



The Quinte Naturalist

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

September

September's Speaker – Tom Wheatley

Mon., Sept. 25. 7: p.m. Sills Auditorium, Bridge St. United Church



For six years Tom Wheatley has spent winters birding in Southeast Asia. Join this expert birder on a virtual trip highlighting the region's birds, their conservation status and how our actions here, affect bird populations on the other side of the world.

You will enjoy Tom's photos, his stories and his subtle sense of humour. He also has a serious message. Our North American diet threatens birds like the Sumatran Trogon which occurs on only a few Indonesian Islands. Tom will explain why.



Sumatran Trogon (Photo by Tom Wheatley)

CLUB OUTING

Saturday, Oct. 7. 1 p.m. at Sheffield Conservation Area



Club member Ted Pordham will lead us on a trail in one of his favourite places in The Land Between, Sheffield Conservation Area. The 467-hectare area is firmly in the Canadian Shield. Its granite rock and topography qualify it as a granite barren which is an area with unique ecology. The bedrock under your feet is about 1270 million years old. Watch for veins snaking through the rocks They are a record of the tectonic forces shaping the land.

Calling Sheffield a “barren” does seem inaccurate although it is a term used in ecology. It is far from barren. Birders have recorded 111 species for Sheffield in Ebird despite the fact that for 5 months of the year there are almost no records. If you are lucky you may see Ontario’s only lizard, the five-lined skink, soaking up the last warm rays of the autumn sun. This tiny animal represents the Carolinian fauna which find their northern most homes in The Land Between. Carolinian flora could be represented by the prickly pear cactus. It was always a mystery whether the plants grew there naturally or were planted by someone. Whatever the case they were able to survive the winter.

Ted’s hike is over a **4.5 kilometre loop trail**. There are some **rugged sections** so wear sturdy footwear, long pants and a hat. About halfway through the hike there is a spectacular lookout. Bring a **snack and drink** for a stop there. You will be back in the parking lot by about 3 p.m. By all means bring your **camera**.

Supposing, like me, you don’t feel ready for a hike like this. I plan to do a few things around the picnic area. Join me. We can see if the prickly pear cactus are still there. There have been only 2 ebird lists submitted for the fascinating area, one in 2012 and the other in 2016, together listing only 18 species. Certainly we can add to this data. The leaves will be turning so there will be opportunities for beautiful photographs. We might even be able to look for skinks.

Meet at the **Sheffield Conservation Area at 1 pm**. It’s 37 kilometres north of Napanee on Highway 41. Allow **an hour for travel** from Belleville. If you prefer meet in the Lowe’s parking lot at 12 noon to carpool. Remember a snack, a drink and your camera.

BIRDATHON

Thanks to our generous donors we raised \$945.00 for conservation. One-half of this sum goes to the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory, one-quarter goes to Bird Studies Canada and one-quarter is returned to the club for our projects.

The total number of species was lower than it has been in the past few years. Our total of ninety-nine species is usually guaranteed on a day during May migration. With different groups of people going to likely spots all over The County we should do much better. I'm looking for someone with more energy to form a team willing to spend all or at least most of the day birding in 2018.

The real purpose of the birdathon is to raise funds for groups who believe that the health of our ecosystem depends on a large and diverse bird population. In that aspect of the day we were very successful.

BIRD SAVER PROJECT This project is a good example of how club money can be used to both conserve wildlife and educate the public. With advice and assistance from Michael Mesure, executive director of Fatal Light Awareness Program Canada (FLAP) Denice Wilkins organized a club partnership with Quinte Conservation (QC) to create a demonstration project at the QC offices. The project's goals were to make the windows in the building bird safe and to alert people to the problem..



The project was completed recently when the “Zen curtains” held by Denice (on the right in the picture with some of her volunteers) were installed on the second storey windows of the QC offices. A pattern of dots had been installed on the lower windows earlier. For more information visit the FLAP website. <http://www.flap.org/>

Recently Michael Mesure told George Thomson that through the internet, newspapers and the CBC people all over Canada and parts of the United States had heard about this project. Representatives of other organizations had been reluctant to take on similar projects because they feared the labour costs. Denice and her volunteers had shown that the bird savers treatment could be installed for very reasonable expense.

You can see the finished product at Quinte Conservation, 2061 Old Highway 2.

