

Hart's Tongue Herald

The Newsletter of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists

Box 401, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P7

Website: owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca

Spring 2016

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Editor: Norah Toth



President's Report

Writing for the spring newsletter happens when it is winter, and spring is yet a month away.

As is often the case, our weather fluctuates a great deal – last Saturday and Sunday it was -24 Celsius and I was blessed with visits by 29 Cedar Waxwings (my favourite-looking bird) who joined a solitary, but robust, American Robin in the Mountain Ash tree on my neighbour's front lawn.

Today, a week later, it is now +44 Fahrenheit (quite a spread in *either* scale), some rain has eliminated a substantial amount of our snow cover, especially in the open areas, and our solitary robin is on the newly exposed lawn, looking for worms. In between these two weekends, I was able to fit in two wonderful ski outings on the magnificent Bruce Peninsula. In addition to the wide assortment of healthy trees – Beech, Black Cherry, Paper and Yellow Birch, Maple, Red Pine and many more – I was reminded of winter bird-life, when three startled Ruffed Grouse did their best to startle me, a Downy Woodpecker announced his presence with a pleasant *knock-on-wood*, and a Pileated Woodpecker called a fond farewell as I glided along the gentle roller-coaster features of the Rankin Trails.

Along the way, the brilliant February sun gilded the lovely Yellow Birch trees, and applied a warm glow to the majestic Red Pines near Beatty Lake. The pristine blanket of fresh snow displayed the recent traffic patterns of various mice, rabbits, squirrels and White-tailed Deer, while the gentle breezes played sweet music, rustling and caressing the still-clinging, burnt-gold leaves of Beech Trees. These are just some of the local ubiquitous “Sights and Sounds of Beautiful Nature in all its Glory!”

I am very much looking forward to our Earth Day/Week activities this Spring which are centred around the Keynote Address by pre-eminent Naturalist and Author John Riley – 7pm Friday, April 22. This stimulating address is generously sponsored by Caframo and specifically crafted for us. It is to be presented aboard the MS Chi-Cheemaun. Tickets are only \$5.00 at Owen Sound Transportation Company in Springmount and at the Ginger Press. Do not be disappointed. This “Signature Event” compares to past generations hearing Charles Darwin or Grey Owl. Be sure to get your tickets

and your own copy of *The Once and Future Great Lakes Country – An Ecological History* well in advance and “Let's make this a full house!” John Riley's fascinating book (see Freeman Boyd's sage and scholarly review elsewhere in this Hart's Tongue Herald) is available at the Ginger Press. This award-winning book is one you will want to have in your personal library, to return to, time and time again. In addition, we have been able to arrange for Mr. Riley to speak to high school students the day before and we are planning one or more nature rambles, on or near Earth Day. Book-ending these activities are Ray Robertson's illuminating report card presentation on earth-friendly projects from the 1990s and Lenore Keeshig's interpretive hike at Neyaashiinigmiing.

On behalf of the OSFN board and members, I extend to Bill Moses a heart-felt expression of gratitude for his many years of service in maintaining and enhancing our website, as well as internal communications. A tireless volunteer and valued contributor, Bill also plays an integral role with the Arboretum Alliance and will be leading an OSFN spring field trip there on May 30.

I am pleased to announce that Director Brian Robin will be providing OSFN's primary website support and coordinating our Facebook platform, which will be another tool to facilitate communication within the club, within the wider community of Grey and Bruce counties and beyond. We hope you and your Friends will “like OSFN on Facebook” too.

