

The Quinte Naturalist

Quinte Field Naturalists is affiliated with Ontario Nature, a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation, and research.

January Roundup



Photo by Chuck Porter in *All About Birds*.

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/is-it-unusual-to-see-american-robins-in-the-middle-of-winter/>

Every morning my day starts with a trip outside to pick up the newspaper from our driveway. Recently the open door revealed a world encased in ice. Standing there trying to decide whether a walk to the driveway could result in broken bones I heard birds. Neighbourhood robins were debating who owned which potential nest site. A house finch was singing loudly from the tall spruces across the street. It was quite obviously not spring. Why were the birds behaving as though it were?

I've heard house finches in late January for several years now. That's not unusual. According to *Birds of North America Online* male house finches sing all year except during the molt in late summer and early autumn. The robin behaviour has changed. Why? Even ten years ago there would have been no sign of robins in our neighbourhood in January even in years when flocks of a hundred or more spent the winter in Potter's Creek Conservation Area. Time to do some research.



Kyle Blaney submitted this sighting of a house finch in California in 2013 to iNaturalist.

Biologists know that birds react to many environmental cues but they also have many innate behaviours. At the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Germany, for instance, researchers have learned that birds have internal clocks and calendars to monitor time of day and time of year. Depending on the species the cycle of the bird's annual calendar may vary from the actual year by as much as a month or two. Special sensors enable a bird to sense day length and reset

its internal calendar. On January 31st there is about 50 minutes more daylight than there was at the winter solstice. The robins recognize the difference.

With its internal calendar automatically set correctly, a bird will be affected by other environmental factors such temperature. Our warming winters have convinced my avian neighbours to start their breeding preliminaries earlier than their ancestors did. The protein-rich worms and insects necessary to feed nestlings are not yet available so the robins will not be actually nesting for a while but when the time comes they will be ready.



Photo by Chuck Porter in an article in All About Birds.

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/is-it-unusual-to-see-american-robins-in-the-middle-of-winter/>

During research about American robins I was surprised to read the paragraph below. It's an example of why we should be contributing information about our sightings to sites like eBird and iNaturalist even if the species is very common. Don't assume you have to be an expert or even a good photographer. On the next page you will find a photograph used to document a sighting of a robin.

Despite being one of the most ubiquitous species in North America and serving as a model species in many studies, there is still much to be learned about the ecology of the American Robin. Of particular interest are studies of regional differences in reproduction, territoriality, communication, and migration, as well as the effects of humans on American Robin populations (e.g., landscape alteration, light and noise pollution, and climate change).



A birder in Tennessee used this photo to document her sighting of an American robin. First find the bird and then look closely at it. Use a magnifying glass if necessary. You can see a yellow bill, black head, gray back and the hint of a red breast. It is definitely a robin. It is not a prize-winning photograph but it is completely adequate to identify the bird in iNaturalist. I've submitted worse. Get out your cellphone or point and shoot camera from Walmart. It's easier than you think.



From the iNaturalist website.

iNaturalist helps you identify the plants and animals around you while generating data for science and conservation. Get connected with a community of millions of scientists and naturalists who can help you learn more about nature! What's more, by recording and sharing your observations, you'll create research-quality data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature. So, if you like recording your findings from the outdoors, or if you just like learning about life, join us. <https://www.inaturalist.org/>

iNaturalist's vision is a world where everyone can understand and sustain biodiversity through the practice of observing wild organisms and sharing information about them.



Quinte Field Naturalists
Annual Fundraising Dinner and Presentation

**Gardens for Pollinating Insects:
Friends not Foes!**

With **Lorraine Johnson**

In this talk, Lorraine explores some of the surprising corners of insect and plant relationships and how our gardens can support these dynamic interactions. Moving beyond charismatic species such as monarchs and milkweeds, Lorraine shares inspiring information about lesser-known creatures—native wild bees, moths, beetles and more—that are necessary for all life on earth, and how to welcome, not fear them in the garden.



Wednesday, May 8, 2024

Doors open at 5:15 p.m. Dinner at 6:15 p.m.

Emmanuel United Church
458 Ashley Street, Foxboro

Buffet Dinner

To reduce the environmental impact of this event we are offering a plant-based option in addition to a meat-based one. This is a great opportunity to try a delicious plant-based meal and help the planet.

Choice of Vegan mushroom-onion-chickpea pie or orange glazed chicken breasts
Both options include mashed potatoes, carrots, coleslaw, roll, butter, dessert, punch, tea, coffee

Tickets available at QFN meetings or contact Nancy Stevenson, nlsriver@gmail.com
\$40 per person



Lorraine is the author of numerous books on growing native plants, gardening for pollinators, restoring habitat, and producing food in cities. Lorraine's work focuses on people and communities growing plants, ecological health, and connection to nature and to each other.

