thorpe (MT), Mike Veltri (MV), Jim Watt (JWa), Angie Williams (AWi), Ken Williams (KWi), Alan Wormington (AW), Brian Wylie (BW), many observers (m.obs.).

Legend:

* - first occurrence for the year
F - first occurrence for the migration
L - last occurrence for the migration
HSA - Hamilton Study Area
terr. - territorial bird
SM - singing male

Plumages, etc.:

m. - male
f. - female
ad. - adult
ba. - basic
alt. - alternate
imm. - immature
juv. - juvenile
1st yr. - first year

Counties/Regions/Cities:

Brant [BR]
Haldimand [HD]
Halton [HL]
Hamilton [HM]
Niagara [NG]
Peel [PL]
Waterloo [WT]
Wellington [WL]

Trumpeter Swan: One at Hamilton Harbour off LaSalle Marina [HM] Jul 26 (RD,CE).

Wood Duck: 17 at Millgrove Loam Pits [HM] Jul 12 (DD).

Gadwall: 150 at Windermere Basin [HM] Jul 22 (RD).

Northern Shoveler: Four m. at Princess Point [HM] Jun 2 (RD); two m. at Windermere Basin Jun 7 (RD).

Green-winged Teal: One m. at Windermere Basin Jun 15 (KM), and two there Jun 28 (RD); two at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond [HM] Jul 19 (CE,DD).

Redhead: Two at Windermere Basin Jun 2-28 (KM; RD), and three there Jul 22 (RD); one m. at Sioux Lookout Park [HL] Jun 3 (KM).

Ring-necked Duck: One m. at Windermere Basin Jun 2-Jul 31 (KM; m.obs.).

Greater Scaup: One m. at Windermere Basin Jun 6-Jul 22

(AW; m.obs.); one m. past Van Wagners Beach [HM] Jul 31 F (RD,BC,DD).

Lesser Scaup: Three m. at Windermere Basin Jun 2-28 (KM; m.obs.); one m. at Bronte Harbour [HL] Jul 5 (GE).

Long-tailed Duck: One off Burloak Park [HL] Jun 3 (KM); one at Bronte Harbour Jul 13 (GE); 14 off Van Wagners Beach Jul 31 (RD,BC,DD).

Bufflehead: One f. at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jun 29 (RD,JBr); one m. at LaSalle Marina Jul 26 (RD,CE).

Common Goldeneye: One on Harbour off CCIW [HM] Jun 25 (JBr); six past Bronte Harbour Jul 25 (GE,SE).

Hooded Merganser: One f. w/ 8juv. at Middletown Marsh [HM] Jun 15 (BC); one f. at Millgrove Loam Pits Jul 2 (TK); one at Grimsby Sewage Ponds [NG] Jul 13 F (RD,DF); one at LaSalle Marina Jul 26 (RD,CE).

Red-breasted Merganser: One f. off Shoreacres [HL] and

one m. at LaSalle Marina Jun 3 (KM).

Ruddy Duck: Four at Windermere Basin Jun 2-Jul 22 (KM; m.obs.).

Ring-necked Pheasant#: One m. at Westover [HM] Jul 8 (TT).

Ruffed Grouse#: One at Lafarge Trail S of Conc 10 [HM] Jul 5 (WB), one at Westover Rd N of Conc 8 [HM] Jul 27-30 (PS).

Wild Turkey: Ten juv. at Ruthven Park, Cayuga [HD] Jun 5 (RD,BC,DD); up to three at Westover Rd N of Conc 8 Jun 12-Jul 10 (PS); four at Tapleytown & Powerline Rds [HM] Jun 26 (RD) and Jul 31 (RD,BC,DD).

Common Loon: Birds on Jun 3: 1 –off LaSalle Marina, 7 –off Sioux Lookout Park, 6 –Shoreacres, 5 –Burloak Park (KM); one ad. at N Shore of Harbour [HM] Jun 23 (RL); one at Bronte Harbour Jul 11 (GE).

Pied-billed Grebe: One terr. at Grass Lake [WT] Jul 1 (JBr); one terr. at Clappison's Corners Wetland [HM] Jun-Jul (TT); one at Desjardins Canal, Dundas [HM] Jul 31 (RD).

Red-necked Grebe: Birds at Bronte Harbour: two nests –Jun 2, one nest w/ 3eggs –Jun 17, one nest w/ 5eggs –Jun 27 (GE); two building a nest at Burloak Park Jun 3 (KM), and the nest had six eggs by Jun 25 with the first hatchling on Jul 22 (EHa); 13 off Spencer Smith Park [HL] Jun 15 (KM); 79 off Rattray Marsh [PL] Jul 10 and 62 there Jul 25 (WR); three off Shoreacres Jul 21 (RD,CE).

American Bittern#: One at Robertson Tract, Halton Region Forest [HL] Jul 1 (JBr).

Least Bittern#: Birds at Dundas Marsh [HL]: 1 –Jun 2 (DKD), 1 –Jun 5 (JBr), 2 –Jun 8 (JBr), 1 –Jun 13 (CE), 2 –Jun 18 (JBr); one ad. at a nest at Millgrove Loam Pits Jun 26 (AWi,KWi).

