

THE QUINTE NATURALIST

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

MARCH



Photo by Tina Sawicki

The eastern meadowlark is a popular harbinger of spring in rural fields. The distinctive slurred whistle delivered from a fencepost or other prominent lookout draws instant attention. The chunky butterball shape with the bright yellow breast makes identification easy. Despite its name the eastern meadowlark isn't a lark. It's a member of the Icterid family which includes blackbirds and orioles.

Meadowlark numbers are declining, probably because of the disappearance of nesting habitat resulting from urban sprawl and intensive agricultural practices. Ontario has lost over 60% of its meadowlarks during the past 40 years. Projects like the one discussed in the article beginning on page 3 help forestall a further decline.

CLUB NEWS

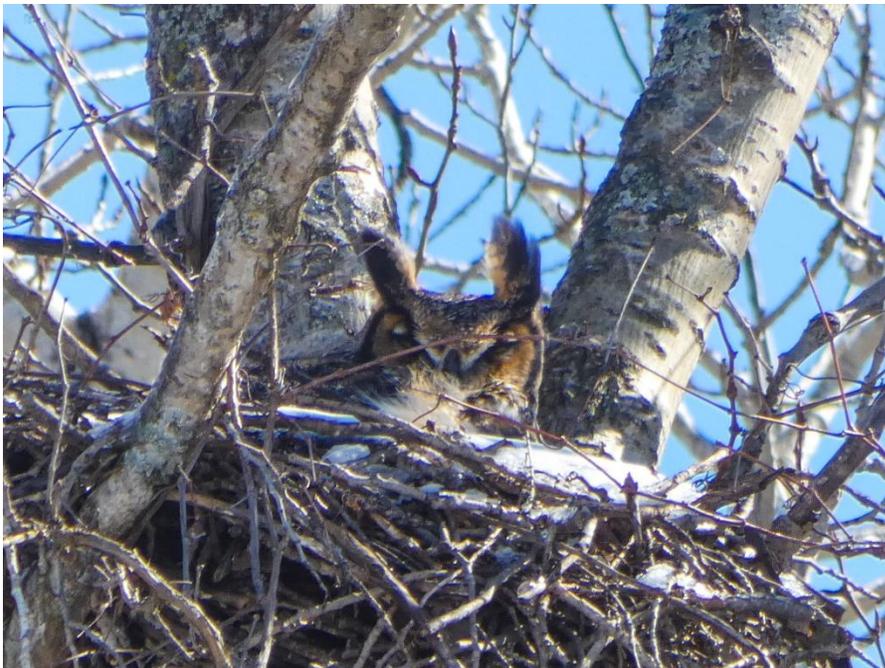
Annual Dinner

Denice Wilkins sent the following email to members:

*As you were no doubt expecting, growing global concerns over the rising spread and severity of COVID-19 have unfortunately necessitated that the **Quinte Field Naturalist program on Monday, March 23rd be cancelled** and our fundraising **dinner scheduled for Wednesday, April 22 be postponed**. We are planning to reschedule the dinner once the threat of the virus has been lifted, so stay tuned for updates.*

To those who have already purchased tickets for the dinner, first of all, thank you so much for supporting our work. It would be very helpful to our volunteer board if you could keep your tickets in anticipation of the rescheduled dinner date. If you are unable to attend the dinner on the new date, we will be happy to refund your money at that time. If for any reason you need to receive your refund now, just give us your name, address and how many tickets you purchased, and your reimbursement cheque will be in the mail!

Stay safe and to relieve stress - get out in Nature and enjoy the beauty and renewal of Spring!



Jason King found this great horned owl on its nest near Thomasburg on March 1. The young will have hatched and fledged by the end of April or in early May. These owls are large birds so it takes time to mature. Food will be abundant as the young learn to hunt. Young rabbits, skunks and other creatures will be easy prey as they blunder about.

PRESERVING LOCAL NATURE

You are probably already aware of the work that The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is doing in our area. Through our donations we helped NCC to acquire properties on the south shore of Prince Edward County and the Brighton Wetland. These lands will not be developed. Natural processes will be encouraged. When houses are erected or fields are ploughed or grazed parts of what is already an extremely rare ecosystem are lost.

Several organizations and private landowners in the Rice Lake Plains have worked to prevent the loss of an unusual prairie and savannah landscape within less than an easy hour's drive from Belleville. We need to do our part.

In the following article Mark Stabb and Val Dalziel describe NCC's recent accomplishments on the plains. They also need financial support to acquire a property with a closing date of early April. On the map following the article the properties mentioned are located just below the words "Red Cloud Cemetery."

NATURE CONSERVANCY SETS ITS SIGHTS ON SALT CREEK IN THE RICE LAKE PLAINS

by Mark Stabb and Val Deziel, Nature Conservancy of Canada

When the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) first started working in the Rice Lake Plains in 2002, we were inspired by two stellar tallgrass prairie sites: the Alderville First Nation Black Oak Savanna and the Red Cloud Cemetery Prairie.



