

# *The Quinte Naturalist*

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

## *March*



*Common Redpoll*

*Photo by Tom Wheatley in eBird*

It's been a Redpoll Winter. Large flocks of these Arctic visitors made up of common redpolls and a few hoary redpolls have been features of many feeders and rural fields. Even in our tiny yard we have a daily visit by a flock of about 100 birds. One birder in Trenton stopped counting at 175 at her feeders. An invasion like this is known as an irruption. Irruptions occur when food sources further north are sparse.

# A Quinte Field Naturalists Webinar

In Cooperation with the South Shore Joint Initiative

Kyle Blaney

## Beauty Close to Home

Monday April 26, 2021 - 7 pm



*Local photographer and naturalist Kyle Blaney has travelled widely in Canada and the United States but during the past year circumstances have kept him close to home. He finds just as much beauty in Quinte as he has found in more distant locations. Join us as Kyle tells us about his experiences in Quinte, illustrated with his impressive photographs.*

**Click below to register and receive a reminder closer to the date**

**[https://www.ssji.ca/ssji\\_presents\\_qfn\\_webinar](https://www.ssji.ca/ssji_presents_qfn_webinar)**



*Dear Members of QFN,*

There are some changes to the format of our newsletters. It is our intent to provide more information to members who do not access our QFN Facebook page and to encourage more member involvement by inviting you to provide submissions to be included in the following editions of this newsletter by sending them to [quintefn@gmail.com](mailto:quintefn@gmail.com) by April 1st.

Some suggestions for submissions include:

Nature sightings with dates, location & photos if possible

Recommended nature books, poems or documentaries

Upcoming nature conferences & presentations (zoom at the moment)

Reviews of recently viewed local nature conferences & presentations

Links to articles and information pertaining to environmental issues

Ideas for outings (with links and a short blurb)

Nature monthly almanac

This newsletter is a work in progress, and it is our hope that it will be a source of relevant environmental information as well as being a reflection of the interests of our membership.

*QFN Board Members*

# **NEW BOARD MEMBERS NEEDED!**

We are searching for people to fill three important positions on the Board. QFN must have people who are willing to take leadership roles if our Association is to continue.

## **QFN President**

In January 2022, George Thomson will have completed 12 years in the role of President and he feels that it is time for him to step down. His duties include preparing agendas, presiding at Board and membership meetings and dealing with ongoing issues as they arise. Holding a minimum of three Board meetings annually is important. According to the Constitution, there is a 2 year term for the President, after which s/he will serve in the role of Past President for 2 additional years.

## **Vice-President**

The QFN Vice-President is responsible for becoming familiar enough with the details of the organization to be able to perform all of the duties of the President in the President's absence. The Vice-Presidency is a preparatory role for the position of President and the person holding this position is expected to become President. The Constitution specifies that the term of the Vice-President position is two years.

## **Social Convenor**

The Social Convenor coordinates the treats and drinks for each of QFNs' large group meetings. In September, a schedule is circulated so that volunteers can sign up to provide food for the September to March meetings. Using that schedule, the Convenor reminds people of their commitment prior to each meeting. At each meeting, the Social Convenor prepares tea and coffee for those present and sets out the food. This task involves carrying the required equipment, including such things as mugs, tea pots, etc., back and forth to each meeting, cleaning them and storing them so that they are ready to be taken to the next meeting.

The Social Convenor also organizes the annual April dinner, reporting to the board for final decisions. This involves finding a venue and caterer and deciding on the menu with vegetarian and vegan options. The speaker is chosen by the board.

