



# The Quinte Naturalist

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



Yes, we can finally say, "It's spring!" As naturalists we will be out in local woodlots to admire the ephemerals such as hepaticas and trilliums. We'll be travelling to local birding hotspots such as the PEPtBO banding station in the Prince Edward National Wildlife Area or the Frink Centre to find migrants and nesting birds. There's no need to spend hundreds of dollars on tiring travel to exotic climes. Exhaust yourself enjoyably on local trails free.

Pictures scattered through this month's edition of *The Quinte Naturalist* depict flowers and birds you can watch for. Your executive will be proposing a new local project designed to help ensure future naturalists will have the same opportunities to enjoy these colourful birds. Details are on page 7. Denice will explain the project at the annual dinner where you will be asked to vote on it.



***Although scarlet tanagers are so bright and sing loudly they can be hard to spot in our local deciduous woodlands. Photo by Gilles Bisson.***

## SPRING UNFOLDS

**Story by Elizabeth Churcher and George Thomson  
First Published in the Tweed News, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

After experiencing a few days of cooler weather with flurries lingering in the air, it was wonderful to wake up this morning to warmer temperatures. Clouds still hang above us, casting gray shadows over the fields but they are full of hope that April showers will soon anoint the tiny sprouts that are just beginning to push up through the soil. As we surveyed our surroundings over morning coffee a few minutes ago, our conversation wondered to the old adage that speaks of the difference between the first day of Spring, on or about March 21<sup>st</sup> each year, and the first Spring day. Although weather varies from year to year, plants and animals follow quite well-defined timetables, with the various aspects of their life cycles attuned to the weather and, in a larger sense, to the climate. The study of the relationship between aspects of the lives of plants and animals and the climate is called phenology. A good example of this phenomenon is the spawning of Smallmouth Bass which doesn't occur until the water temperature reaches 16 degrees Celsius in Spring and Summer.



***George and Elizabeth call their farm  
Hepatica Hill. Photo by Kathy deGroot.***



***Its red breast betrays the fact that the  
eastern bluebird is related to the robin.  
Photo by Caspar Radden submitted by  
Terry Sprague***

As we look out at our fields and woodlands, the colours are still muted, largely shades of browns and grays. It's wonderful to think, though, that in a few short weeks' time, life around us will be burgeoning. We're already seeing forerunners of this: the Chipmunks are now scurrying around, on the lookout for food and mates, and busy re-establishing territorial boundaries. Some of our migrant songbirds --- Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Eastern Bluebirds --- have returned and are well established as daily guests. Our resident avian friends, such as the Cardinals and Chickadees, are starting to sing their

courtship and territorial songs. The high, clear 'fee-beeyee' (with second part lower than the first) of the Chickadee and the crisp, whistle, 'what-cheer-cheer-cheer' of the Cardinal are the melodies of Spring! Recently, we heard the song of the Junco, a musical trill, replacing the 'smack' and 'ti-ti-tic' calls of the Winter. --- And early the other morning, we were serenaded by the beautiful song of the Robin, still a little tentative, but a wonderful beginning to the day. Our pair of Crows, who have become our year-round guests, now are focussing their attention on nest building. We watch them pull grass from the lawn and then fly away, --- but where do they go? Their cunning tactics still have us guessing!

When we turn the calendar page to April, a green light comes on. April is the month when Spring, as reflected in the lives of the plants and animals around us, really starts to unfold. Cottontail Rabbits, having mated in March, will have their first litters of young, and Black Bears and bats will emerge from hibernation. A big event of April is the beginning of the frog and toad chorus, which will extend throughout the Spring and into Summer. Like an evening at the theatre, various musicians will come on stage. The first frog singers of April are always the Chorus Frogs --- they even begin in late March if the nights are warm enough. These vocalists are followed by the Wood Frogs, the Spring Peepers and the Leopard Frogs.