Black Oak

The carefully stewarded Alderville Black Oak Savanna is the best known and highest quality example of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna and oak woodland in the Rice Lake Plains. The Red Cloud Cemetery, and its original prairie

remnant overlooking the Salt Creek valley west of Warkworth, is also well cared for and interesting, although it is only 0.4 hectare (1 acre) in size.

Both sites help us appreciate what once was, and what could be restored, in the rolling hills of the Oak Ridges Moraine.



The silvery-maroon colour of big bluestem gives a subtle glow to the Barr property. This grass may grow as tall as two metres. It provides habitat for native bees which nest here. Photo: Mark Stabb

NCC began its efforts to conserve the Salt Creek watershed in 2005 with the donation of the 13-hectare (32-acre) Barr Property, located in the creek's headwaters. Thanks to on-going restoration efforts, where once there were small patches of tallgrass species and sprinklings of indicator species, such as sand cherry, tallgrass communities now cover almost 40 per cent of the property.

potential building lot. NCC moved quickly and purchased the property to create a long-term buffer for the historical prairie remnant, and to expand native tallgrass plant communities. The 6-hectare (11-acre) property has since undergone a radical transformation. With hard work from NCC staff, contractors and volunteers, former farm fields are now full of tallgrass species, such as butterfly milkweed, Indian grass and woodland sunflower.

In 2007, a farm next to Red Cloud Cemetery came up for sale as a

In 2015, while the newly restored tallgrass communities were beginning to flourish, another remnant site came up for sale just down the road. The landowners had enjoyed the site as a recreational property and were intrigued by the idea of selling it for conservation.



In bloom big bluestem is also known as turkey-foot. Notice the small bee. Photo: USFWS

Now owned by NCC, the 11-hectare (27-acre) Red Cloud School Road property is home the one of the largest populations of rare cylindrical blazing star in the province. As part of our restoration efforts, NCC has established a 'seed nursery' on the property. This native plant restoration project is designed to produce seed that can be used to restore sites across the Rice Lake Plains. Staff have also mapped out a trail that we hope to open to the public soon.

Now NCC is once again setting its sights on Salt Creek Valley. We have a conservation opportunity immediately west of Red Cloud School Road. NCC has an agreement to purchase the 39-hectare (96 acre) Teleki-Dukes property – our biggest project to date in the watershed. If not protected, this intact oak woodland and mixed forest habitat could be lost to development.



***Tallgrass prairie is a haven for butterflies. This swallowtail was at Red Cloud School Road.
Photo: Mark Stabb***



***Monarchs are another species which loves tallgrass prairie.
Photo: Chelsea Marcantonio, NCC***

A 1996 ecological survey of the Salt Creek Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (by Vivian Brownell and Sean Blaney), indicated that much of this property was once oak woodland, with lots of openings and light reaching the ground. In the absence of fire or other disturbance, young poplar, birch and other trees have closed in over the years. It is a tremendous wild property that makes a great sister site to the other NCC nature reserves in the area.

Our work in and around Northumberland County would not be possible without the support of private donors and groups such as the Quinte Field Naturalists. Your organization generously contributed directly to the purchase of the NCC's Brighton Wetland project and many QFN members have individually contributed to NCC's conservation work in the area. We thank you sincerely for your ongoing support of the restoration of these important habitats.

NCC is once again looking for help to protect an important piece of the Salt Creek Valley, in the Rice Lake Plains. We invite you to learn more about the Teleki-Dukes property, which we hope to purchase in mid-April 2020.

We invite you to tour any of NCC's nature reserves, enjoy the natural sights and to be inspired by the restored habitats.

For further information please contact Val Deziel at 705-868-5374 (val.deziel@natureconservancy.ca), or visit our website at <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/ontario/featured-projects/salt-creek.html>