## Marion Fisher, QFN's Oldest Member Passed Away at 103

Born August 2, 1917 and passed away peacefully in Ottawa on January 14, 2021. Predeceased by her mother Alberta (Bertie) Rickard Fisher and her father Alwyn Fisher. Much loved by her extended family, including many cousins in both the Rickard and Fisher families. She obtained degrees in Business at Albert College, English Literature and French at Queen's University and Library Science at McGill University. Over many decades, she was a librarian both in Vancouver, B.C. and Belleville, ON and ever curious she travelled widely. She was a keen advocate for nature conservancy and an active member of the Quinte Field Naturalists and the Hastings County Historical Society. She will be greatly missed by family and friends. Donations may be made to any nature conservancy group of your choice.

### Advocacy group

#### *New Group to advocate for Belleville's Natural Heritage*

Quinte Field Naturalist club members Cathy Lake and John Lowry have established a new Facebook Group called the "**Belleville Citizen Environmental Advocacy Forum**" to provide local citizens with the opportunity to discuss issues of concern regarding the local environment.

The group was formed in early February in response to continued and increasing pressure for new development within the city. Development issues are the primary focus of the group. The public group's stated purpose is "to create an informal forum for citizens to bring forward and share their ideas, concerns, suggestions and potential solutions regarding environmental issues affecting the City of Belleville."

It is hoped that by sharing information and keeping members of the public informed of various issues that they can be proactive and have the opportunity to positively influence decisions made at a local government level that impact on Belleville's environmental performance.

Anyone interested in joining this Facebook group need only click the "Join" button and a message automatically goes to the administrators (Cathy and John) who will then "approve" your request. Please note that in order to do so you have to have an established Facebook account.

# SIGHTINGS

At every meeting we talk about interesting nature-related sightings by our members. This section of our newsletter will serve as an alternative forum when we are not meeting and, when we are meeting, a supplement to sightings mentioned at the meetings. Sightings can be pictures, drawings or written descriptions of your observations. Send your sightings to either [quintefn@gmail.com](mailto:quintefn@gmail.com) or [sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com](mailto:sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com).

**Don't forget that the best place to find significant local sightings is on Terry Sprague's new website <https://naturestuff.net>. Click on "Birding" and follow the links. The April 2 report includes a spectacular picture of a turkey vulture by Keith Gregoire who found it in Stanley Park in Belleville's east side..**



*Here's a sign of spring. As the ice melts, flocks of dabbling ducks pause on their trip to their nest sites. Rick Beaudon found this group near County Rd 64 between Carrying Place and Brighton. Among the mallards look for northern pintail, American wigeon and northern shoveler.*

**A Mourning Dove Adventure.** We use a wire pet cage as one of our feeders. Smaller birds enjoy their seeds while larger birds are excluded. A determined mourning dove can squeeze in but then I'm called upon to free a panicky bird that can't find the way out. One dove's experience had a very salutary effect on all observers. This bird had the usual experience of being unable to exit after eating its fill. To add to its woes a large Cooper's hawk saw its plight and landed no more than the length of a dinner fork above its head on the cage. For 15 or more minutes the two, potential lunch and expectant diner, stared at each other. The hawk eventually left to find a more accessible victim. Apparently word spread. There have been no more mourning doves in the cage.



*Tom Wheatley photographed this Carolina wren which has been appearing at his family's feeder all winter. With climate change this species is expanding its range.*



*American woodcock, timberdoodle, skydancer. Whatever you call it this comical sign of spring has returned. Rena Sherring posted this picture in eBird taken near Jordan Lake north of Madoc.*



*If you compare these two birds with the bird shown on the front page you will notice that they are leucistic, meaning they have a pigment deficiency caused by a genetic mutation. This condition occasionally occurs in many birds and animals. It differs from albinism in that only part of the individual is pale and the eye retains its original colour. The two pictures are the result of a remarkable coincidence. The bird on the left (photo by Kyle Blaney) was an almost daily winter visitor at our feeders on Dunnett Blvd. The bird on the right (photo by Tom Wheatley) appeared at a feeder in Foxboro, 10 kilometres away. Leucism is not known to produce the same pattern in different individuals. Are these two pictures of the same bird?. What are the chances that the same bird with an identifiable plumage pattern would patronize two feeders 10 kilometres apart with both feeders monitored by birders who also photograph birds? We'll never know.*