Great Egret#: Birds at Dundas Marsh: 1 –Jun 2 (RD), 1 –Jun 15 (JBr), 1 –Jul 28 (PSc *et al.*); one at Valley Inn [HL] Jun 3 (DD), and one there Jul 7-22 (RD; SD); one at Bronte Marsh [HL] Jun 15 and two there Jun 17 (GE); one at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jun 17-Jul 27 (JBr; m.obs.); one at LaSalle Marina Jul 26 (RD,CE).

Green Heron: Two ad. at Windermere Basin Jun 28 (RD,CE); a pair at a nest at Millgrove Loam Pits Jul 2 (TK).

Osprey: One at Grass Lake Jul 1 (JBr); two ad. at a nest at Grand River at Windecker Rd [HD] Jun 20 (RD), and two ad. + one juv. there Jul 25 (RD,DD); one at Osler St, Dundas [HM] Jun 26 (MM); one over Cootes Dr, Dundas [HM] Jul 14 (RD); two at Grand River at Brant Park [BR] Jul 27 (DBn).

Bald Eagle: One over John & Charlton Sts, Hamilton [HM] Jun 3 (SD); one ad. over Conc 5 E Flamborough [HM] Jun 11 (PSc); one ad. at Dundas Marsh Jun 13-18 (RD; JBr), and one juv. there Jun 13 (RD); two juv. fledged from a nest at Grand River S of Wilkes Dam, Brantford [BR] Jun 21-25 (DBn) and later seen over James Hillier School, Brantford [BR] Jul 22 (BL); one over High Level Bridge [HM] Jun 30 (MM); one 4th ba. at Rock Chapel [HM] Jul 16 (SD).

Northern Harrier: One f. at 8th Rd E, Saltfleet [HM] Jul 27 (CL).

Sharp-shinned Hawk: One terr. at Middletown Marsh [HM] Jul 4 (RD,BC).

Broad-winged Hawk: One terr. at Conc 8, Beverly Swamp [HM] Jun 1-Jul 3 (PS).

Merlin#: One at Upper Middle Rd, Burlington [HL] Jul 9 (DD); a pair at a nest at Holborn St, Brantford [BR] Jul 5 (BL) provided the second confirmed breeding record for the HSA; one at Bronte Harbour Jul 11 (GE).

Peregrine Falcon#: A pair nesting at Burlington Lift Bridge [HL] fledged two juv. by mid-Jun (BCh *et al.*); one at Brant St & Ghent Ave, Burlington [HL] Jul 7 (MM,SA).

Virginia Rail#: One terr. at Middletown Marsh Jun 1-15 (BC); one terr. at Clappison's Corners Wetland Jun-Jul (TT); two at Grass Lake Jul 10 (MV).

Sora#: One terr. at Clappison's Corners Wetland Jun-Jul (TT); one at Grass Lake Jul 1 (JBr); one terr. at Grimsby Sewage Ponds Jul 13 (RD,DF).

Common Moorhen#: Two ad. at Millgrove Loam Pits Jul 2 (TK); one at Grass Lake Jul 10 (MV); one at Grimsby Sewage Ponds Jul 22 (AWi).

Sandhill Crane#: One at Grass Lake Jul 1 (JBr), and two there Jul 10 (MV); two ad. + one juv. at Reg Rd 17 SE of Cayuga [HD] Jul 6 (SR).

Black-bellied Plover: Two at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 L (JPz; JBr; RD).

Semipalmated Plover: One at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 L (JBr); two at Monaghan Mushroom Farm, Guelph Line [HL] Jul 19 F (CE,DD).

Killdeer: One over Sunrise Cres, Dundas [HM] Jun 27 F (RD).

Solitary Sandpiper: One at Rattray Marsh Jul 10 F (WR); 28 at Monaghan Mushroom Farm, Guelph Line Jul 19 (CE,DD), and 20 there Jul 20 (CE).

Greater Yellowlegs: One at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jul 27 F (JBr).

Lesser Yellowlegs: One at Windermere Basin Jun 29 F (JBr); 12 at Monaghan Mushroom Farm, Guelph Line Jul

20 (CE).

Upland Sandpiper#: Two at Dofasco Trail & 10th Rd E [HM] Jun 26 (RD), and three there Jun 27 (JBr); 11 at Fulton [NG] Jul 2 F (AW).

Whimbrel#: Three at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 L (JPz; RD).

Marbled Godwit#: One 1st alt. at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 * (DKD; m.obs.).

Ruddy Turnstone: One at NE Shore of Harbour [HM] Jun 11 L (JBr).

Semipalmated Sandpiper: 15 at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 (JPz), and seven there Jun 12 (JBr); five at Windermere Basin Jun 2 (KM); three at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jun 2 (KM), and one there Jun 15 L (KM); one at Campbellville Rd & Millborough Line Jul 7 F (PS); six at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jul 19 (CE,DD).

Least Sandpiper: Six at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 (DKD), and one there Jun 5 L (JBr); one at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jun 3 (KM); one at Windermere Basin Jun 28 F (RD,CE), and five there Jul 5 (RD); eight ad. + one juv. at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jul 18 (DD); five at 5th Rd E N of Green Mt Rd [HM] Jul 19 (CE,DD); 13 at Monaghan Mushroom Farm, Guelph Line Jul 19 (CE,DD).