In the meantime, this final month of winter promises to bring us a little more snow, so that our Young Naturalists can have enough snow for their planned activities and our tracking seminar with the enigmatic Jeff Kinchen can, once again, motivate all of us to strive toward *Knowing Nature Better!*

With a Song in My Heart,

John Dickson, President

Cover: Coyote in a field in Bruce County. **Credit:** Jim Punnett

Book Review

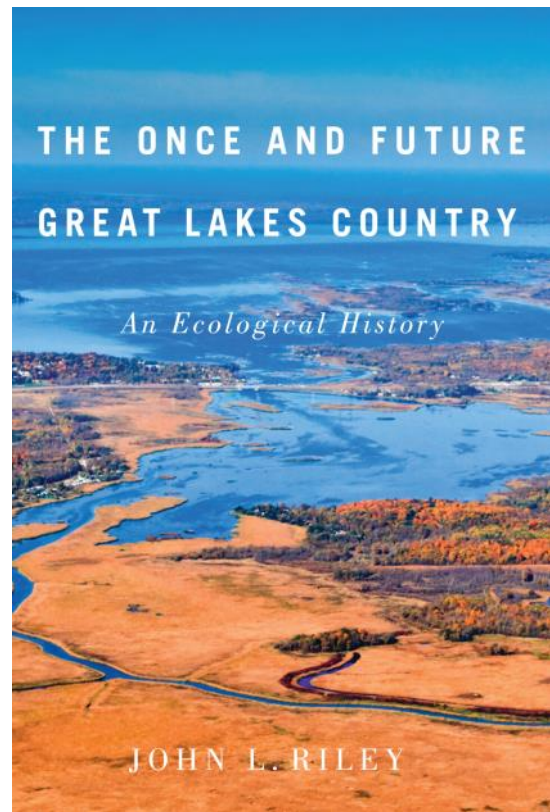
The Once and Future Great Lakes Country: An Ecological History. John L. Riley. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.

"Historic accounts of fire in the *Warton Echo* show that there were major slash fires on the Bruce Peninsula every year or two between 1879 and 1932."

Riley's book is packed full of such Great Lakes lore. Read about the Ontonagon boulder (a multi-ton copper nugget), the world's largest mill pond at Scugog and the tale of the pigs and the snakes in the Niagara Gorge. Standing alone, these anecdotes, drawn largely from primary sources and first person accounts, would constitute a remarkable natural history of the Great Lakes Basin over the last 500 years. But there is much more. Riley uses four ecological timeframes to parse the history of the basin: the extensively managed and heavily populated "open country" of the pre-contact period (pre 1600); the rewilding of the basin after the near total collapse of indigenous cultures and populations (1600 to 1800); the profligate exploitation of natural resources during the settlement period (1800 to 1920) and the rise of conservation and preservation initiatives (1920 to 2050?). The key theme that emerges is change: "Great Lakes country was almost totally different in 1800 from what it was in 1600, and then totally changed again in 1910. It will be a different place again in 2050."

For naturalists, much of this change in the Basin's flora and fauna is a woeful tale: "It is unarguable that our present woodlands, prairies, and wetlands are far less diverse and robust than they were four hundred years ago, just through the removal of key vertebrates. Add to this the elimination of the many species-habitat interactions that similarly enhanced diversity, and then add our own modern simplification and homogenization of the landscape. The result is near total loss." "Scaled up to the basin as a whole, this story of early native abundance and use, destroyed by libertarian overharvest and mismanagement, and soured by extinctions and invasives, is unequalled. Yet we rarely acknowledge it, seldom teach it, and never mourn it."

It is difficult not to pass judgment on our pioneering ancestors, but so great is the change that we cannot put ourselves in their shoes. For an example of the gulf between us, we need reach back only 100 years to the birth of the conservation movement: "Commercializing the game in [Algonquin Park] progressed from one thing to another ... the rangers destroyed the muskrats because they injured the marsh growth, the beaver and the porcupine because they destroyed trees, the otter and the mink because they ate fish, the fox, the fisher and the marten because they killed partridge, and the wolves because they killed deer."



A more productive focus is to enquire into the present and future prospects for our home basin, a task taken up in the third part of the book. Here, Riley draws on a distinguished career on the front lines of the Ontario conservation movement. He argues that in the north of the basin, we still have the opportunity to save large, intact samples of the best of our natural heritage. In the south, we need to save what is left and seek to restore some of the more degraded habitats. Much of this work is well in hand – hence Riley's choice to characterize the current era as one of conservation and preservation initiatives. "On balance, the evidence to date across the Great Lakes country suggests that we have reinvested well. In comparison with a century ago, there is more forest cover, cleaner water, recovering native biota, and an improved quality of life." The return of the piping plovers to Ontario beaches is just one success story that we can point to.