# Members Have Their Say

*In this section of the newsletter, you will find members' comments about current issues, accounts of trips and experiences or questions about something which concerns them. You are encouraged to send pictures and ideas to [quintefn@gmail.com](mailto:quintefn@gmail.com)*

## **Correcting Some Misinformation about the Carbon Tax**

By Bernd Baier

In the face of a growing catastrophic global climate crisis the federal government in 2018 introduced its carbon pricing programme often referred to as the Carbon Tax. Canada's carbon tax has two parts: a carbon levy on fuel purchases and a big emitters program for industrial facilities. The objective is to provide a disincentive to consume products that result in relatively high global warming emissions while providing an incentive to consume more climate friendly products. However, the programme faces major opposition from many sectors of our society, with the most serious perhaps coming from ordinary citizens.

In Ontario the carbon levy component of the carbon tax is currently subject to a disinformation campaign by its opponents, which combined with citizen resistance to higher fuel prices, makes the task of sustaining the federal programme difficult indeed.

In terms of the attitude towards a levy on fuel purchases by Canadians, a Nanos poll from 2018 is telling: a majority of Canadians would not be willing to pay more than \$100 per year in the form of a carbon tax.

To ease the resistance to paying higher taxes on fuels the federal government offers rebates to citizens in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario (the other provinces have their own carbon remission programmes). These rebates, referred to as the Climate Action Incentive Rebate, cover the estimated rise in the cost of home heating and driving automobiles for the average person in the respective provinces.

However, opponents of the carbon tax often highlight the rise in the cost of fuel while omitting to mention the rebates that people receive (the focus of the included article).



# Climate Action Incentive Payments

	Average cost impact per household* of the federal system**				Average Climate Action Incentive payment per Household***			
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
Ontario	\$244	\$357	\$463	\$564	\$300	\$439	\$571	\$697
New Brunswick	\$202	\$296	\$386	\$470	\$248	\$365	\$476	\$583
Manitoba	\$232	\$342	\$447	\$547	\$336	\$495	\$649	\$797
Saskatchewan	\$403	\$588	\$768	\$946	\$598	\$883	\$1,161	\$1,419

\* Average household of 2.6 people

\*\* For more information on these estimates, please see the Backgrounder: Fall 2018 Update – Estimated Impacts of the Federal Carbon Pollution Pricing System.

\*\*\* Climate Action Incentive payments for 2020-2022 are illustrative and subject to change.

- Amounts increase annually to reflect the increases in the federal carbon pollution price

Because these rebates are tax credits, many people are not aware that they have received them and therefore continue to believe that the carbon tax will result in a higher financial burden on drivers and households.

To fight the climate crisis we need an honest debate about the costs and benefits of climate change policy and to be aware of disinformation on the issue.

Links [OPINION | Ottawa needs to fight more effectively for the carbon tax](#)



**During migration most snow geese travel north considerably east of Quinte. This bird appeared in Wellington harbour in mid-March. Photo by Dale Smith.**

# A Gem Threatened by Development

By John Lowry

On Thursday I was fortunate to have a guided walk through the Hanley North area -- led by Christopher Spencer (who has 37 years experience in the area) . Doug Knutson took extensive video, including with his drone.

I was actually astounded how nice it was in there -- extensive wetlands, beaver dams, an amazing grove of very old mature deciduous trees. A clear set of pathways have been established (and even a neat little wooden bridge to cross Bell Creek) -- in short it is an amazing gem of a spot and literally right next to the East End subdivisions

I commented to Chris that it would make an amazing conservation area, just the way it is

Hopefully Doug is going to develop a video to circulate (much like the bicycle ride one).

It was a refreshing change after having walked through the Parkville Green proposed subdivision where it has been almost totally clearcut -- a true scene of devastation, leaving the ancient oak tree standing out in the middle of a flat wasteland. Aerial photo showing Hanley Park North on the next page.



