



The Quinte Naturalist

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

January 2016 Issue

The Return of the Peregrine



Photo by Ian Dickinson

Early one summer morning about twenty years ago Sharron and I found ourselves sitting on a rock beside Lake Mazinaw looking across the water at Bon Echo Rock. We weren't camped in the park or staying nearby. Why had we crawled out of our beds in Belleville a couple of hours even earlier to watch a rock which would still be there in the afternoon? It was our shift in a project designed to aid the recovery of an endangered species, the peregrine falcon.

By the late 1960s peregrines had been almost extirpated in eastern North America. Widespread use of DDT had caused them to lay eggs with shells so thin that they could not support the weight of a brooding parent. Following the phasing out of DDT use in the 1970s naturalists began several efforts to revive the Ontario population of peregrines.

One of those projects involved placing hack boxes on the cliff at Bon Echo where young captive peregrines could be raised with minimal human contact. When the birds were old enough the boxes were opened and the birds were allowed to fly and return as they

pleased. We were members of a large group of volunteers who took turns watching and reporting on the activities of the peregrines.

The fog generated by the past twenty years obscures most of my memories of the project. I can't even remember if we saw the birds. We may have. I think that initially there was disappointment that the project appeared unsuccessful but peregrines do now nest on

Important club news on page 3.

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the rock almost annually so even that scrap of memory may be wrong. At the time Denice was the Natural Heritage Education Co-ordinator in the park so perhaps she remembers.

My one vivid memory from that morning doesn't even involve peregrines. A black-and-white warbler continued to visit its nest right at our feet. It seemed that so many people had spent time at this lookout that the bird had become completely confident that it could go about its business unhindered.

What brought this long ago summer morning to mind was this winter's Christmas Bird Count. For the second year in a row counters recorded peregrines and this year counters found 3 birds not just 1. Once impossible to find in Ontario, peregrines are back, at least in small numbers. The efforts of those hundreds of volunteers in many recovery programs like the one at Bon Echo have brought success.

OS 20



HAVE I MADE A MISTAKE?

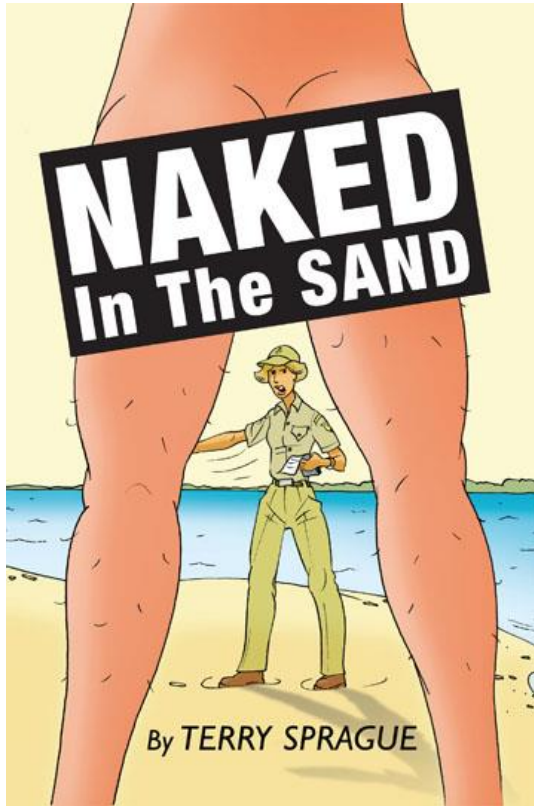
You might assume that's what this great horned owl is wondering. In fact, the owls do nest so early in the season that it is not unusual for the brooding parent to be covered in snow. Our local owls will be out claiming and defending territories already. I'm hoping that we will be able to have an owl prowling in February but first I need to find some co-operative owls. Owls can be finicky and even when present just ignore efforts to get them to reveal themselves. Little luck so far but keep watching your emails and Facebook for more information.

In addition to great horned owls local nesting species include eastern screech-owls, barred owls and, less commonly, long-eared owls and northern saw-whet owls. The snowy owls which are present this winter will return to the arctic before nesting. Short-eared owls nest in small numbers just east of us but they are not known to nest in Hastings.

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CLUB NEWS



“Excuse me, would you have a light?” I smoked cigarettes back then when I could slip one in without the public seeing me. I fumbled around in my pocket anxiously for the book of matches as she leaned forward in my direction. My first match spluttered and went out when my nervous fingers smothered it like a candle snuffer. She moved in even closer, her long, flowing hair, now directly in front of my face. As the next match flared to life, I just about set her hair on fire!