Another important happening in April is the beginning of the breeding of birds. Almost 30 species will be nesting this month, including Crows, Blue Jays, Grackles and Robins. Towards month's end, our shorebirds will start to pass through our area, many on their way to northern breeding grounds. We always watch snowmelt water in low parts of our fields, in hopes of seeing Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and other sandpipers probing the mud for food. As Spring unfolds, with each day of April revealing more of nature's



gifts, we listen for the territorial and courtship flight sounds of the Common Snipe and the Woodcock and the clear 'Kill-deer--Kill-deer---Killdeer' of the Killdeer, another of our shorebirds. Shifting our downward gaze from temporary pools in the fields back to the skies, we anticipate the arrival of Swallows and Phoebes, knowing that April's warmth will support the emergence of flying insects, the food on which they depend. Barn Swallows will arrive later this month, joining us after their long journey north from South America. As April merges into May, more and more songbirds will arrive --- warblers (Common Yellowthroat pictured), thrushes such as our Wood Thrush, flycatchers, vireos, tanagers and sparrows. Some will stop to

breed in our area while others, such as some of the warblers, will fly on to raise their families in the Boreal Forest to the north.



***Cowslip or marsh marigold is actually a member of the buttercup family. Photo by Ian Dickinson.***

As the gentle days of April usher in more newness and welcome back more old friends, we begin to visit our woodland regularly, anticipating the forest floor suddenly clothed in delicate pinks, blues, mauves, whites and yellows. Before the leaves emerge on the trees above them, our diverse array of wildflower buds will unfold, sharing their beauty with us for only a short time. Silver, Red and Manitoba Maples, American Elms, Speckled Alders and Trembling Aspens, too, will make a fashion statement as they show off their flowers.

As we scan our woodland floor, we watch for early butterflies, often being treated to a Mourning Cloak fluttering among the bouquet of wildflowers. --- And when we return from a leisurely woodland stroll, if the temperatures are warm enough, we might get a glimpse of delicate Spring Azures dabbling in the puddles in our laneway.



***It's hard to believe that a fairly common bird as blue as this indigo bunting can be hard to spot even when singing loudly yet that is exactly what happens. The vivid colour just seems to blend into the green foliage. Photo by Kyle Blaney.***

In our local lakes, our fish are moving into Spring. Beneath the surface of the water, mid-April is full of the action of Walleye and White Suckers spawning. Later in the month, Northern Pike and Muskellunge will follow suit.

In April, our ears and our eyes are filled with the images and sounds of Spring. The multitudinous array of life unfolding around us fills us with excitement and surprise. It introduces exuberance and exhilaration into our lives, shattering our sleepy, winter routines and filling us with hope for the future. Together, let's enjoy each new day and all that it has to offer as 'Spring Unfolds'.

## 2016/17: OUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS – THANKS TO YOU!

Quinte Field Naturalists are about more than meetings with interesting and entertaining speakers, a chance to socialize with people who share your interests and outings. We enjoy these aspects of our club but the QFN also accomplishes many other things. With donations to support projects by other organizations, our own club projects and participation in citizen science we fulfill our mandate to sponsor nature education, conservation and research. Here's a summary of this year's projects:

**H. R. Frink Outdoor Education Centre.** You are helping to introduce birds to the children and visitors at the H.R. Frink Outdoor Education Centre! We purchased seeds to stock the feeders. Hundreds of students and visitors enjoy the birds attracted by these feeders. In addition vice-president Phil Martin constructed the two feeders seen in the picture to replace others which were in very bad condition. This project is part of our mandate to promote nature education. This is an ongoing project with an annual cost of about \$200.



**Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre.** For the past three years Denice Wilkins has managed a club project to produce and sell **Turtle Incubation Care Units (ICUs)**. These structures are sold to members of the public to place over nests of turtle eggs to protect them from depredation by animals such as skunks, raccoons and foxes. Using profits from the sale of ICUs QFN provided funds to purchase a surgical head loupe like the one to the right. The loupe alleviates eye strain and will allow veterinarian Dr. Sue Carstairs more precision when operating on even the smallest of turtles. Donation was \$600.



Please "Like" QFN on Facebook

And visit Terry's website for all the latest news on nature in the Quinte Area -  
[naturestuff.net](http://naturestuff.net)

**Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre.** For over twenty years SPWC has aided injured and orphaned wildlife to prepare them for return to the wild. The facility also works with landowners to assist them to find humane solutions to problems wildlife may be causing.

Our club donated \$300 for the purchase of ceftazidime, a powerful antibiotic marketed as Fortaz. This drug is particularly effective in the treatment and prevention of infections in reptiles.