*Photo by Doug Knutson*

***Belleville's city arborist believes that this majestic white oak is more than the 200 years old. Some specimens of this species have been proven to be over 450 years old. There's a good chance that it emerged from an acorn at the time of the War of 1812.***

***It's remarkable that this tree has lasted so long. Oak wood is used for furniture, flooring, interior finishing and boat-building. You would think that the proximity of Corby's distillery with its need for oak barrels would be a particular threat.***

***The acorns provide food for many species including wild turkeys, wood ducks, grackles, blue jays, nuthatches, thrushes, woodpeckers, rabbits, squirrels, and deer.***



The original image was included in the *Draft Plan of Subdivision & Rezoning Applications for Hanley Park North, Part of Lot 14, Concession 1, City of Belleville*. Prepared for Hanley Parks Development, Inc. by Macaulay Shiomi Howson Ltd

## Members' Recommend

This section of the newsletter is a chance for QFN members to suggest events, TV shows, internet offerings of interest. This month thanks to Cathy Lake, John Lowry and Catherine and Bernd Baier for their suggestions.

**The Friends of the Salmon River and The Friends of the Napanee River have collaborated to produce a virtual winter speakers series.**

Three of the presentations have already taken place. Click here to see them and also information about upcoming speakers. <https://www.friendsofsalmonriver.ca/>

Mark Boone, the senior hydrologist for Quinte Conservation, summarized his multi-year research project on **Drought across Quinte: What is going on and What Can and Should We and Our Municipal Governments Be Doing about It?**

Colin Jones, MNRF's Provincial Arthropod Zoologist, spoke on **Dragonflies and Damselflies: Guardians of Our Wetlands and Creeks.**

Maya Navrot from Quinte Conservation and Chloe Lajoie from Watersheds Canada gave a presentation. **Watersheds 101 and Shoreline Restoration and Planting Programs.**

**The South Shore Joint Initiative has posted videos of their most recent speakers.**

Cathy Lake recommends Amanda Tracey's discussion of **Invasive Species in the South Shore IBA.** Amanda is a conservation biologist with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHEkmyZrRjQleYWrT\\_LsswQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHEkmyZrRjQleYWrT_LsswQ)



**This project by the Rotary Club of Picton may be of interest.**

Sandbanks Provincial Park, Outlet Beach

The Picton Rotary Club is planning to clean up Outlet Beach at Sandbanks Provincial Park in celebration of Earth Day. You can help.

**Saturday 24 April 2021** two time slots 10 am - 12 noon 1230 pm to 230 pm

Those interested need to register at [media\\_relations@friendsofsandbanks.org](mailto:media_relations@friendsofsandbanks.org)

## **Correspondence**

The full letters will soon be available elsewhere but the key paragraph from two recent letters are included below.

**Feb. 2, 2021 George Thomson sent a letter to the Belleville Council and Mayor to stress the importance of preserving the city's wetlands.**

*The Quinte Field Naturalists Association strongly encourages the Belleville City Council to protect Belleville's Wetlands from development. Contiguous blocks of wetlands are important to the maintenance of biodiversity, the ecological life support upon which Humans and all other species depend. While QFN is not opposed to development, the Association is in favour & supportive of only environmentally friendly development that respects the significance and value of wetlands and other natural areas.*

**March 3, 2021. John Lowry congratulated Prince Edward Field Naturalists for their role in convincing the local council to increase any development's setback from wetlands to 50 metres.**

*We would like to thank you for your important role in advocating for a more significant buffer setback from locally significant wetlands in the Official Plan in Prince Edward County and congratulate you for your role in seeing it successfully adopted by your local council.*

# News

## New Bander-in-Charge at the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory

Banding, Research and Training Committee Co-Chairs, Nick Bartok and Brian Joyce, are very pleased to welcome Phillip Mercier as Bander-in-Charge for the spring and fall migration monitoring and reporting seasons. Spring banding runs April 10th to May 31st.