White-rumped Sandpiper: One at Dundas Marsh Jun 12*-13L (JBr; CE).

Dunlin: Eight at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 L (DKD).

Short-billed Dowitcher#: Three at Rattray Marsh Jul 10 F (WR).

Wilson's Phalarope#: One f. at Red Hill Expressway & QEW Stormwater Pond Jun 2 L (KM; MD); one f. at Rattray Marsh Jul 10 F (WR).

Little Gull#: One 1st alt. off Grays Rd Jun 2 (KM).

Bonaparte's Gull: One ad. off CCIW Jul 29 F (RD); two juv. at Grimsby Sewage Ponds Jul 31 (RD,BC,DD).

Great Black-backed Gull: One 1st alt. at CCIW Jul 23 (RD), and one ad. there Jul 29 F (RD).

WHITE-WINGED DOVE#: One at Deer Run Ct near Blue Lake, S of Glen Morris [BR] Jul 9 * (GSi,JSi) provided the third record for the HSA.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo#: One at Hilton Falls C.A. [HL] Jun 8 (LFr,KHo); one at Conc 8, Beverly Swamp Jun 11-19 (PS *et al.*; RD *et al.*); two at Currie Tract, Halton Region Forest [HL] Jun 12 (JWa *et al.*); one at Dundas Marsh Jun 18 (JBr).

Northern Saw-whet Owl#: One calling at Aberfoyle [WL] Jul 27 (KK) may have been an escaped captive bird from

Mountsberg C.A. nearby (*vide* AF).

Common Nighthawk: One terr. pair at Sherwood High School, Hamilton Mountain [HM] Jun-Jul (SMa).

Chimney Swift: Ten at Dundas Marsh Jun 2 (RD); eight at Gary Allen High School, Burlington [HL] Jul 1 (MT); 12 over Sunrise Cres, Dundas Jul 17 (RD).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: One at Hilton Falls C.A. Jun 8 (LFr,KHo).

Pileated Woodpecker: One ad. m. + two juv. at Rattray Marsh Jul 25 (WR).

Great Crested Flycatcher: One at LaSalle Marina Jul 26 F (RD,CE).

Yellow-throated Vireo#: One SM at Ruthven Park Jun 5 (RD,BC,DD); one SM at Milton Mill Pond [HL] Jun 17 (KK).

Common Raven#: One at Westover Rd N of Conc 8 Jun 1 (PS); two at Conc 8, Beverly Swamp Jun 4 (TT); two over Park Rd, Grimsby [NG] Jun 6 (CL); one at Britannia & Tremaine Rds [HL] Jun 15 (KK); one at Guelph Line & Hwy 5 [HL] Jun 29 (MT); one at Dundas Valley C.A. Jun 30-Jul 2 (PSc; WB); one at Millgrove Loam Pits Jul 2 (TK); one at Woodhill Rd N of Conc 4 [HM] Jul 12 (DD).

Purple Martin#: One over Verhoeven Rd, Burlington [HL] Jul 28 F (DD); 15 at Grimsby Sewage Ponds Jul 31 (RD,BC,DD).

Bank Swallow: Ten over Sunrise Cres, Dundas Jul 17 F (RD).

Red-breasted Nuthatch: One at Sunrise Cres, Dundas Jun 19 (RD).

Winter Wren: One SM at Lafarge Trail S of Conc 10 Jun 3 (PS); one SM at Westover Rd N of Conc 8 Jul 8 (PS).

Sedge Wren#: One at Robertson Tract, Halton Region Forest Jun 17*-20 (KK; m.obs.).

Marsh Wren#: Six SM at Dundas Marsh Jun 13-15 (RD; JBr); two SM at Clappison's Corners Wetland Jun-Jul (TT).

Swainson's Thrush: One over St. George St, Brantford [BR] Jul 10 F (BL) was the second earliest record for the HSA.

Brown Thrasher: Three terr. pairs at Dofasco Trail & 10th Rd E Jun 26 (RD).

Golden-winged Warbler#: One m. carrying food at Conc 8, Beverly Swamp Jun 12 (PS *et al.*); one f. at Currie Tract, Halton Region Forest Jun 27 (MT).

Nashville Warbler: One terr. at Conc 10 W of Hwy 6 [HM] Jun 1 (TT).

Chestnut-sided Warbler: One at North Waterdown Wetland Trails [HM] Jul 27 F (TT).

Magnolia Warbler: One ad. m. at Sunrise Cres, Dundas Jun 7 L (RD).

Black-throated Blue Warbler: One SM at Currie Tract, Halton Region Forest Jun 15 (JPz).

Yellow-rumped Warbler: One m. at Courtcliffe Park [HM] Jun 30 (TT).

Black-throated Green Warbler: One SM at Hilton Falls C.A. Jun 15 (JPz).

Blackburnian Warbler: One terr. at Currie Tract, Halton Region Forest Jun 12 (JWa *et al.*).

Pine Warbler: One SM at LaSalle Park [HL] Jul 26 (RD,CE).

Prairie Warbler#: One SM at Conc 6 W of Westover [HM] Jul 4*-8 (RD,BC; m.obs.).

