

THE QUINTE NATURALIST

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

SPRING

MARCH/APRIL



Blue-winged Teal, One of our smallest ducks. Photo by Kyle Blaney

**Outings – Please contact John Lowry to register for any of these outings.
Johnslowry61@gmail.com.**

1. Thursday, May 8th -- 8am -- Stanley Park, Belleville -- a bird walk with Keith Gregoire.
2. Saturday, May 10th -- 9 am -- Point Petre-- (Note - this is a South Shore Joint Initiative (SSJI) event) -- A wildflower walk with John Lowry.
3. Saturday, May 31st -- 10 am -- Cassidy Block -Colonization Road (east of Vanderwater Conservation Area). A forest walk with Robert Ormston.

CLUB NEWS



BOSTON PIZZA NIGHT. Katie Bopp, Front of House manager of Boston Pizza, (left) handing over a cheque for \$390.35 to Quinte Field Naturalists Corresponding Secretary Elizabeth Churcher, the proceeds of the fundraising night held on Monday, March 31st. And a good time was had by all!!

Our thanks to Boston Pizza

CONGRATLATIONS to Terry Sprague who has received a King Charles III Coronation



PHOTO BY THE PICTON GAZETTE

Medal. The medal is given to those “who have made significant contributions to the country, a province, territory, region or community.” Terry has spent over 60 years educating people about nature through newspaper columns, park and conservation authority programs. He has led numerous walks both for his private company and for QFN and other nature organizations. Still today he gives Zoom presentations for county organizations.

A NOTE FROM JOHN LOWRY:

Lori & I spent the day at the Quinte Field Naturalists booth at the Seedy Saturday event on March 1st -- held at Centennial Secondary School -- over 600 people attended and we handed out lots of free seeds (thanks Elizabeth), and a ton of membership forms. We also filled a page of people supplying their email address to be added to our notification list.



We were exhausted by the end of the day (already being very tired coming off the month-long election, having spent Friday gathering in election signs) but the response was terrific. A very successful event and a lot of enthusiasm to see it repeated next year.



PLANT SALE

Saturday, May 17th, 2025
8:00am-12:00pm
St. Joseph's Catholic Church Parking Lot
SE Corner of Herchimer Ave & Victoria Ave

- Perennials/Annuals
- Wildflowers
- Natives/Ornamentals
- Winter Hardy Cactus
- Vegetables
- Garden tools and Art

ASK THE MASTER GARDENER ALL YOUR PLANT QUESTIONS !



100% of funds raised will be invested in tree planting

Get your garden ready and help the Earth at the same time



QFN PLANT SALE AND TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE

A Note from Greg Parsons



There are lots of reasons why trees are important to wildlife and people. With habitat disappearing at an alarming rate, climate change looming, and mental health challenges in citizens skyrocketing, QFN has taken on the goal of planting more native trees in our communities.

QFN's Spring Plant Sale, is the major fundraiser for this tree planting campaign. This year it will again be held at St. Joseph's Catholic Church @ the corner of Victoria and Herchimer Ave., Saturday May 7, 8 am – 12 Noon.

A big shout out to Father Rod and the congregation of St. Joe's for offering to host our sale!

This is an event everyone can help with one way or another. You can donate something to sell, volunteer to help in advance or on the sale date, and even just help spread the word. And certainly I hope you will come to the sale, bring your friends and shop for some great bargains!

Donations, Donations, Donations! We rely on our members, friends and the greater community for donations to our sale. Maybe you have a grow light and can start some seeds? Will you have too many bulbs to plant, too many houseplants? Spring is a great time to split perennials and thin out the gardens. Greg will bring a selection of pots to the March and April QFN meetings if you need any. We just ask that if you are digging plants from your garden, please make sure they are clean (not mixed with goutweed, periwinkle, English ivy, lily of the valley or other invasives), no one wants to buy a peony and be surprised with a goutweed invasion.! It's best to pot plants early and carefully to make sure they look good on sale date. Oh and please don't forget to label each plant you donate with a name and flower colour! Why not even include a picture tag? We'll also accept small garden tools & ornaments, birdhouses, etc. that are in good saleable condition. So maybe it's time to clean out the shed! (See details on next page)

Plants can be dropped off May 12 – 16, at the following locations:

71 West St, Belleville - Greg & Jose

32 Bradgate Rd, Belleville - John

13 Eastwood Park Drive, Belleville - Ted & Nancy

It would also be a great help if you have a connection at a local greenhouse grower or retailer whom we might approach for donations. If you are comfortable doing this that's super, if not, please pass their name and contact info on to Greg and he'll happily approach them. Reach out to <mailto:GregPparsons@gmail.com> and let him know how you will help. Nature Thanks You!