BIRDS OF RICE LAKE PLAINS



Eastern Bluebird. Photo: Tina Sawicki



Bobolink. Photo: Tina Sawicki

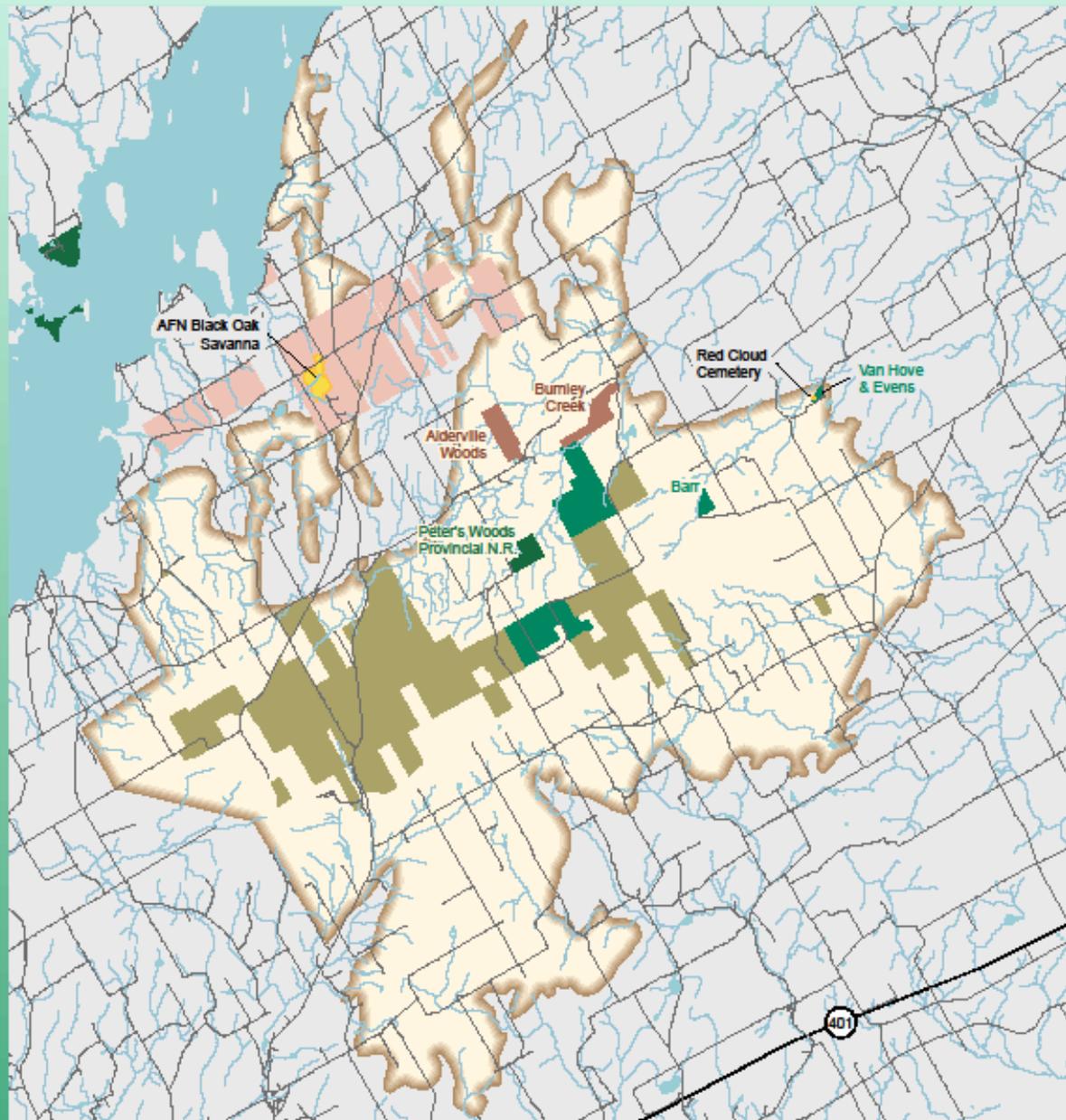


Eastern Towhee. Photo: Ian Dickinson



Indigo Bunting. Photo: M. Wannamaker in ebird

Rice Lake Plains: Conservation Lands and Land Ownership

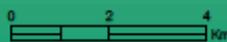


Land Ownership

- Lower Trent C.A.
- Provincial Park
- NCC Project Property
- Alderville First Nation
- Northumberland County Forest

- Rice Lake Plains Study Area
- Non-Anchor Site

Scale 1:120,000



Disclaimer:
This map is illustrative only. Do not rely on it as being a precise
indicator of privately-owned land, routes,
locations of features, nor as a guide to navigation.
This map may contain omissions or errors.

Data Source:
Nature Conservancy of Canada - Ontario Region, 2007,
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2006

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Miniature of Catharine Parr Traill as an elegant young English lady.

Source : Library and Archives Canada /
C-067337

Catherine Parr Traill (1802-1899), the sister of Susanne Moodie, was a prolific and important nineteenth century author and amateur botanist who lived on the Rice Lake Plains from 1846 to 1857. She was an amateur only because at that time, there was no possibility of a women having a paid, professional position. You can still study her many albums of pressed plants which reside in the National Herbarium.

Ahead of her time Catherine Parr Traill published two field guides to the flora of the region, *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1869), and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada: Or, Gleanings from Forest, Lake and Plain* (1885).

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 pm, 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
Recording Secretary	Corresponding Secretary Elizabeth Churcher 613-478-3205	
Treasurer Mike Shaw 613-967-1055	Publicity/Environmental Officer Denice Wilkins 613-478-5070	Membership John Blaney 613-962-9337
Newsletter John Blaney 613-962-9337	Outings John Lowry 613-962-5232	Social Convener Sharron Blaney 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – April. 15. 2020