Want to know what happens next? Terry will be at our meeting with copies of his book available for \$25.00. In his long career he got into some interesting situations.

Dues – Dues remain the same this year - \$25 single and \$40 for a family. As the treasurer is swamped at this time of year it helps if you pay by cheque. The budget on page 9 shows how vital your membership fees are to help pay your club expenses.

Elections – Our January meeting is also our annual meeting. It's election year but we avoid all the bother of campaign speeches by having only one candidate for each position. We are still a democracy so you will be able to nominate alternate candidates should you wish to do so. Here is the current slate of candidates.

President – George Thomson

Vice-President – Phil Martin

Corresponding Secretary – Elizabeth Churcher

Recording Secretary – (2 Required)- Lori Brown, Nancy Stevenson

Treasurer – Doug Newfield

Environmental Officer – Denice Wilkins

Membership/Mailing – Karina Spence

Social – Sharron Blaney

Membership/Outings – John Blaney

Budget - We will also vote on the proposed budget. See page 9. Doug will be available to answer questions.

Annual Dinner – April 25, 2016, St. Mark's United Church, Cannifton. Tickets will be available at the meeting for \$28 each. Our speaker this year is Steve Burrows. Steve's book, *A Siege of Bitterns*, won the 2015 Arthur Ellis Award from the Crime Writers of Canada for Best First Novel. He has birded on five continents; he's the former editor of *Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Magazine* and a contributing field editor for *Asian Geographic*. His books are so popular that he recently signed a contract to complete a series of six Birder Murder mysteries. Sharron has read the book and highly recommends it. Join us for a fowl evening.

A GENTLE REMINDER

By George Thomson and Elizabeth Churcher

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It's a gray day! The clouds have opened up and large, fluffy flakes of snow are floating to the ground. As we look out from our cozy kitchen, we can see the snow deepening under the bird feeders and the supply of seeds in them diminishing as more and more of their kin flock together for a snack. The shrubs, trees and remnants of herbaceous plants are laden with snow, making our bird feeders much more appealing to large numbers of our feathered friends. Despite the burden of winter clothing including those long, heavy boots, George always has a smile as he ventures out to feed the birds in early morning. We know so well the outcome of his efforts! With their dining room table well supplied, we can sit back and relax, enjoying the Black-capped Chickadees, the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, the Dark-eyed Juncos and the delicate Gold Finches, as they take their turn at the feeders. The dynamic scene gets even more interesting as Wild Turkeys, White-breasted Nuthatches, Tree sparrows, Crows and Blue Jays all move in. --- And yes, Starlings and the occasional House Sparrow do drop by for a welcome snack. On January 4th, we cheered as we spotted a male Cardinal, our first of this winter!



Added to the species already mentioned, is a faithful bird that is always sure to be present, both winter and summer, feeding on the ground, maybe in a small group or perhaps in a larger party. It is a gentle bird and very social. Even its voice, a mournful “coah, coo, coo, coo” is gentle. It is, of course, the Mourning Dove, one of only two Ontario members of the Columbidae family, the pigeons and doves. Worldwide, the family contains 32

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species. We all recognize the Mourning Dove's cousin that lives in our surroundings. It is the Rock Pigeon, native to Africa, Europe and Asia but now found worldwide in cities, towns and countrysides.

While the Mourning Dove does not have dramatic features, its distinctive shape and colouration can rarely be mistaken, although, when seen in the distance, Elizabeth would argue that it can look like a Kestrel. The Mourning Dove is 23-34 cm long and weighs 125 g. It is clothed in soft, gray-brown plumage with a pinkish tinge, sports a black patch on its cheek & dark spots on the wings and it wears delicate pink stockings. Its tail is long & pointed and white spots, very visible in flight, highlight its edges. A long, slim neck supports its small head. We love to watch them as they quietly feed on seeds, walking, not hopping, with the bobbing head motion characteristic of pigeons and doves. Their flight is swift, direct and arrow-like, accompanied by a whistling sound especially on take-off.

A fascinating feature of the Mourning Dove that has always intrigued us is its production of "milk" to feed its young. Like all doves and pigeons, the Mourning Dove supplies its chicks with a protein and fat rich secretion from its crop for the first few days of their lives. The only other birds that produce this "milk" are flamingos and penguins.