But there are major obstacles in our path: population increases, urban sprawl, climate change, invasive species. As Riley's insightful analysis shows, we have no solutions for some of the biggest challenges. Regarding invasive species, "many areas have suffered such a colossal cock-up for so long that we are now exploring a new 'recombinant ecology'". Couple this concern with the fact that "most people's understanding of their place in nature has rarely been so slight" and I am reminded how important our club's mandate of "Knowing Nature Better" is. *The Once and Future Great Lakes Country* can help with that!

Submitted by: Freeman Boyd

Eastern Coyote Natural History

The Eastern Coyote is native to North America. It is an interesting and essential species. It is a keystone species. This means that the coyote plays an important role maintaining local biodiversity. It does this by keeping small mammal and rodent populations in check. Keystone species ensure that the ecological community's structure is maintained.

Coyotes are intelligent and have keen senses. They know their territory well and are often curious about human activities within it. As a result, you might see coyote pups playing with discarded pop cans, sticks or golf balls. Parents use play behavior to teach their young appropriate survival skills.

Coyotes communicate by howling. They do this to locate a missing pack member, mate or pup; to send information about possible danger; to vocalize with neighbouring packs; and to defend a home territory. Vocalizing also helps maintain family bonds. Sometimes two coyotes can sound like a chorus. It is also thought that coyotes often howl for pleasure or because they are lonely.

They are omnivores. They feed on insects, vegetation, fruit, small rodents and carrion. They may also prey on larger animals, such as White-tailed Deer. Adults bring prey back to the den for their young.

When possible, coyote alpha pairs mate for life. When the territory is stable, a pair might have between two and ten pups, although the average is usually five. They are devoted and diligent parents and both are involved in pup rearing. Older siblings from previous litters might also help out.

Females are capable of breeding within the first year. The usual gestation period is 62 - 63 days. Alpha coyote parents are protective and caring and will not tolerate

threats, such as a domestic dog off leash, to their young.

The size of the home range can be anywhere from three to fifty square miles. Each coyote pack travels and hunts in its own specific territory which is influenced by the availability of resources and space.

Human fear, misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge about coyote behavior and habitat have led to 50 - 70% of coyotes being killed by humans before they reach adulthood. Sightings of Eastern Coyotes increase during the winter mating period (January and February); when spring den selection and pup rearing is occurring (May and June); and in the fall during the dispersal of pack members.

By expanding our use of rural areas and fragmenting the coyote's natural habitat, we are forcing coyotes to live more closely with us. For this reason, it is important for us to understand coyotes and how they benefit the biodiversity of our natural spaces.

Submitted by: Norah Toth



Birdseed can be an attractant for coyotes. Credit: Jim Punnett

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Living With Coyotes

Coyotes, like other wildlife, sometimes come into conflict with humans. Since migrating to Ontario from the west more than 100 years ago, coyotes have adapted well to urban environments and can now be found in both rural and urban settings. Coyotes can be found across Ontario but are most abundant in southern agricultural Ontario and cities like Owen Sound.

Changes in land use, agricultural practices, weather, supplemental feeding and natural food shortages may contribute to more coyote sightings in your community.

You can take steps to make sure coyotes aren't attracted to your property and to keep your pets safe. To reduce the potential for coyote encounters, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has the [following tips for the public](#).

Do not approach or feed coyotes

- * Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. However, they are wild animals and should not be approached.
- * Do NOT feed coyotes — either intentionally or unintentionally. It makes them less fearful of humans and makes them accustomed to food provided by humans.
- * Aggressive behaviour towards people is unusual for coyotes, but you should always exercise caution around wildlife.