Bay-breasted Warbler: One m. at North Waterdown Wetland Trails Jul 27 F (TT).

Cerulean Warbler#: One SM at Ruthven Park Jun 1-3 (CMA; RL,NF).

Black-and-white Warbler: One terr. at Conc 10 W of Hwy 6 Jun 1 (TT); one SM at Westover Rd N of Conc 8 Jun 1-Jul 30 (PS); one m. at Lafarge Trail S of Conc 10 June 11 (PS); two at North Waterdown Wetland Trails Jul 27 F (TT).

American Redstart: Two at North Waterdown Wetland Trails Jul 27 F (TT); one f. + two juv. at Shoreacres Jul 21 (RD,CE), and one m. + one f. + one juv. there Jul 28 (RD,CE) indicated successful breeding at this urban site.

Northern Waterthrush: One at Sunrise Cres, Dundas Jul 30 F (RD).

Louisiana Waterthrush#: One at Hilton Falls C.A. Jun 8 (LFr,KHo).

Mourning Warbler#: One terr. at Conc 10 W of Hwy 6 Jun 1 (TT); one SM at Ruthven Park Jun 5 (RD,BC,DD); two terr. at Currie Tract, Halton Region Forest Jun 12 (JWa *et al.*).

Hooded Warbler#: One m. at Rattray Marsh Jul 25 F (WR); one m. at North Waterdown Wetland Trails Jul 27 (TT).

Canada Warbler: One terr. at Conc 10 W of Hwy 6 Jun 1 (TT); two SM at Lafarge Trail S of Conc 10 Jun 3 (PS), and two m. + one f. there Jun 11 (PS *et al.*); one at Valley Inn Jul 3 (JFo); one at Lafarge Trail N of Conc 8 [HM] and one ad. + one juv. at Conc 8, Beverly Swamp Jul 22 (AWi,KWi).

Eastern Towhee: A nest w/ 1 egg + 1 nestling at Fletcher Creek Conservation Reserve [WL] Jul 3 (BL,KM,BW).

Clay-colored Sparrow#: One terr. at Northland Nurseries, Millgrove [HM] Jun 4 (TT).

Grasshopper Sparrow#: One terr. at Northland Nurseries,

Millgrove Jun 4 (TT); one SM at Conc 5 & Middletown Rd [HM] Jun 12 (RD); one terr. at Grass Lake Jul 1 (JBr); three SM at Conc 6 W of Westover Jul 4 (RD,BC).

White-throated Sparrow: One terr. at Conc 10 W of Hwy 6 Jun 1 (TT); three SM at Lafarge Trail S of Conc 10 Jun 3-11 (PS).

Dickcissel#: One over Eramosa Karst C.A. [HM] Jun 23 * (JHo).

Eastern Meadowlark: A nest w/ 3 eggs at Cooper Rd S of Safari Rd [HM] Jul 4 (BL).

Orchard Oriole#: Two SM at Ruthven Park Jun 5 (RD,BC,DD); birds at Dofasco Trail E of 10th Rd E [HM]: 1m. -Jul 2 (LMK), 1 -Jul 19 (CE,DD), 1f. + 2juv. -Jul 26 (AWi,KWi), 1f. -Jul 31 (RD,BC,DD); one 1st alt. m. at Grimsby Sewage Ponds Jul 31 (RD,BC,DD).

Purple Finch: One f. at Westover Rd N of Conc 8 Jun 8-10 (PS).

Please send your bird records for Aug-Sep 2010 by Dec 10 to: Rob Dobos, 21 Sunrise Cres., Dundas, Ont., L9H 3S1; ph: (905) 628-0297; e-mail: rdobos@cogeco.ca

Volunteer Corner December 2010 by Elaine Serena

As Field Events Director for the last three years, I would like to salute our great HNC hike leaders. They are all volunteers, who share their love of nature and expertise in different fields to make our outings so special. Some of them have led hikes for the club for very many years and our members look forward to these outings that have become an annual tradition.

I might note especially Dean Gugler, Kevin McLaughlin, Jim Pringle, Lois Evans, Bob Curry, Bill Lamond, Rob Dobos, Frank Morley, Bruce Mackenzie, Dennis and Gwen Lewington, Paul Smith, Don McLean, Rick Ludkin, Shirley Klement and Mike Street.

I would also like to thank Brian Wylie, Joyce Litster, Sheldon McGregor, Warren Beacham, Ken and Angie Williams, Peter Scholtens, Audrey Gamble, who willingly stepped in to offer hikes when I asked them.

More recently other hike leaders have joined the ranks and you will see their names on our hike programme. Thank you so for taking on the challenge! Welcome Gerten Basom as our new Field Events Director. She has lots of ideas for the coming months!

Ontario's Three Billion Year Geologic Journey

by Elaine Serena

At our November general meeting, we were privileged to welcome guest speaker Nick Eyles, Professor of Geology at the University of Toronto. Dr. Eyles has several books to his credit, including this year's release, *Canadian Shield: The Rocks That Made Canada*, which traces the geologic evolution of the Canadian Shield. His numerous articles on ice age geology and environmental geology in urban areas have appeared in leading scientific journals. Dr. Eyles has conducted geological fieldwork worldwide, from the Arctic to the Antarctic.