While we appreciate the Mourning Dove's delicate beauty and gentle disposition, it evokes in us deeper feelings about humankind's relationship with the natural world. Pigeons and doves have suffered more from human slaughter than most birds. Of the 130 species of birds driven to extinction since 1500, 14 species, over 10 %, were pigeons and doves. Some of these, like the dodo of Mauritius (extinct 1662), were flightless and helpless at the hands of humans.

Another well-known member of this group that we will never be able to witness with our own eyes is the Passenger Pigeon. At one time, this bird, whose flocks were so large that they darkened the sky and took hours to pass over, was the world's most abundant avian species. It is thought that 2 in 5 of North American birds were Passenger Pigeons. Some think there were as many as 10 billion in this continent when Europeans first arrived. The last wild Passenger Pigeon was shot in Pike County, Ohio in 1900 and Martha, the very last of her kind, died in a cage in the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, sometime between noon and one p.m. on September 1st, 1914.

The extinction of the Passenger Pigeon ranks with the near extinction of the Bison, which was saved at the final minute, with only 1000 left, as one of the darkest events in our relationship with our fellow creatures.

--- So, each day as the Mourning Dove flies down and mingles with the other birds beneath our feeders, it serves as a gentle reminder that we must wisely manage and look after all of the species around us and the ecosystems that they live in. Many kinds of animals and plants worldwide are in decline and an increasing number are endangered. We can take nothing for granted! As members of the web of life in Tweed's environment and on Planet Earth, let us together take up our responsibility to be wise custodians.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

How wrong can one person be? Apparently if you are me the answer is “very.” I expected that this year’s count would have low numbers. I expected that birds would be scattered through the area and hard to find because they wouldn’t have to concentrate around sources of food and shelter. I certainly expected something different than what actually happened.



*Photo by Ian Barker, submitted by Terry Sprague
Redhead, One of the New Species Found on
This Year's CBC*

Counters found 7860 birds, more than 1000 above the average., and 58 species, the second highest number in the fourteen years of the count. There were two species (Redhead and American White Pelican) which were firsts for count day and a third new species (Snow Goose) found during count week. Count week includes the 3 days before and after count day of December 28. A further ten species occurred in the highest totals ever on the count.

Fourteen years in one count circle isn't really statistically significant since numbers bounce around depending on count day weather and other factors but there are some apparent trends we can watch with the exception of water fowl. Waterfowl numbers vary greatly with the amount of open water so it's hard to detect any particular trend.

Bald Eagles have appeared on 6 of our 14 counts including the 3 most recent so they may be extending their winter range into our part of the bay. The northward movement of red-bellied woodpeckers which some attribute to climate change is reflected in our CBC as they are now found regularly. Ironically as we tend to associate them with the north woods common ravens are now found year-round in the Quinte region with at least 5 or 6 on annual CBCs.

The “little brown jobs” and their kin show some possibly significant changes. Decliners include American tree sparrows, house finches and house sparrows which have been at

or below their median numbers for 5 consecutive years. Dark-eyed juncos, on the other hand have been near or above their median numbers for the past 6 years.

Thanks to the 24 counters and 1 feeder watcher who produced the numbers summarized in the table below. They spent a cumulative total of 68 hours in the field driving 706 km and walking 40 km. Thanks especially to the members of 2 groups who rose early to add an hour of owling time. Your efforts have added important data to biological research.

* A species occurring in record numbers

* A species new to the count

cw – count week, the period 3 days before and after the actual count day

SPECIES	No.	SPECIES	No.
*Snow Goose	cw	Red-bellied Woodpecker	3
Canada Goose	2998	Downy Woodpecker	32
*Mute Swan	75	Hairy Woodpecker	11
*American Black Duck	41	Northern Flicker	3
*Mallard	854	Pileated Woodpecker	4
*Redhead	2	American Kestrel	4
Ring-necked Duck	1	*Peregrine Falcon	3
Greater Scaup	16	Blue Jay	100
*Lesser Scaup	23	American Crow	271
*Bufflehead	9	Common Raven	6
Common Goldeneye	130	Black-capped Chickadee	403
duck species	6	Red-breasted Nuthatch	3
Hooded Merganser	6	White-breasted Nuthatch	54
Common Merganser	53	Brown Creeper	1
*Red-breasted Merganser	8	Golden-crowned Kinglet	4
Great Blue Heron	1	American Robin	141
*American White Pelican	1	European Starling	514
Common Loon	1	Cedar Waxwing	70
Double-crested Cormorant	1	Snow Bunting	35
Bald Eagle	2	American Tree Sparrow	108
*Northern Harrier	6	Song Sparrow	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Swamp Sparrow	1
Cooper's Hawk	1	White-throated Sparrow	2
Red-tailed Hawk	21	*Dark-eyed Junco	358
Ring-billed Gull	253	Northern Cardinal	25
dark-backed gull species	1	Red-winged Blackbird	1
gull species		House Finch	35
Rock Pigeon	628	American Goldfinch	136
Mourning Dove	169	House Sparrow	94
*Snowy Owl	2	Total Birds	7860
Belted Kingfisher	1	Total Species Including 1 cw	58