Secure garbage, compost and other attractants

- * Do not provide food to coyotes and other wildlife. Properly store and maintain garbage containers to help prevent coyotes from becoming a problem.
- * In the fall, pick ripe fruit from fruit trees, remove fallen fruit from the ground and keep bird feeders from overflowing as coyotes eat fruit, nuts and seeds.
- * In the summer, protect vegetable gardens with heavy-duty garden fences or place vegetable plants in a greenhouse. Check with your local nursery to see what deterrent products are available.
- * Place trash bins inside an enclosed structure to discourage the presence of small rodents, which are an important food source for coyotes.
- * Put garbage at curb-side the morning of the scheduled pickup, rather than the night before.
- * Use enclosed composting bins rather than exposed piles. Coyotes are attracted to dog and cat waste as well as products containing meat, milk and eggs.

- * Consider eliminating artificial water sources such as koi ponds.

- * Keep pet food indoors.

Use deterrents and fences to keep coyotes away from your home and gardens

- * Use motion-sensitive lighting and/or motion-activated sprinkler systems to make your property less attractive to coyotes and other nocturnal wildlife.
- * Fence your property or yard. It is recommended the fence be at least six feet tall with the bottom extending at least six inches below the ground and/or a foot outward, so coyotes cannot dig under the fence. A roller system can be attached to the top of the fence, preventing animals from gaining the foothold they need to pull themselves up and over the top of a fence.
- * Electric fencing can also help deter coyotes from properties or gardens in some circumstances.
- * Clear away bushes and dense weeds near your home where coyotes may find cover and small animals to feed upon.
- * Close off crawl spaces under porches, decks, and sheds. Coyotes use these areas for denning and raising young.

Keep pets safe

- * Cats and small dogs may be seen as prey by coyotes, while larger dogs may be injured in a confrontation. To avoid these situations consider the following suggestions:
- * Install proper fencing.
- * As coyotes are primarily nocturnal, pets should be kept inside at night.
- * Keep all pets on leashes or confined to a yard.
- * Keep cats indoors and do not allow pets to roam from home.
- * Feed pets indoors.
- * Spay or neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, domestic dogs that have not been spayed or neutered.

If you encounter a coyote

- * Do not turn your back or run. Back away while remaining calm.
- * Use whistles and personal alarm devices to frighten an approaching or threatening animal.
- * Call 911 if a coyote poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety.
- * Never attempt to tame a coyote.

Living With Coyotes continued

Reduce risk of predation on livestock

- * Barns or sheds can provide effective protection from the threat of coyotes preying on livestock.
- * Guard animals, such as donkeys, llamas and dogs, can be a cost-effective way to protect livestock from coyotes. Guard animals will develop a bond with livestock if they are slowly integrated and will aggressively repel predators.
- * For more information on preventing livestock predation, please visit the [Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs](http://www.ontario.ca/ministry-of-agriculture-food-and-rural-affairs) website.

Managing problem wildlife

- * You are responsible for managing problem wildlife, including coyotes, on your own property.
- * The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry helps you and municipalities deal with problem wildlife by providing fact sheets, appropriate agency referrals, and information on steps that can be taken to address problems with wildlife.
- * The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act sets out the legal actions you can take to deal with problem wildlife on your property. Generally, you or your agent may harass, capture or kill problem wildlife to prevent damage to your property. Additional authorization is required when this involves deer or elk; please contact the local ministry office for more information.
- * You can invite a licensed small game hunter or a trapper to hunt or trap coyotes on your property where local bylaws permit. There is no closed season for coyotes in the majority of southern Ontario.

LEARN MORE

Read more on coyotes in the community, including biology and behaviour of coyotes, at ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife

Learn more about coyotes, including how to deal with coyote problems, by calling your local district office. <https://www.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/ministry-natural-resources-regional-and-district-offices>

Living with Coyotes March 2015 is a Fact Sheet available from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. It has been redesigned to allow it to fit within this newsletter.



You are being watched. Credit: Karen Punnett

Grey Bruce Volunteers

Piping Plover Volunteers

People along the Great Lakes shoreline are excited about the fact that Piping Plovers will soon be returning to Grey Bruce to nest. Winter sightings in Florida and the Bahamas have piqued our interest. We now have a chance to contribute to stories about an endangered species by monitoring their progress right in our own "backyard".