STRIPES

by Elizabeth Churcher and George Thomson
First published in the Tweed News, Oct. 5, 2016

Seasons of transition are filled with both surprise and promise. Each day, we step out the front door to scan the meadows and woodlands, searching for Mother's Nature's alterations in our surroundings. Have the Yellow-rumped Warblers or Ruby-crowned Kinglets decided to stop by on their journey south? Are the Red Maples beginning to display their true colours? Records from previous years help us to anticipate what will happen next.

While we watch and wait, we continue to be thrilled by the cheerful sights and sounds of resident birds as well as species passing through on migration. Recently, two Eastern Phoebes entertained us as they flew back and forth from a maple tree to capture insects in the inimitable flycatcher fashion. Perhaps they were a mated pair travelling together for awhile. From a little farther away in the fields, the "see-you-in-summer" song of Eastern



Known as Butter Butt among birders the yellow-rumped warbler is our most common warbler during migration. If there is a good crop of berries one or two may stay for the winter. (Photo by Ian Dickinson)

Meadowlarks occasionally drifted in our direction. Probably these were birds from farther north, already on their great southern pilgrimage. We always marvel at how all of the birds are adapted for their ways of life. Of course, this applies just as well to all the creatures around us. Every living organism is superbly suited to the life it lives.

As we moved out onto the lawn, still discussing the intricate behavioural and structural patterns in nature, our thoughts drifted to some of our recent treks along our local backroads. On a number of occasions, we have spotted a snake that requires our attention. We are always pleased when it is still living and we can guide it to safety. Some, unfortunately, have been run over by vehicles. Because of their 'lowly' position, these creatures are difficult to see and unsuspecting drivers often do not even realize that

they have crushed them. For the wellbeing of all of our animals as well as ourselves, we are committed to driving slowly along our country roads.

During our back-road explorations over the past few weeks, we have located five snakes. "Yellow Stripes", George announced. He was quick to add that they are Eastern Garter Snakes, a species that is emblematic of all our Ontario snakes. Why? Just like all of the others, the Garter Snake is in decline for various reasons, the principal one being the numerous roads that have been built in Southern Ontario. Snakes, like all other reptiles, are restricted to southern regions because of their physiology. Being ectotherms or cold-blooded animals, their body temperature is dependent upon the temperature of their surroundings. Unlike warm-blooded birds and mammals, our reptiles as well as amphibians and fish, cannot maintain their body temperature by internal means. --- So, when you see snakes basking on rocks or, unfortunately, on roads, they are not just there for relaxation: they are absorbing the heat of the sun both directly and from the surface on which they are resting in order to keep warm enough to support their body functions.



Garter snakes got their name because the stripes make them look like old-fashioned garters used to hold up socks before socks had elastic in them.

Snakes, as a group, are not faring well worldwide. Other reptiles, the turtles and lizards, as well as amphibians, the frogs and salamanders, are experiencing major population declines. They are all victims of habitat loss, food collection, persecution, climate change and roads. --- But more than any of the others, snakes top the list as subjects of persecution. They are particularly vulnerable to death on the road where we often find them because of their need to soak up warmth from dark surfaces. Unlike turtles who are just crossing roadways to get to their destination, snakes lay sunning for extended periods

of time, without any comprehension of the risk they are taking. We have to be their guardians.

Our beautiful province, Ontario, is home to 15 species of snakes, 8 of which the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has classified as 'Species at Risk'. Two of these, the Eastern Ribbon Snake and the Eastern Milk Snake are currently designated as 'Special Concern' while six --- the Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, the Eastern Fox Snake, the Black Rat Snake, the Queen Snake, the Butler's Garter Snake and the Massasauga

Rattlesnake --- have been elevated to the status of 'Threatened'. The Eastern Garter Snake, not yet listed at risk, is one of our most common snakes but it is still very vulnerable. It would seem to be to its advantage that its range extends farther north than any other kinds of snakes that live in our province.

At our home just south of Tweed, we appreciate the visits of our striped guests. Occasionally, as we are reaping the harvest in our garden, a friendly Garter Snake slithers by and we pause to admire its beauty. Sliding so agilely along the ground at our feet, we acknowledge how highly adapted it is for its 'lowly' life. Its coat of black, olive and brown blend in well with our crops but persistent yellow stripes down the middle of the back and along each side often announce its presence. A closer look, informs us that its belly is yellowish or greenish and it is about 25 inches long. Most adults range in length from 20 to 30 inches.