Phillip hails from Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and has a BSc from McGill University in Wildlife Biology. He has banded at Foreman's Branch Bird Observatory, Owl Moon Environmental Inc., and l'Observatoire d'Oiseaux de Rimouski.



Due to federal, provincial and municipal COVID-19 protocols, we regret the Observatory will remain closed to the public for the spring season. PEptBO will also rely only on a core group of experienced volunteers, but fingers-crossed for visitors at the Observatory in the autumn, and opportunities for more volunteers!

The opening of the banding station is one sign of spring. John Lowry noticed another sign in the parking lot at his grocery store. Mourning doves are early nesters. The pair that built this nest would have been wise to take a little more time to choose a site.

**The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant, "What good is it?" If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.**

Aldo Leopold, American Ecologist, 1887 - 1948

## McMahon Bluff: Help protect a piece of Prince Edward County's wild south shore



*Photo and text from the Nature Conservancy of Canada's website.*

McMahon Bluff is a natural gem on the southern shore of Prince Edward County. This 97-hectare (241-acre) property boasts steep slopes, cliff faces, forest, savannah, alvar and

more than two kilometres of rare, undeveloped Lake Ontario shoreline. Its limestone cliffs rise almost 30 metres above the Bay of Quinte and the mouth of the Black River. Just north of the Prince Edward County South Shore Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, the property provides vital breeding and stopover habitat for migratory birds and supports a rich diversity of rare wildflowers and other plants.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has an immediate opportunity to protect this incredible property, and we need your help to protect it for the long term.

NCC must raise \$460,000 this winter to protect this important piece of Prince Edward County. The current landowner has generously agreed to donate the property, but NCC still needs to raise funds to cover associated costs for the acquisition, as well as to fund a management plan and vital, ongoing stewardship work for this property for the long-term. Please consider making a gift or multi-year pledge to support this project. Follow this link. <https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/ontario/featured-projects/mcmahon-bluff.htm>

***In 2009 Terry Sprague had this to say about McMahon Bluff:***

*“For visiting botanists, it would not be an exaggeration to say that McMahon Bluff’s spectacle of rare plants has caused many observers to break down and weep openly. Found at this site have been both nationally and provincially significant plants.”*

***For the full article click here:*** <https://naturestuff.net/web/mcmahon-bluff-a-rare-gem/>

## Early Bloomers

by Elizabeth Churcher and George Thomson  
reprinted with permission from Tweed News, April 6, 2016

Our annual early spring venture to the Stoco Fen area is now in the past for another year. Perhaps you recall the name of the first flower to emerge (*described in our April 1st, 2015 article*), giving us as a sample of the renewed life that will soon clothe our surroundings. If your response is “Skunk Cabbage”, you are absolutely correct. Yes, it is this unique plant that lures us to East Hungerford Road where we walk up and down, exploring the ditches until we discover our prize, a flower which looks and smells like decaying flesh. Heat generated by its own enzymes enables it to push up through the snow to claim its #1 status, at least in the timing of its appearance.

As the snow continues to vanish and the days grow longer, our dreams are filled with Pussy Willows, exploding buds, roadsides garnished with pastel blues, pinks and brighter yellows and woodland floors carpeted with colourful floral arrangements. As we drive slowly along Hunt Road or enjoy the beauty engulfing Rapids Road, we scrutinize their gravelly borders in search of spring’s next arrival. “Yes!” shouts Elizabeth as she catches her first glimpse of yellow. A small patch of flowers which resemble Dandelions are poking their heads above the mounds of sand and gravel. These brilliant yellow flower heads are supported by stems --- but where are the leaves? A closer look helps us to realize that our discovery is not Dandelions but a near relative, the Coltsfoot. Both plants are in the Aster family.