In 2015, there were 4 Piping Plover nests and up to 15 individual plovers on Sauble Beach. Volunteers spent an average of 4 hours at a time recording observations and providing tips to passers-by about the birds and how to respect their space. We are anticipating more birds on the beach in 2016, so education is very important. Your help is needed from late April to early August.

Thank you to club member Shirley Harrison and others who, in 2015,

were Plover Lovers monitoring Piping Plovers and telling beach goers stories about the birds. Thank you as well to volunteer Plover Lovers Kirsten & Grace who reported a wintering plover in Georgia. They added to the story for this bird who has spent the last two summers at Silver Lake State Park in Michigan.

To volunteer contact: ploverlovers@gmail.com

Great Canadian Birdathon

Each May, participants in the Great Canadian Birdathon (www.birdscanada.org/birdathon) spend time birding to contribute to bird conservation. Administered by Bird Studies Canada, this birdathon supports Canadian bird research and conservation efforts.

Did you know that members of our club can designate a portion of the funds they raise to support the Owen Sound Field Naturalists? Thank you to Judy Duncan who each year has directed some of the money she has raised to the OSFN.



PROGRAM LISTINGS

The Owen Sound Field Naturalists (OSFN) advocates and nurtures the appreciation, understanding and conservation of our natural world as is exemplified in our motto—Knowing Nature Better. We were created in 1989 to provide Owen Sound and area naturalists with the opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and to share activities that would allow them to increase their understanding of natural history and conservation. Today, we have over 300 members and are a member club of Ontario Nature.

Indoor meetings are held on the **second Thursday** of the month, September to May in the auditorium of the **Owen Sound and North Grey Union Public Library at 7:00 p.m.** In June, the meeting starts at 6 p.m. with a potluck supper and it's held at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Guest presenters are chosen to provide a wide range of topics. Their expertise covers natural history subjects that may be local, provincial, national or international in scope. Indoor meetings are open to the public. The OSFN also provides a full schedule of **outdoor activities** throughout the year. On these outings, members learn and share first-hand knowledge about the flora, fauna and geography of this region. Participation numbers are limited on most outings to ensure the quality of the experience and to reduce impact on the environments visited. Pre-registration is required for outdoor activities.

Please note that all programs and schedules are subject to change. To avoid disappointment, please check www.osfn.ca for updates (changes to dates, speakers, locations, etc.) or watch for an e-herald from osfieldnaturalist@yahoo.ca We thank you for understanding.

www.owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca P.O. Box 401, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P7

Outdoor Programs

Pre-registration is required. Participant numbers are limited on most outings to ensure the quality of the experience and to reduce the impact on the environments visited. Please call or email the listed contact to register.

Saturday, March 5, 2016 - 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Who Made Those Tracks and Why? An Interpretive Late Winter Tracking Hike with Jeff Kinchen
Register: Jeff Kinchen, bognors.finest@gmail.com or 519-372-7499 **Limit:** 12 participants

Friday, April 22, 2016 EARTH DAY (TBA)
Special Events During Earth Week with OSFN Executive Leadership

Wednesday, April 27, 2016 - 10:00 a.m. – Noon
Interpretive Hike at Neyaashiinigiimiing with Lenore Keeshig
Location: Meeting place in Neyaashiinigiimiing (Cape Croker)
Register: Lenore Keeshig, Lenore.Keeshig@pc.gc.ca
Limit: 12 participants

Saturday, April 30, 2016 - 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Inglis Falls Arboretum and Propagation Area with Bill Moses A perfect opportunity to see what's happening at the arboretum.
Register: Bill Moses, bill.mosesos@gmail.com or 519-371-4559 **Limit:** 12 participants

Sunday, May 15, 2016 - 8:00 a.m.
Birding at Bayview Escarpment with Mark Wiercinski
Register: Mark Wiercinski, Mark.Wiercinski@forces.gc.ca or 519-379-0437 **Limit:** 12 participants