Our speaker prefaced the evening's topic—Ontario's geological evolution—with a global overview. The theory that the Earth's land mass was once a single continent was first suggested approximately 100 years ago. The supercontinent of Pangaea, which means "all the lands," arose between 500 and 300 million years ago, later fragmenting into several pieces, which became all our present continents. At present we remain in a dispersal phase, but eventually the continents will merge into a single enormous land mass. The planet has existed for 4.5 billion years, and is roughly half-way through its life expectancy. At some point the Earth will lose its protective magnetic field and then our atmosphere will be stripped away by the Solar Wind. Life will then cease and the Earth will resemble the moon's surface.

The Earth is divided into tectonic plates, which drift on underlying partly molten rocks, moving and interacting with one another like a "huge jigsaw puzzle." Plate tectonics is the study of

the large-scale motions of these plates, and of the action of geological forces upon them. After splitting off from the Antarctic continent, India drifted north and rammed into Asia, a collision of plates that threw up the Himalayas. Slave Province, the oldest geological region in North America, depicts what our continent probably looked like 3.5 billion years ago. In North America, the final stage of the accretion process took place 200 million years ago, with the arrival of the Yukon, Alaska, B.C., and parts of California.

Throughout its history, our planet has been bombarded by asteroids, comets, meteorites, ice, and other space debris. Enormous chunks of rock have transformed Earth's crust, and massive asteroid strikes may have prompted the break-up of supercontinents. While space material continues to rain down on Earth's surface daily, most of the fragments are reduced to dust by the time they land. Impacts were responsible for some of the Earth's five major extinctions, most famously that of the dinosaurs. Dr. Eyles compared extinctions to pruning, for both are followed by a renewal of life.

Humanity lives on the surface of a planet in turmoil, where nothing is stable. We tend to attribute landscape changes to cataclysmic events, while ignoring the minute movements that inexorably work their changes over the ages. Since Jurassic times, the sea floor at the Mid-Atlantic Ridge has been spreading at the same rate that fingernails grow. And every 24 hours, the tectonic plate beneath us shifts to the west, a distance equivalent to the thickness of a sheet of

paper. The Earth is constantly evolving.

Ontario was originally part of an early landmass called Arctica, formed about 2.5 billion years ago and later incorporated into enormous supercontinents. The Canadian Shield is the planet's oldest landform, believed to have been present at the very start of the Earth's history. As the Shield evolved through the collision of continents, its land mass increased in size. The Shield was completed 1.5 to 1 billion years ago, with the creation of the Grenville Orogeny. ("Orogeny" means mountain building.) The greatest mountains ever to exist on the planet, the Grenville mountains eventually wore down, just as the Himalayas are wearing down today.

Dr. Eyles likened the Shield's composition to a sandwich. The bottom "slice" is made up of cooled, solidified lava and magma, known as igneous rock. The filling consists of fossil-rich sedimentary rocks, while glacial till and other glacial debris make up the top layer. The Shield has deeply weathered over time. It covers more than half of Canada's land mass, and occupies a sizeable area of North America, extending south as far as New Mexico. The Shield is exposed in its northern parts. However, as it dips towards the southwest, it gradually becomes covered by sedimentary rock, which is formed by the deposition of material eroded from older rocks and deposited in layers. Sediment is thickest in the Shield's southernmost range.

Niagara's dolostone rock is composed of limestone, a sedimentary rock, with an admixture of dolomite that makes it

extremely durable. The hard rock of the Escarpment erodes much more slowly than rocks of softer composition. There are two gorges at Niagara Falls: one skirts the famous Whirlpool Rapids; the other, now buried (St David's Buried Gorge), is thought to date back to the last interglacial period.

In northern Ontario's Temagami greenstone belt, the rocks are composed of pillow lavas and do indeed resemble pillows. These formations occur wherever lava is extruded under water. Upon reaching the surface, the lava rapidly cools and forms a skin, which becomes inflated as more magma emerges onto the surface. The pressure of the magma eventually splits the skin, allowing yet more lava to flow through and split the pillows into smaller rocks.

A large part of Ontario's economic wellbeing is based on its mineral wealth. Billions of tons of metal have mineralized in the depths of the Earth. Different minerals form under different temperature conditions. Valuable resources like gold and diamonds are found beneath the Shield's crust. Diamonds are the product of deep mantle rocks rising to the surface from the core, and were formed approximately 2.1 billion years ago. When a stream of magma is trapped underground and subsequently cools to a solid, it is referred to as Kimberlite Pipe. These pipes, which assume the shape of a vertical structure or intrusion, are a source of diamonds. Kimberlite intrusions are proving useful as a diamond exploration tool, for Ontario's diamonds are not randomly located. Their systematic distribution leaves important clues as to where diamonds can be found.

Earthquakes most commonly occur along ocean trenches or along faults between plates. Rocks grind against each other, building up sufficient pressure to shatter rock and release pent-up energy as seismic waves. However, not

all earthquakes occur where plates meet. Some occur when "welds" within a plate weaken and break. In our area, the potential exists for substantial intraplate earthquakes, as powerful as Magnitude 7.0. Earthquakes of that strength and above are capable of inflicting serious damage over large areas.