**Other Projects.** In addition to these three major projects we made a small donation to sponsor a film at Belleville's annual documentary film festival, Docfest.

Club members also participate in many citizen science projects. As a group we provide data on bird populations through participation in the annual international Christmas Bird Count. The Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory's Birdathon is an opportunity to raise funds and to remind ourselves and others of our local birds and their habitat requirements.

Club members seldom stop at club-organized activities. Many of us take part in a myriad of surveys which provide data from our local municipalities to national and international conservation organizations. These surveys include Project FeederWatch, the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Program, the Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program, the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program, the Nocturnal Owl Survey and ebird Canada as well as helping to monitor the first piping plover nests in fifty years at Presqu'ile Park.

### YOU HELPED SAVE SNAPPING TURTLES!



See the big smile on this girl's face? OK, who can tell whether a turtle is smiling or even if a turtle smiles? We are smiling however. Last December the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry announced that it was limiting the hunt on snapping turtles. Thousands of naturalists and groups like QFN wrote in to protest about any hunt on this "species of special concern," a designation assigned

by this very ministry. April 1 this year the ministry banned any hunt of snapping turtles. The statement from the ministry said, "Snapping turtle is a long-lived species that reproduces slowly and is subject to other significant stressors, such as road mortality," Our letters do make a difference and sometimes governments will do the right thing.

## A NEW PROJECT – REDUCING BIRD MORTALITY LOCALLY



*Photo by Sara Scharf/FLAP*

What happened to this Nashville warbler? Like millions of other birds it died after it collided with a window. A well-researched study in 2013 estimated that in Canada alone a minimum of sixteen million and possibly as many as forty-two million birds die in this way every year.

There are spectacular incidents when a hundred or more confused migrating birds hit a wall of glass at night in an overly-lit building . That's tragic but just

a symptom of the problem. The study found that simply because of their sheer numbers houses and other low-rise buildings account for about ninety percent of deaths.



The picture to the left illustrates the cause of these deaths. Glass is reflective. To a bird it is simply flying to the woods it sees nearby. There are ways to mitigate the problem.

Your executive is proposing that we partner with Quinte Conservation to turn their offices into a demonstration of how to reduce bird mortality significantly. For this purpose we will ask members at the annual dinner to budget \$1,000 to purchase materials and make arrangements for their installation. A naturalist group in Guelph has completed a similar project on the university arboretum building. Lower Trent Conservation

Authority has already made the necessary modifications in its buildings.

Denice Wilkins will provide more details at our annual dinner. You will be asked to approve the budgeting of \$1,000 for the project. Please support this proposal.

For background material follow these links: <http://flap.org/> and <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/why-birds-hit-windows-and-how-you-can-help-prevent-it/>

## OUTINGS

**Saturday, May 6.** Cliff Maclean's farm has attracted scientists from well-known organizations such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Natural Heritage Information Centre. Its variety of habitats including an area of rare karst topography make it a unique place which naturalists love to visit. Join us to enjoy the spring flowers. The farm is at the end of Leslie Rd. east off Hwy 37 just south of Roslin. Bring a **lunch** to eat by the river. Meet in the Lowe's parking lot at 9:30 a.m. or at Cliff's farm at 10:00 a.m.

**Saturday, May 20.** It's our annual Birdathon. Join us and be part of the club team, the Good Terns. We simply find as many avian species as we can in Prince Edward County in one day to have fun and raise money for bird conservation and research. Instructions on where and when to meet will follow in an email.

The money we raise is divided among the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory, Bird Studies Canada and the Quinte Field Naturalists. Pledges support this effort by donating either a flat amount or a certain amount per species found. We expect to find over 100 species. Please be a Good Tern. You can make a pledge at the dinner or on line here: [www.kintera.org/faf/donorReg/donorPledge.asp?ievent=1169312&supId=381443686](http://www.kintera.org/faf/donorReg/donorPledge.asp?ievent=1169312&supId=381443686). Click on "Sponsor a Participant," enter my name (John Blaney) and follow instructions.

***The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an 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.***

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Next Newsletter Deadline – September 15, 2017

Please send submissions to [sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com](mailto:sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com)