***Skunk Cabbage found on East Hungerford Rd. and photographed for iNaturalist by Kyle Blaney***

Coltsfoot is a perennial which grows from underground rhizomes in early spring --- so early that there may still be snow on the ground. After its flower heads have transformed into Dandelion-like seed heads, its large basal leaves appear. Each one of them resembles --- you guessed it --- a Colt’s foot! But this plant is lucky enough to have two



possible names. You may have heard someone refer to it as Coughwort. Why? Its Latin name is “Tussilago farfara”. The genus “Tussilago” comes from the Latin word “Tussis” meaning “cough”. This label begins to make sense only when we realize that European settlers introduced the plant to our country as a cough remedy.

As in all members of the Aster or Composite Family, what appears to be the flower is really a flower head composed of yellow ray florets. Each one of these florets or “petals” is really a separate little flower! The flower head is supported by a hairy stem, up to 45 cm in height, which helps to insulate this early bloomer when icy air lingers in its bed. Under close scrutiny, you can also observe many leaf-like bracts which hug the flowering stem tightly.



**Coltsfoot. Photo posted on iNaturalist by Jason King.**

While driving along our country roads offers a chest of spring treasures, nothing can surpass the thrill of woodland adventures. The freedom offered by the disappearance of ice and snow and the donning of lighter clothing and boots motivate us to climb frequently to the peak of our tree covered hill in anticipation of a spring floral display. The warmer days of early April always offer rewards. There at our feet, in shades of pink, blue, mauve and white is our Hepatica, a native species which thrives in dry to moist rich forests. The beauty of this delicate flower prospering on the hilltop as well as its early appearance in our woodlands each spring inspired us to name our farm, Hepatica Hill.

While we have not yet seen the Hepatica this year, we are feasting on the pleasures that this beautiful species has shared with us in years gone by. For a few moments, we allow our minds to float into the past and we envision it all. --- Sitting on an old log, we gently touch the fragile petals and then proceed to count them on a number of plants. We learn that they can range from 5 to 12 in number. Our fingers run up and down their stems and we feel the hairs that probably protect them from the cold, just as those on a Coltsfoot stem do. We push away the dry Maple leaves surrounding their stems and discover remnants of last year’s Hepatica leaves, hardy ones that have survived under the snow throughout the winter. Days later, we arrive at the same location to find the flowers withered, their stems bent low to the ground and rich, sharp-lobed leaves taking their

place. In passing, we comment that the later emergence of the leaves, too, is similar to Coltsfoot.

After climbing down the hill, across the marsh and up through the field, we go into our house for a cool drink. As we sit discussing our observations, the questions begin to flow and we soon find ourselves pulling books



*Hepatica. Photo submitted by Elizabeth and George*

off of our library shelves. We discover that there are two species of Hepaticas, *Hepatica acutiloba*, implying that it has sharp pointed leaves and *Hepatic americana*, a variety that sports round-lobed leaves and, as its name suggests, is “of America”. Both are in the Buttercup family.



*As the season advances look for spring beauties. Photo by Jason King on iNaturalist.*

The genus name “Hepatica”, too, has a story to tell. It refers to the liver! To help you remember, just think about hepatitis, an infection of the liver. Back in the Middle Ages in Europe, it was thought that the shape of plant organs revealed their usefulness in healing. This notion was labelled the doctrine of signatures and was one of the bases for early classification of plants. The 3-lobed leaves of Hepaticas resembled the liver and the plants were used to treat liver ailments.

Every spring, we delight in finding Skunk Cabbage, Coltsfoot and Hepaticas. Perhaps more than any other flowers, our early bloomers entice us to explore and to experience the newness of spring. Just as plants have new life, so do we feel young again as we ramble through the fields and woodlands. Early bloomers suggest the beginning of a series of miracles and fill us with hope as we anticipate the glorious unfolding of bud after bud throughout the growing season.



***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**  
Vacant

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Next Newsletter Deadline –April 15, 2020

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