The Laurentide Ice Sheet has formed repeatedly over the last 2.5 million years, returning at roughly 100,000-year intervals, and depressing the crust with its three-kilometre thickness. The last glacial period came to an end when the great ice sheets withdrew 11,000 years ago. We are now living in the Holocene—the longest interglacial period ever. Some observers believe that the planet should be undergoing glaciation now. They reason that the Little Ice Age, which occurred between 1300 and 1900 A.D, would have progressed to full-fledged glaciation, had it not been forestalled by human interference. Dr. Eyles cited William F. Ruddiman's book, *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum*, which presents a "respectable theory" that an ice age was averted because of global warming from human activities.

Although ice sheets generally erode previous sediments, Ontario retains a sedimentary record of two glaciations, and is the only place in North America to do so. The most recent ice age covered the land with vast seas and huge, continent-wide ice sheets which measured two kilometres thick, leaving the Great Lakes in their wake. Dr. Eyles mentioned that the Scarborough Bluffs are a good record of the last ice age. Unfortunately, there is little appreciation of the need to preserve such outcrops, which could yield valuable data as improved geologic techniques are developed.

Zircons, which grow in response to the flow of fluid through rock, have proved useful in dating rocks. At the time of

their formation they contained uranium, which decays to form lead. Their age can be precisely calculated by measuring the amount of lead within a sample. Geologists are able to reconstruct past environments from rocks and gain information about the evolution of supercontinents.

Geology has made great strides in a few short decades. Before the 1970s, plate movement was not understood. And until 20 years ago, no one knew how the Canadian Shield had been put together. However, the Shield's underground world still leaves much to be discovered. During sabbaticals spent in Brazil and Australia, Dr. Eyles has been working to understand the causes of glaciation. Earth's surface cannot be understood without studying the deep interior, and today's geologists are mapping the interior using seismic techniques. Sound waves generated by controlled underground explosions bounce back to the surface, providing scientists with data on Earth's structure. The field of geology has increasingly adopted an environmental focus. This approach reflects the fact that we live in a geological epoch called the Anthropocene, which means "the epoch of man." Dating back to the invention of the steam engine, the epoch was named to reflect the significant influence humans exert on the landscape.

Dr. Eyles promised us a journey to "where we've never been before," and he fully delivered on his promise. If your appetite has been whetted to expand your geologic horizons, you are sure to enjoy *Geologic Journey II*, a CBC *Nature of Things* production. Dr. Eyles was host and scientific advisor for the five-part series, which is currently airing. To view episodes online, visit www.cbc.ca/geologic2.

Bird Study Group Meeting Summary - October 2010

by Michael Rowlands

The Decline of Grassland Birds in the Northern Great Plains with Chris Street

Parking was tight at the Burlington Seniors' Centre on Monday, October 25, 2010 – not because of the Bird Study Group's announced programme, unfortunately, but because it was municipal election night and the auditorium was in use as a polling station! We met in the smaller Port Nelson and Wellington rooms and had a turnout of about 70 people.

Emcee George Holland quickly went through some general announcements before introducing our guest speaker, BSG Member Chris Street, who had last spoken to us in March 2010 on Ontario forestry practices and bird conservation. This time Chris was back from a summer of working in Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan, helping a University of Manitoba Master's candidate who was studying the effect of cattle grazing on nesting grassland birds. His nest searching and monitoring allowed him close contact with a number of grassland bird species that are in decline so we invited him to tell us what he had learned.

Chris first explained there are three major types of grasslands in the Great Plains of central North America: **tall grass** (5-6 ft. tall, found in the eastern portion of the Great Plains, needs 30-35 inches of annual rainfall, maintained by wildfires), **short grass** (<2 ft tall, western portion, 10 in. rainfall, maintained by grazing) and **mixed grass** (2-3 ft. tall, central portion, 15-25 in. rainfall, maintained by wildfire and grazing).

More than any other habitat group of birds in Canada, grassland birds in the prairies have declined on average at a rate of 1.5% annually since 1968, with 14 species of birds that utilize grassland habitat within the Prairie region on the Species at Risk List of Canada.

There are six main reasons for habitat loss and degradation in the Prairies:

1. Land Conversion to Agriculture – With grassland being converted to cropland, returning birds have found their nests on the ground are destroyed during harvesting.
2. Poor Grazing Practices – Overgrazing by domestic animals confined to fenced fields has removed the tall grasses in which some of the birds used to nest.
3. Wildfire Suppression – With farmers using wooden fences around their fields, they are reluctant to allow any fires in the fields that could damage the fences. In the past, natural wildfires used to control the grasslands.
4. Elimination of Wild Bison Herds – When millions of bison roamed the Great Plains, they ate a lot of grass! Now that their numbers in reintroduced herds are greatly diminished and their movements are restricted by fences, the grasslands are no longer grazed to the same extent.
5. Invasive Species – Without the former natural controls on the grasslands, invasive species like crested wheatgrass are choking out the native grasses.

Insects such as grasshoppers don't graze on this plant as they do on native grasses, so the invasive species becomes more competitive for moisture and nutrients.

6. Pesticide Use – Even though DDT is no longer used, other permitted pesticides take their toll on insects in the food chain, decreasing the food supply for nestlings and disrupting the natural balance.