Goutweed



Pictures from the Ontario Invasive Plant Council Website

Goutweed was introduced to North America as an ornamental in the mid 1800's. The name originates from its earlier use to treat gout. Alternate names are snow on the mountain, ground elder, dog elder and English masterwort. Its compound leaves with two or three leaflets can be green or variegated bluish-green. It became popular as a ground cover because it was tolerant of many adverse conditions such as shade and poor, dry soil. Spreading rapidly through underground rhizomes it changes soil chemistry, reduces plant diversity and reduces light levels at ground level so that even shade tolerant tree seedlings such as white pine can't grow. Removal of the species is very difficult as even a tiny root fragment can regenerate a patch.

For more information about goutweed and other invasive species check the website of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council. <https://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca/>

FRINK CENTRE ACTIVITIES



THANKS to Ted Pordham and Marie Clarke for keeping the bird feeders filled at the H.R. Frink Conservation Area and Outdoor Education Centre. Teachers there report that on class trips students often jump off the bus and rush to see the chickadees and other birds at the feeders. This project helps us fulfill our mandate to encourage the enjoyment of nature and educate all ages about our local wildlife.

Ted sends the following report and pictures.

Our birdfeeder suffered some minor damage from the ice storm of March 30th. Repairs will be needed this summer. Thanks to Marie Clarke for her help in keeping the feeder filled this past winter.

There have been some perfect days for walking the trails starting with Easter Monday. No bugs, no snakes, and no humidity. Spring flowers are popping up, lots of bird activity and most of the trails are high and dry. Two things in particular are worth seeing. The newly completed Hi-Lo bridge is a beautiful structure which should last a long time. Quinte Conservation did a great job in both the fundraising and the construction. On a more natural note, the damage from the ice storm was quite severe. No wonder the conservation areas were closed to the public while trail maintenance was carried out. Now the long process of rotting debris and regrowth begins. This area is well worth an hour or two of exploring.



I must agree with Ted that the area is worth many hours exploring. From the new Hi-Lo Bridge (left) which crosses a swamp you may hear or see birds



such as wood ducks, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, northern waterthrushes, winter wrens or even barred owls. On the easy-walking trail to the bridge (left) Quinte Conservation has cleared the fallen branches. During May watch for spring ephemerals such as hepaticas, large white trilliums, red trilliums and yellow trout lilies.



Large white trillium – John Lowry



Winter wren – James Thompson. This tiny bird may have the loudest song in the woods. Watch for it scurrying through tangled fallen branches like a mouse.



Red-trillium – Lori Borthwick. This early flower has many common names such as trinity flower and wake robin. It's ironic that such a beautiful flower is also known as stinking Benjamin because of its fetid odour of rotting meat to attract pollinating flies



Yellow trout lily – John Lowry

SIGHTINGS

There was a small irruption of great grey owls this past winter. Every few years some of these denizens of the boreal forests decide to spend the winter in Hastings county. For the safety of the birds the locations of most sightings were not publicized. Bill Lee sent a story of his first hand experience with one of the visitors:



This great grey owl spent a day in the middle of one of Belleville's urban neighbourhoods. The diagnostic yellow eyes and white bow tie are obvious. A barred owl would have coal-black eyes. Photo by Sally Neal.

I had an interesting wildlife encounter early last week. The previous day, I had cleaned out our cold room and placed old squash in our composter, which is adjacent to a clump of sumac on our property line. I had seen rabbit tracks around the house and garage for the last couple weeks, so threw the last of the small shriveled carrots into the sumacs on top of the snow behind the composter, thinking Mr Rabbit could use a meal.

Arriving at the composter with a bowl of peels and veggie scraps the next morning, I was surprised by a large bird that jumped up from within the sumacs, circled low, and flew by me within reach. It was a great grey owl!! Within the hollow in the snow where it had been sitting, there were tufts of rabbit fur, and I haven't seen any sign of the rabbit since! According to the Audubon reference, they prey on mostly small mammals, but in this case, it sure seems that he dined on rabbit!