Thursday, May 19, 2016 - 6:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.
Listening along the Rankin River with Andy Koshan
Bring your own canoe/kayak (BYOCK)
Register: Andy Koshan, akoshan@yahoo.ca or 519-372-9480
Limit: 12 participants

Saturday, May 21, 2016 - 10:00 a.m.
Trees and Birds of a Typical Arran Township Farm with Jim Coles Grassland, upland forest, wetlands and a barn with swallows. (rain date: Sunday, May 22)
Register: Jim Coles, jcoles@gbtel.ca or 519-934-0020 **Limit:** 12 participants

June, 2016 - mid-week (TBA)
Wildflowers, Herbs and More with Barbara Palmer
Register: Barbara Palmer, barbara_p@rogers.com or 519-372-0355 **Limit:** 12 participants

Indoor Meetings

Indoor meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday of the month from September to June. They start at 7:00 p.m. at the Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library, 824 1st Avenue West, Owen Sound. Remember, bring a coffee mug to meetings.

March 10, 2016 Dr. Maurice Dusseault

THE GOOD AND THE BAD ABOUT HYDRAULIC FRACKING IN CANADA - RISKS, REWARDS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Maurice will look at hydraulic fracturing and natural gas development in a technical context, explaining the real risks. He will also pose a question to the audience: "Where do you want your energy to come from, at what cost, and why?"

April 14, 2016 Ray Robertson

GREY COUNTY ENVIRO-AGRICULTURAL UPDATE

Sustainability issues and the forces for good planning in Grey-Bruce. An excellent opportunity to follow up on woodlot, wetland & fisheries enhancement projects from the 1990s to 2015. It's amazing how they have matured.

May 12, 2016 David McLeish

THE EVOLUTION OF AN ECOLOGY ETHIC

This presentation will explore the colonization of the planet, including land and water, by humans, in the context of our relationship with its finite resources, how we have chosen to exploit them and how our environmental and ecological ethics continue to evolve.

June 9, 2016 @ 6:00 p.m. SHARP ** Last meeting of the year**

ANNUAL POTLUCK SUPPER & PRESENTATION

Please note location is not at the Library:

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 865 1st Ave. W, Owen Sound

Bring your own plates, cutlery and cup or mug, and bring a food dish, with serving utensils, to serve 8-10.

SPECIAL GUEST

Charles T. Mitchell, Organic Farm Inspector

SUPPORT WILDLIFE – EAT ORGANIC

Chuck Mitchell is an organic farmer in Meaford and organic inspector for farms and processors of organic products in the US and Canada. He has spent the last 40 years working internationally, promoting more sustainable agricultural methods. This presentation will highlight sustainable agriculture in Central America, Myanmar (Burma) and the Republic of Georgia, and will discuss why purchasing organic food is of benefit to wildlife.

Earth Day, Friday April 22, 2016

Daytime Nature Rambles with John Riley and OSFN Leaders

Times and locations will be available closer to the date.

7pm Keynote Address Featuring Pre-eminent Naturalist and Author John Riley

The Once and Future Great Lakes Country, An Ecological History

Sponsored by Caframo, Doors Open at 6pm

Hosted by Owen Sound Transportation (OSTC) aboard the MS Chi-Cheemaun

Tickets \$5.00 at OSTC Springmount Office and the Ginger Press where copies of Mr. John Riley's award-winning book will be available.

OSFN has also arranged for Mr. Riley to address High School Students on Thursday, April 21.

Please note that all programs and schedules are subject to change. To avoid disappointment, please check www.osfn.ca for updates (changes to dates, speakers, locations, etc.) or watch for an e-herald from osfieldnaturalist@yahoo.ca

We thank you for your understanding in these matters.