Chris then discussed a number of specific grassland bird species that he studied and how they have fared since 1968 when detailed annual statistics began to be recorded in the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS).

Baird's Sparrow, which is much like our local Grasshopper Sparrow, has declined 8.2% annually since 1988. It likes a lot of litter on the ground to make its nests and has been mostly affected by land conversion, poor grazing practices, invasive species and pesticides.

The **Chestnut-collared Longspur** has declined 5.1% annually since 1968 and is listed as "threatened" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). It requires native pastures that have been heavily grazed or recently disturbed by fire to create sparse level vegetation on the ground. It has been affected the most by land conversion, poor grazing practices, elimination of the wild bison herds, and invasive species.

McCown's Longspur has shown a decrease of 8.7% annually since 1968 and is a species of "special concern" under COSEWIC. It requires native pasture that is very heavily grazed and recently disturbed by fire - even sparser vegetative cover than the Chestnut-colored Longspur.

The **Grasshopper Sparrow** has declined by 5.4% annually since 1968 and requires similar habitat to that of Baird's Sparrow. Along with the usual reasons for decline, it has particularly suffered from the invasion of non-native grass species that create an undesired habitat structure.

The **Ferruginous Hawk** requires a raised area surrounded by open grassland or cultivated area with an abundance of its main food source, the Richardson's Ground-Squirrel. It has shown an increase in population of 9.7% annually since 1968 but its range has actually shrunk by nearly half due to the encroachment of woody species of plants. It is listed as "threatened" under COSEWIC. Increased persecution of the Richardson's Ground-Squirrel has decreased this hawk's food availability and human disturbance has caused high abandonment of nests.

The **Burrowing Owl** has experienced a decrease of almost 90% of its population during the 1990s and is listed as "endangered" under COSEWIC. It prefers very sparsely vegetated areas utilizing the old burrows of mammals such as badgers, ground-squirrels and prairie dogs. The near elimination of prairie dog colonies has significantly decreased suitable burrow sites and the conversion of grasslands to agricultural fields and the subsequent use of pesticides has seriously decreased food availability and contaminated

populations located near croplands.

Finally, the **Greater Sage-Grouse**, which traditionally has required large patches of sagebrush to fulfill nutritional and nesting requirements, has seen a 90% decrease in its range and is now listed as "endangered" under COSEWIC. Its decline is due to conversion of sagebrush flats to cropland, high mortality from the West Nile Virus, and disturbance from natural gas field developments. The constant noise from oil and gas operations near historic lekking grounds (where males gather for competitive mating displays) drowns out the popping noises the males use to attract females and has caused the abandonment of many leks.

Despite the gloomy trends Chris had just finished explaining to us, he concluded his talk by saying there is some hope for the future. Increased protection of species at risk is creating opportunities for species to rebound and increased research efforts are discovering the root cause for the decline of certain species. Land stewardship to educate local landowners on best practices to create and maintain bird habitat is spreading and the National Parks System Plan includes the purchasing and conserving of as much native pasture as possible for the future protection of native bird populations.

After taking a number of questions from the floor, Chris was thanked for his informative presentation by George Holland, who spent many years in the prairies and had his own anecdotes to share.

When the usual sightings report with Frank Morley was completed, Cheryl Edgecombe gave a brief book review

of *The Reluctant Twitcher: A Quite Truthful Account of My Big Birding Year* by Toronto author and lifelong birder Richard Pope (Dundurn Press, 2009). The book is a serious accounting of his quest in 2007 to see 300 species of birds in Ontario but is different from other birding books because of his self-deprecating humour throughout. Some BSG members will recognize the names of many of the other birders mentioned in the book who often accompanied Richard on his pursuit of rare species. The book also contains many exceptional colour photographs and illustrations from persons well-known to the BSG membership such as Jean Iron, Mark Peck and Barry Cheriére. This book could be a nice birthday/Christmas/holiday gift for a birder you know!

Cheryl then gave a brief commercial for two local "hot spots" that have seen a lot of birding action lately: Woodland Cemetery, near the main Royal Botanical Gardens buildings, and Fifty Point Conservation Area. Both spots offer great opportunities for watching migrating birds and, at this time of year with unpredictable weather blowing in birds from other regions, for spotting rarities such as Boreal Chickadees blown in on north-west winds, or Cave Swallows from Texas blown in on southwest winds.

George Holland then closed the meeting with a few announcements about forthcoming meetings and hikes. Please note: Brandon Holden, originally booked to speak at the October meeting but called away to do birding surveys on James Bay, is now scheduled to do his presentation on the birds of Newfoundland in January 2011.

Dove Answers & Winter Finch Forecast

Courtesy of the Apsley Voice
by June Hitchcox

Well, Hamilton naturalists & fall clean-up, to the rescue.

About June 20, “my” Mourning Dove laid 2 eggs. One egg hatched and that squab left the nest July 20. One egg was in the nest. I assumed that this was the second egg, laid June 20. However, some have suggested that the female must have laid a second egg right when the first squab left and with the unusually hot weather, the female was on the nest only at night; the male some very brief times during the day – the rest of the time was spent with their newly-fledged squab.