MEETINGS

January Meeting

Monday, January 25, 7:00 pm

Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, Belleville

Native Plants for the Garden - Peter Fuller, owner of Fuller Native and Rare Plants in Belleville, will discuss the benefits of using native plants in your garden, introduce the plants which are best for sustaining pollinators and birds and explain how to go about propagating native plants yourself!

Resolve to plant a bee-friendly garden this spring – think of your garden as a Bed and Breakfast – a Bee & Bee – for pollinators, providing food, water and accommodation. Bea Olivastri, CEO, Friends of the Earth Canada.

February Meeting

Monday, February 22, 7 pm

Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, Belleville

Go West, and North, Young Man – Kyle Blaney. QFN member Kyle Blaney is a photographer and birder. He will illustrate some of his favourite places with his breathtaking photography and talk about some of his experiences which might best be characterized as “interesting.”

Treasure Table – Our February meeting is also Treasure Night. Bring treasures to the meeting to contribute to this fund-raiser. They can be edible, literary or anything else that someone might find useful or decorative. No garage sale rejects please. Please attach a label with price on the item. Prices are generally bargain basement level.

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an incorporated affiliate of Ontario Nature, is a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research. It was founded in 1949 and incorporated in 1990, and encompasses the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward. The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is legally entitled to hold real estate and accept benefits.

Quinte Field Naturalists meet on the fourth Monday of every month from September to March (except December), 7:00, Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, 60 Bridge Street East, Belleville. In April we hold our annual dinner at an alternate time and location. New members and guests are always welcome. Bring a friend.

President

George Thomson
613-478-3205

Past President

Wendy Turner

Vice-President

Phil Martin
613-922-1174

Recording Sect'y

Corresponding Sect'y

Elizabeth Churcher
613-478-3205

Treasurer

Doug Newfield
613-477-3066

Environmental Officer

Denice Wilkins
613-478-5070

Membership/Mailing

Marjorie Fisher
613-968-3277

Outings/Newsletter

John Blaney
613-962-9337

Refreshments

Sharron Blaney
613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – February 10, 2016

Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com

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Dec 31 2015

QUINTE FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION

		Budget 2015		Actual 2015		Budget 2016
Revenue						
Annual Dinner	55	\$1,375.00	51	\$1,275.00	50	\$1,400.00
Baillie Birdathon		130.00		223.25		130.00
Coffee/ Tea Fund		100.00		202.35		150.00
Donation Box		75.00		261.50		100.00
Membership Fees		1,050.00		1605.00		1,100.00
Treasure Table		225.00		317.00		250.00
Turtle ICU's Sold				410.00		
Total Revenue:		\$2,955.00		\$4,294.10		\$3,130.00
Expenses						
Annual Dinner		\$825.00		\$800.00		\$900.00
Insurance (Liability and D&O)		570.00		567.00		590.00
Ontario Nature Membership		83.00		83.00		89.00
Association Membership in HPLT		50.00		50.00		50.00
Newsletter Duplicating		65.00		0.00		65.00
Newsletter Mailing		30.00		14.35		30.00
Trifold Duplicating		100.00		97.86		125.00
Speakers		550.00		475.00		550.00
Hall Rental		400.00		400.00		400.00
Bank Charges		30.00		30.00		30.00
Documentary Film Festival		50.00		50.00		50.00
Turtle ICU's Expense				150.46		
Miscellaneous		500.00		520.00		500.00
Total Expenses:		\$3,253.00		\$3,237.67		\$3,379.00
Total Revenue minus Expenses:		-\$298.00		\$1,056.43		-\$249.00

QFN TREASURER: Doug Newfield