"Lorraine Johnson has been one of the most constant and helpful advocates of putting native plants back into the garden." (from the book *A History of Canadian Gardening*, by Carol Martin)

Club News

Since our last newsletter in October we have had two member meetings with speakers and the executive board has met three times.



Professor McLaglan introduced his presentation with a discussion of our ambivalent attitude toward fire. We use it for cooking, heating or just providing atmosphere around a fireplace or campfire yet we also fear it.

Photo by Doug Knutson, Windswept Productions

interacting to complicate changing fire conditions.

Previous fire suppression strategies reduced the area any single fire burned. When we reduced these low intensity fires we lost some of their benefits. They could reduce the intensity of subsequent fires by reducing the branches and other plant material which becomes fuel. Climate change is giving us more frequent dryer and hotter summers, perfect conditions to provide dry grass and other fuels for fire.

Fire is a natural part of our ecosystem. We need to learn to manage it better, both to avoid disasters like Fort McMurray and to allow an ecosystem to function in a natural way.



White-throated sparrows nest in the shrubby openings left in a forest while it regenerates from a wildfire. Kevin Pero in Minnesota contributed this photo to iNaturalist.



Photo by Doug Knutson, Windswept Productions

At the UN's 2022 Conference on Biological Diversity in Montreal (COP15) over 180 nations agreed to 23 targets to address biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems and protect indigenous rights. Corina Brdar, the speaker for our January 15 meeting explained one of those targets known as 30 by 30.

30 by 30 refers to a goal of achieving effective

conservation and management of at least 30% of the world's lands and waters by 2030. The current totals are 17% of land and 8% of marine areas under production. There is considerable work ahead for governments and organizations like Ontario Nature.

Ontario Nature has a number of programs focusing on species at risk, sustainable use of forests, wetland education and human rights. In two blogs which Corina has contributed to the Ontario Nature website she gives more of her thoughts on Ontario Nature's role in the 30 by 30 program.

In February, 2023 Corina contributed a blog describing some strategies to meet the 30 by 30 target.

<https://ontarionature.org/meeting-30-x-30-an-ambitious-target-blog/>

In January of this year Corina contributed a blog concerning the problems related to mining the mineral resources required for a transition to a greener economy.

<https://ontarionature.org/green-transition-doesnt-need-to-cost-communities-and-planet-blog/>



The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe around us, the less taste we shall have for destruction. Rachel

Carson

Issues and Plans

Several other reports, issues and plans have been discussed and explained in general meetings and in executive board meetings. In the interest of publishing the January edition of *The Quinte Naturalist* before March they will be left for the next edition of our newsletter. Be assured, there is far more going on than is reported in this edition.

To give you a taste of some of our advocacy, Catherine Baier's account of the work of the beaver sub-committee of the board is reproduced below.

Beaver Update January 15, 2024

By Catherine Baier

In July 2023 a QFN sub committee met with the Green Task Force of Belleville to present the position of QFN on the importance of coexistence with beavers. The sub committee stressed the fact that beavers are critical for the preservation of the wetlands that are so important in sustaining biodiversity, particularly in the face of the current massive global loss of biodiversity and extinction of species. They implored the GTF to ask the Belleville council to follow the recommendations made by QFN in March and to amend their current wildlife/trapping policy.

In December 2023 the Belleville Council accepted the recommendation of the Green Task Force to make only one modification to their approach to beaver conflict management:

- That some members of the Department of Transportation attend an on-line course given by the Beaver Corps Training Program from the Beaver Institute.

This was not a recommendation made by QFN because it takes years of training and experience to successfully deal with wildlife conflicts in a non lethal manner.

The GTF did not adopt any of the following recommendations made by QFN that:

- Belleville council amend their wildlife/trapping policy to provide clear directives and procedures that would allow coexistence with wildlife.
- Experienced wildlife management professionals are employed to achieve this goal.

Belleville’s current wildlife policy states that their goal is coexistence with wildlife, but it outlines in great length trapping procedures while including only one sentence about the use of non lethal beaver management methods. There are no clear directives and procedures with safeguards to ensure that these methods are tried before resorting to trapping.