To support this notion, in October, when tidying up the hedge under the nest, I found near the ground, two halves of a Dove egg. Usually birds take the shells away from the nest as a safety precaution re: predators, but an unhatched egg would be quite heavy so probably was just tipped out over the edge of the nest. It has been an interesting summer watching this pair of doves at eye level, 6” away from me. Thanks to those for the help.

Now for a short summary of the Annual Ontario Winter Finch Forecast by Ron Pittaway, listing those species that will probably stay in the far north and those that must fly to Southern Ontario or further, for food.

All birds must go where their food is plentiful – poor crops make them seek other areas. Ron forecasts not many Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings, due to the excellent Mountain-Ash berry crop in the north (Boreal Forest) and few White-

winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins due to excellent White Spruce cone crops in the north. Purple Finches must fly south to find deciduous and conifer seeds; Red Crossbills may find areas of good pine seeds but the Eastern Hemlock crop is poor so many must fly south as will Common Redpolls with the poor northern crop of White Birch seeds; Evening Grosbeaks may seek the excellent southern crop of Manitoba Maples – and they love black-oil sunflower seeds at the feeders; Blue Jays will find American Beech crops poor to none but acorns better than last year, so an average number should be seen in the south; some Red-breasted Nuthatches, with poor crops of conifer seeds in some northern areas, will fly south. It is always interesting to see if the forecast works out.

CONGRATULATIONS!!

Louise Unitt

is the winner of a brand new copy of The Winter Finders Set!

We hope you enjoy your books!



Photo: Mourning Dove by M. Walsh

Regular Meetings

Monday, December 13, 7:30 pm

“The Bird Detective”

Bridget Stutchbury

In her new book on the social lives and sexual antics of birds, Dr. Bridget Stutchbury explains why some birds readily "divorce," why parents don't treat their sons and daughters equally, why females sneak in quick sex with neighbouring males and why some adults forego breeding altogether.

A Yale-educated professor of biology and a GG finalist for *Silence of the*

Songbirds, Bridget Stutchbury roams forests studying the social lives and sexual antics of birds, sharing with us the curious reasons for their strange behaviour, bright colouring and elaborate songs. Are birds truly faithful to their mates? Dr. Stutchbury explains the science behind the surprisingly sophisticated and often amusing habits of birds, drawing on examples from around the world.

Next Month: Jan 10

Insects and Pollination -Peter Kevan

Sanc. Land Trust Committee

Join us at an informal monthly meeting to find out about the activities of the land trust program to protect land in our area and to steward our nature sanctuaries. All are welcome! We meet the evening of the 4th Tuesday of each month. Contact Jen Baker, land trust coordinator, for details (905) 524 3339 or land@hamiltonnature.org.

Bird Study Group

Monday, December 15, 7:30 pm

Location: Burlington Senior's Center
2285 New Street,
Burlington

7:00-7:30: Decaf shade-grown coffee and snacks

7:30-9:30: Meeting, Auditorium B.

Contact: George Holland
905 945-3962

This is an informal meeting featuring a discussion of recent bird sightings, an identification session and a workshop or slides about some aspect of birding. If you are a beginning birder, come out to learn more about birds. If you are an experienced birder, come out to share your knowledge and enthusiasm.

This month: Christmas celebration meeting, including market place, bird quiz, dead bird collection for the ROM, sightings; bring some baked goodies to share.

All of our hike leaders are volunteers who give their time and expertise freely. Participants are encouraged to share their knowledge and enthusiasm. Remember to bring along items you might need such as water, field guides, binoculars, insect repellent, etc. Some walks will be more rigorous than others, so please assess your ability and check with the hike leader if unsure.

No dogs please, as they startle wildlife, damage nests and plants and interfere with the enjoyment of other participants.

The Hamilton Naturalists' Club accepts no responsibility for injuries of any kind sustained by anyone as a result of participating in any of these events.

Upcoming Events

Sunday, December 26, 2010

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Hamilton Christmas Bird Count has been held annually for over 85 years and is a popular and anticipated event with local birders, usually with more than 70 participants, counting all species of birds within a radius of 24 km of Dundurn Castle. You may be surprised at the number of different birds recorded at this time of the year. Contact Tom Thomas to confirm your count site or to join in the fun. (905) 689 5920

Sunday, January 30, 2011, 1:30 pm.

IDENTIFYING WILDFLOWER REMAINS IN WINTER

A remarkable number of wild flowers can still be identified at this time of the year. Meet Dean Gugler and Fleur-Ange Lamothe at Sanctuary Park in Dundas at 1:30pm. The parking lot is off Sanctuary Drive in Dundas.

Leaders: Dean Gugler and Fleur-Ange Lamothe, call (519) 647 2371 for details

Saturday, February 12, 2011, 11:00 am

WINTER HAWKS AND OWLS

Join Ken and Angie Williams to look for a variety of hawks and owls around the side roads of Haldimand. Last February the group was thrilled to find 54 hawks and owls, but also saw Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, Eastern Bluebirds, a Red-bellied Woodpecker and many other species of winter birds . It was an exciting day out! The plan is to meet at Tim Horton's in Hagersville at 11am. Bring a lunch, as the outing will continue through the afternoon. In the event of stormy weather, it will be deferred to Sunday.

Leaders: Ken & Angie Williams (905)547 8580



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