Most of the rest of these sightings were gleaned from eBird and iNaturalist. If you don't post on these websites please send pictures and stories of what you have seen to me. sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com.



Fox sparrows don't nest in Quinte but every spring and fall they pass through on their trip between nests in the boreal forest and brushy tangles in central and southern US. It's a highly variable species but the foxy colour of most we see locally explains their name. Photo by Tom Wheatley.



Raptors in the genus buteo are notorious for their variations in plumage. Red-tailed hawks, like this one, can be identified even if there is no sign of a red tail. The black area on the leading edge of the wing called patagial marks and the belly band verify this bird's identity. Photo by Joe Bartok.



We might be happy to see coltsfoot along country roads as an early sign of spring. Not everyone is happy to see the blooms. In New York state and parts of Ontario it is classified as an invasive plant.



Exuberant play and curiosity make river otters popular mammals. Popular with everyone, that is, except owners of small ponds and fish hatcheries. Their agility in the water and on land make otters efficient predators. Lori Borthwick photographed this individual on the ice of Moira Lake.

BIRD MIGRATION

George Thomson and Elizabeth Churcher

Reprinted with permission from the Tweed News, April 19, 2023

The warmth of Springtime is permeating every facet of our lives. Winter coats have



been abandoned in favour of lighter jackets or sweaters, accents of green are livening gardens & fields, and bird friends of many different species are continuing to arrive from southern wintering places. George is very busy documenting avian return dates, and together we are reviewing their songs & calls. After a quieter Winter season, some of the birds' vocalizations are presenting us with challenges, reminding us anew of the complexity of Nature.

There are 4 or 5 local flycatchers which look very similar to eastern phoebes. Using some careful observation and the following clues you can become an eastern phoebe expert:

- ***Appearance. Phoebes do not have either a white eye-ring or obvious wing bars. The bill is completely black.***
- ***Behaviour. Phoebes frequently pump their tails.***
- ***Nesting. Using green moss and mud, phoebes often build nests under bridges or the eaves of buildings.***
- ***Song. As mentioned in the article phoebes will tell you their name. To hear the song and learn more about eastern phoebes visit:***

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Phoebe/overview

Photo by Joe Bartok

What a joy it is to reacquaint ourselves with a great variety of avian guests. On April 6th, as we were pushing open the basement door, we stopped in our tracks to listen to a high pitched, plaintive “kill deer” floating over the fields on the sound waves. The next day, our attention was drawn to a raspy, two parted “fee-bee” drifting on a soft breeze from the barnyard. The Eastern Phoebe (pictured) had arrived and seemed to be settling into a familiar nesting place. Of course, these birds may have just been passing through, nearing their final destination but there is always the possibility that they will take up their Summer residence with us at Hepatica Hill. Time will tell.

For some bird species, there is no doubt in our minds that they have made their decision to reside in our midst for the next few months while they raise their young. Daily, we are witnessing the Eastern Bluebirds sitting atop their nest boxes,

seemingly having made a definitive claim to their Summer home. And Crows are very busy collecting twigs to construct their nests. They are particularly entertaining when they try to recover a longer dead branch from the Maple tree in front of our kitchen window.

In the weeks to come, more & more species will arrive or just drop in on their way



I'm always surprised that a bird as bright as a scarlet tanager can disappear among the green leaves of the forest canopy. Photo by Tom Wheatley.

farther north. Many of the shorebirds & warblers fall into this category: they are true migrants seeking their breeding location. All of the members of their kind migrate. For example, we do not see any warblers, Scarlet Tanagers or Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in the Winter. Some of the migrators, however, do come to us much earlier than others because they have gone a shorter distance south to avoid the frosty weather. Others, like the Barn Swallow and the Bobolink fly tremendously long distances and we have to exercise patience as we await their grand return.

Unlike the species just mentioned, a few species that are quite familiar to us are only partial migrants, because some of their members migrate and others don't. Birds like Robins & Red-tailed Hawks are examples of this group: we can observe individuals of these species throughout the colder months.