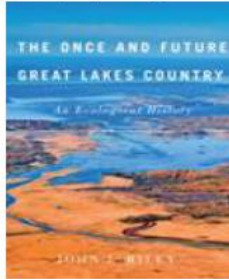
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KNOWING NATURE BETTER

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AS WE CELEBRATE **EARTH DAY** FRIDAY APRIL 22, 2016
FEATURING A KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY ACCLAIMED ECOLOGIST AND AUTHOR
John Riley The Once and Future Great Lakes Country Speaking Tour



by John L. Riley

John Riley is the Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC's) science advisor emeritus. He has had careers as botanist, geologist, ecologist and conservation professional with the Royal Ontario Museum, Ontario Geological Survey and Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Nature and, since 1998 with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. John Riley's Contributions to Conservation are Legion. DON'T MISS THIS EXTRAORDINARY PRESENTATION! MEET MR. RILEY! BOOKS AVAILABLE!

Aboard the MS Chi - Cheemaun

7PM Friday April 22, 2016
EARTH DAY

Limited Seating - Tickets \$5. Each
Available at OSTC Office Springmount
and at The Ginger Press

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Round-lobed Hepatica **Credit:** Nancy Sepalla

The hike leader for the Waking Spring guided hike at MacGregor Point Provincial Park is Madeline Sanagan, a University of Guelph student studying nature interpretation. Madeline is summer staff at MacGregor Point. She has arranged for free park admission for registered OSFN members who attend her hike. Participants will be asked to provide feedback and evaluation to comply with her course requirements.



**PLOVER
LOVERS**

Beach Talks

June 11

9:30 to 11:30 am

Sauble Community Centre

July 5 to August 9

Join us at the meeting area beside the 6th Street washroom on Tuesday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30 pm for presentations about beaches, botany and birds.



**GUIDED
HIKE**

"Waking Spring"

**MARCH 28TH
10am**

How do our local flora and fauna use their unique adaptations to emerge from the cold of winter and into the warmth of spring? Join Student Park Naturalist Madeline Sanagan on a walk through one of **MacGregor Point Provincial Park's** beautiful trails. We will explore how the natural world 'wakes up' and thrives with the warming temperatures.

Maximum 12 participants. Must register in advance by contacting m.sanagan@gmail.com.
Free entry into Park.

Christmas Bird Count Reports

Since its humble beginning over a hundred years ago, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has grown to be the largest citizen science project on the planet. There are now 460 individual count circles in Canada with 9 right here in Grey and Bruce counties. This year's lack of snow and warmer temperatures turned up some rarities. It's amazing how often new sightings are recorded. A Vermillion Flycatcher found in Wallaceburg, a count near London, is a first for Ontario. Vermillion Flycatcher's normal range is the Gulf coast and Mexico. Closer to home a White-eyed Vireo was discovered on the Pike Bay count. The White-eyed Vireo's normal summer home is the Carolinian forest. They are rarely found north of the Carolinian forest in southern Ontario. Saugeen Shores count added five new species including Harlequin Duck and Barred Owl. Of course birders like to find the mega-rarities but the data collected on common birds is most useful. The results are used by biologists and naturalists to assess population trends and distribution of birds. Bird numbers are recorded along with weather and number of participants. The type and number of birds found reflects the state of the environment. This was the warmest December ever and many birds, especially waterfowl, had not moved south. Fewer land birds than normal were found, but ducks and geese were in abundance.

Owen Sound Count: Compiler Freeman Boyd

The 45th Annual Owen Sound Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 20, 2015. Twenty-nine observers in 9 groups recorded 6320 birds of 46 species. That is the lowest number of species observed since 1986, with the average for the last decade being 58. The total number of individuals was only down slightly.

Ducks were the marquee performers this year, in part because even standing water was still open after a very mild fall. Four Canvasbacks were the most unusual sighting, recorded only once before in 1991. There were also count highs for Ring-necked Duck (4), and Hooded Merganser (31).

Other sightings of note:

Northern Harrier (1), recorded on only 10 of our 45 counts. Mute Swans (17) were first recorded in 2005. The number of swans wintering in Grey and Bruce continues to rise.

Wild Turkey (133). First recorded in 1999, the numbers peaked in 2009 at 340 and have, over the last five years, stabilized at about 140.

Overall finch numbers were quite low, with no redpolls or siskins being observed.