We have no fear when a Garter Snake approaches. The majority of them don't even try to bite: some will strike out in self-defence if picked up but the bite is harmless. Their teeth are numerous and sharp but small and can hardly penetrate the human skin although they can seize tender earthworms, slugs, insects, frogs and mice. In turn, Eastern Garter Snakes are preyed upon by animals such as Striped Skunks, Red Foxes, Raccoons and Red-tailed Hawks. Even Bullfrogs occasionally eat young Garter Snakes. - -- So they are very important members of a complex food web, helping to keep the natural world in balance.



As we drive leisurely along our country roads at this time of year, bright yellow stripes signal "Caution, Proceed Carefully!" It may be one of our reptilian friends bathing for the last time in the sunshine before he slides, often via crevices in the rocks, down below the frost-line to hibernate for the winter. We won't see him on our roads for awhile but he will be in our thoughts as his metabolism slows and he rests peacefully. We hope that he has found a safe haven, well protected from predators and brutal storms. We look forward to his return to our garden in the springtime where he can continue to assume his vital role. Just like all of the creatures that come and go, enriching our surroundings and lives with their presence, our Eastern Garter Snakes deserve our respect, consideration and protection.

A STROLL IN ZWICKS PARK

This is the first of a series describing short walks in the Quinte area to observe nature. They are intended to be introductions to these trails. Do your own walks to see what else you can find. I welcome information about your sightings and photographs or drawings of what you see.



Zwicks Park is a people park, not a nature park. It's a great place for families to picnic, kids to play on the swings, adults to play soccer or anyone to sit and just watch the world go by. It's made to order for events like concerts and civic celebrations on Canada Day. But look beyond the grass and human-oriented facilities. We may modify nature and limit its diversity but it's still there to enjoy. There will be things to

see on a pleasant walk of two to four kilometres in any season but for now we'll concentrate on autumn and winter sights. The paved walking trails are maintained year-round.

For this outing we'll park near the playground, walk to the paved trail and turn left to go under the Bay Bridge. Fall migration is under way. We will see birds that don't nest in the park or even nearby. Caspian terns, the largest terns in the world are still patrolling the waterfront, every so often uttering a raucous *kwok*. You can also watch for the largest gull in the world, the great black-backed gull loafing on the rocks or the bridge. It's size and colour make it unmistakable. Sometime during the fall there will probably be an occasional Bonaparte's gull, less than half the size of its giant cousin. They are a welcome change from the more than 100 ring-billed gulls loafing on the grass



If you are lucky you will see a Caspian tern making a spectacular dive for its dinner.

Continue along the bay to the mouth of the Moira. As the lakes and rivers north of us freeze hundreds of waterfowl will gather or "stage" in the bay, preparing for the flight further south. Many will stay as long as the current at the mouth of the river and through

the channel under the Bay Bridge keep the bay open. Buffleheads, common goldeneyes and common mergansers will probably dominate.

The scene changes as the bay freezes. Last winter a bald eagle stopped in every so often, scavenging any dead or sick ducks or the remains of fish left by gulls or ice-fishers. A fox would also sometimes make a foray out for its lunch.



In the fall the black hood of the Bonaparte's gull is replaced by white with a small black "ear" patch

Of course you find mallards in any open water but as you continue on the trail beside the river you may see a few who haven't read the field guide. They are supposed to be dabblers, tipping up to forage. These rebels dive in water a metre or more deep to get tidbits from the bottom. In the winter there may be a hooded merganser in the river. Every so often a mink travels along the rocks on the riverbank.

The trail turns sharply at the edge of the Travelodge hotel property. In the bushes along the next section look for smaller birds. Chickadees and robins are often abundant. During migration surprises can turn up here. Last week a couple of American redstarts stopped here to rest and eat. Thrushes sometimes forage in the undergrowth. After the trail crosses the lane into the hotel it turns again to lead you under the new Bay Bridge. Beside the railway tracks yellow warblers nested earlier in the year. They're gone now but you can be sure that goldfinches and sparrows will be finding weed seeds. Multiple visits will give you a chance to watch the finches molt into their more subtle winter garb. You can turn again to finish your walk beside the soccer pitch and head back to the parking lot.

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.

President George Thomson 613-478-3205	Past President Wendy Turner	Vice-President Phil Martin 613-922-1174
Recording Secretary Nancy Stevenson 613-779-9407		Corresponding Secretary Elizabeth Churcher 613-478-3205
Treasurer Doug Newfield 613-477-3066	Publicity/Environmental Officer Denice Wilkins 613-478-5070	Membership/Mailing Karina Spence Unlisted
Outings/Newsletter John Blaney 613-962-9337		Social Convener Sharron Blaney 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – November 10, 2017
Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com