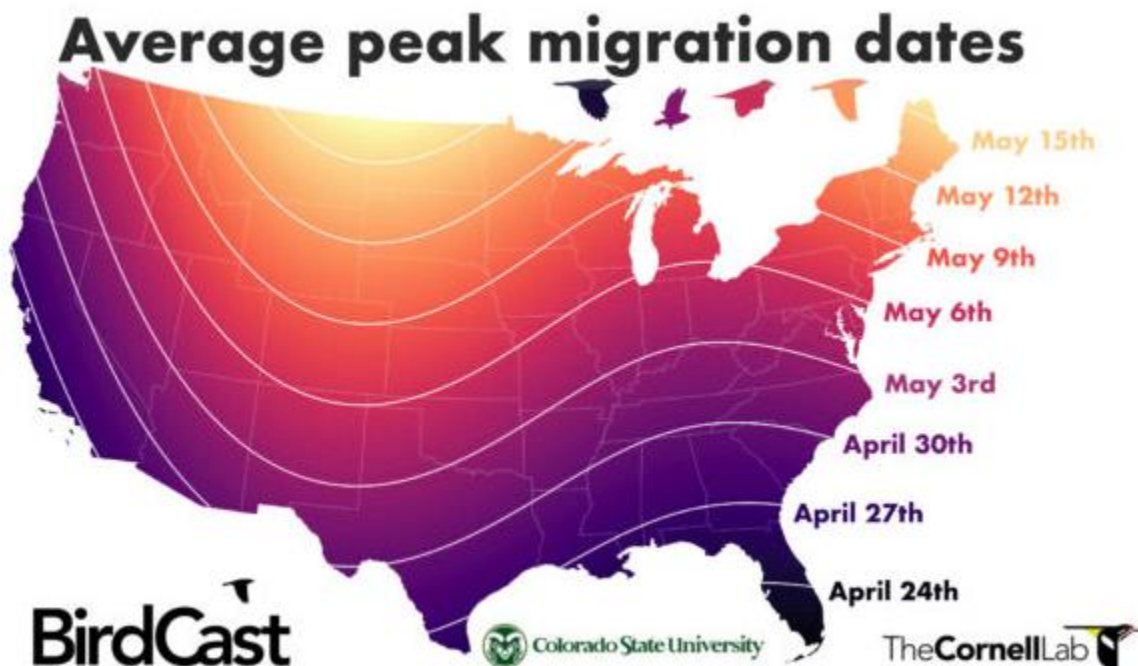
While we have established that many birds do migrate, some of the big questions still remain unanswered. Why do they migrate? How do they get enough energy for their trip? How do they find their way?

Let's begin by looking at why such small creatures venture out on perilous journeys. Wouldn't it be a lot easier to remain at their Winter residences to raise their young? The answer is "No" and it is based on food supply. Birds that follow the Spring north ensure that they will be able to get enough nutrients to feed their young during the longer Summer days. They can spread out into the vast northern country, including the mixed deciduous woods, the wetlands and the Boreal Forest which is often referred to as the 'songbird nursery', with its vast menu of insects. Even farther north, the expansive Tundra is ready to provide for the birds' nutritional requirements with its abundant insect fare. With the many species of permanent residents in southern

climes, the migrants would encounter too much competition for acquiring food for their young if they stayed in their Winter residences.

There is an urgency to the northward migration in the Spring, as contrasted with the more leisurely journeys southward in the Autumn. The first birds to return to the northern breeding grounds will claim the highest quality territories with the most food resources. Eventually, as many as possible will become established and we always hope that there will be room and sustenance for ALL! Most of the birds will migrate about 200 to 500 miles per day, weather permitting. Many, whether adult birds who have made the trip before or juveniles who hatched last season, will return to their previous year's familiar location. How do they manage to find it?

The story of migration will continue but we must pause here to mention the significance of April 22nd, Earth Day. It is a day to celebrate our planet & what it does for us, a day to think about protecting our planet as much as possible from harm, because it sustains the entire fabric of life, the many creatures including us. April 22nd is a day to marvel at the wonders of migration, the mysteries yet uncovered, the miracles of fortitude, determination & perseverance of those wonderful birds who bring us so much beauty and joy. What better symbol of hope is there than the returning birds in the Spring!



Although this is an American map it shows that Quinte is at the peak time for spring migration



For information about the Spring Birding Festival at Prince Edward Point visit the observatory website. <https://www.peptbo.ca/events-calendar/spring-birding-festival>

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