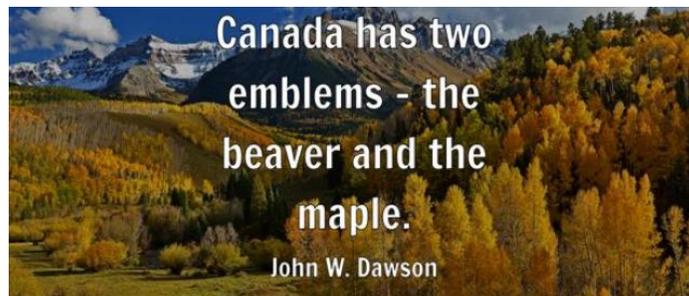
In other words the decision to resort to trapping instead of first trying nonlethal methods is not based on any policy procedure but is made as a subjective evaluation by the Transportation Department.

In conclusion, the situation for Belleville beavers, except for a plan to attend on-line training, has not changed as is indicated by the title of the article in The Intelligencer, “Beaver trapping will continue to prevent flooding”. Thirty seven beavers have been killed in the last few years, 9 of which were killed in 2023.



Dates	Location	Animal	Reason
April 20-24, 2023	Cascade Blvd	2 Beavers	Negative impact to sanitary sewer infrastructure
April 18-26, 2023	Airport Parkway	6 Beavers	Negative impact to a private-property owned well
Nov 13-20, 2023	Millennium Parkway	1 Beaver	Blocking storm sewer infrastructure

Figure 1 Graphic by Doug Knutson, Windswept Productions





**Quinte Field Naturalists
Speaker Presentation**

**Holes, Highways and
Hydro-Cuts**

With **Robert Ormston**



Hydro-Cut in Ontario



Southern Ontario's geography is dominated by human infrastructure. Often this infrastructure can be wholly destructive to nature, but sometimes it can influence ecosystems in surprising ways. Find out why abandoned quarries (holes), highway margins, and hydro-cuts may be of interest to naturalists, and what plants and animals have taken to these spaces.



Robert Ormston is a QFN member and recently worked as a stewardship technician for Quinte Conservation. He is a local naturalist and lately has focused on looking for uncommon plants and insects in the Quinte and surrounding areas.

Monday, February 26, 2024
7:00 p.m.
Centennial Secondary School
160 Palmer Road, Belleville, ON

Southern Black Beans and Rice

By Robert Ormston

I've eaten this recipe many times and it's one of those that is greater than the sum of its parts. It also gets better over time in the fridge as the beans absorb more of the flavours of the sauce. It functions as a main course since it contains carbohydrates and proteins (beans and rice make a 'complete protein') and goes well with a variety of vegetable dishes and salads.

Ingredients

- 1 pound dried black beans (2 cups)
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 large cloves of garlic (mashed, pressed, or finely chopped)
- 2 green peppers, chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- 2 tablespoons wine vinegar
- 1/2 to 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 2 teaspoons salt
- cooked brown rice (amount up to you)
- chopped green onions

1. Thoroughly rinse beans, and soak overnight in at least triple their volume in water. This helps reduce cooking time and improves digestibility. Boil the beans when you are ready until they are soft. Reserve 1/2 cup bean broth from boiling. You can also cook brown rice while preparing this recipe.
2. In a pot or saucepan, heat 1/4 cup of olive oil and sauté onions, green pepper and bay leaves until the onions are lightly brown.
3. Add cumin, oregano, 2 tablespoons of wine vinegar and reserved bean broth. Simmer until onion and pepper are soft.
4. Add drained beans, hot pepper sauce, honey and salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 10 minutes to allow flavours to blend.
5. Serve over rice topped with some green onions.

Sightings



There were two exciting, rare birds in the Quinte region in December. Kyle Blaney spotted the greater white-fronted goose shown on the left from his deck on the 19th. After determining that it was not a possibly escaped domestic greylag goose he posted the photo on eBird. It was number 88 on Kyle's list of birds spotted from his deck and only the second of this species ever reported to eBird in Hastings County. Unfortunately for local birders the bird disappeared after an hour or so, possibly headed east to Kingston where the species was also recorded.

Paul Jones photographed the Townsend's solitaire shown on the right in Sandbanks Provincial Park on the 24th. The species is seldom seen in Quinte and this is the first record since 2014. It was Paul's 280th species found in PEC, 240 of which he has photographed. The solitaire is a thrush usually associated with the high mountain country of the west. Compare its unprepossessing appearance with its song which betrays its thrush heritage.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Townsend's_Solitaire/id



John Lowry photographed this Carolina wren near Madoc. From its name you would expect it to be a species from south of the Great Lakes. Before 2000 it was seldom seen in the Quinte area. Carolina wrens have gradually shifted their range north. There is now a small but growing breeding population in Hastings County. One pair chose to nest in a hanging flowerpot beside a neighbour's patio door. It's now a regular, often heard in our neighbourhood.