Another notable miss were the waxwings – recorded 27 times

in the last 30 years.

The wrap up was held at the Ginger Press. Many thanks to Maryann for a hardy dinner after a day outdoors.

Kincardine Count: Compiler James Turland

Participants had ideal weather on December 17, 2015 for driving and all roads were open and snow free. Everyone was anticipating good things. As it turns out the lack of snow meant birds were widely dispersed and not concentrated around feeders. This made them harder to find.

The two new birds added to the Kincardine count this year were Tundra Swan and Ring-necked Duck. Canvasback, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and Snow Goose each made their second ever appearance. Six Snowy Owls were more easily spotted because of the lack of snow. The 3,500 Ring-billed Gulls found shattered the old record of 266. Ring-billed are our most common gull in summer but have traditionally migrated before the count period. Canada Goose was the most abundant species this year with over 5000 being counted.

Over its 30 year history, Kincardine has amassed a total of 121 species but never more than 60 on one count until this year. The 62 species found is a new record high and was mainly due to the waterfowl. This year Kincardine's results are a reflection of the bigger picture. Greater numbers of waterfowl were recorded across the province.

Meaford Count: Compiler Lynne Richardson

The 45th Meaford count was held on Monday, December 28, 2015. The temperature remained around -7C and there were strong biting winds and big waves on Georgian Bay. Mild temperatures leading up to the count left all water completely ice-free. Despite the unfavourable weather on the day, but also due to the recent mildness, a total of 54 species were found. This is the second highest total in the past 25 years and the third highest in the 45 years of the count (58 in 2012; 60 in 1975).

A total of 4145 individual birds were recorded. This number is strongly bolstered by a record number of Canada Geese and Mallards. This total is a little over the average of the last 10 years.

Two new species were added to the count list bringing the 45-year cumulative total to 120. One Canvasback male was found with Redheads at the Thornbury lagoons and there was one lingering Wood Duck.

Christmas Bird Counts continued

Seven new highs and four ties-for-high were recorded.

Highs (former high): Canada Goose – 1180 (1992); American Black Duck – 20 (13); Mallard – 376 (220 – numbers rising over the years and the first 15 years of the count Mallard were rarely found and/or only a few); Northern Pintail – 2 (1 on only two previous counts); Hooded Merganser – 10 (6, 4); Redhead – 14 (5, on only one previous count); Red-bellied Woodpecker – 9 (7).

Ties: Black Scoter – 1 (2008, 2009); Double-crested Cormorant – 1 (1992); Bald Eagle – 5 (2013); Red-winged Blackbird – 1 (1993).

Notables: Northern Shoveler – 2 - 2nd time recorded (4 in 2008); Redheads – 14 - 2nd time recorded (1998); Common Goldeneye – 45 - a 25 year low; Golden Eagle – 2 - 4th year in a row; 1st recorded 2001 and counted 8 years since. A definite trend. Purple Finch – 22 - recorded only twice in the last 15 years; “Oregon-type” Junco – 1, male.

Misses: All owls – understandable given the shrieking winds, however Count Week species included Snowy Owl (1); Northern Shrike; and Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings, a few of both had been around.

Cape Croker Count: Compiler Jarmo Jalava

The fifth Cape Croker Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 19, 2015 at Neyaashiinigmiing (Unceded) First Nation (a.k.a. Nawash) on the beautiful Bruce Peninsula.

There was a very light, patchy dusting of snow on the ground and all waters were ice-free. Temperatures hovered between -1 and -2C throughout the day, with blustery northwest winds, occasional light flurries and generally good viewing conditions (although Georgian Bay was rough, with high swells).

The total individuals observed, 855, was well below average of 1,157; and observers noted long stretches with very few or no birds seen. The species total of 41 (average 40) included a

remarkable 8 new species for the count, with the most surprising being a well-seen Nashville Warbler. Also unprecedented was a report of 12 Trumpeter Swans.

Saugeen Shores Count: Compiler Norah Toth

The 12th Annual Saugeen Shores Christmas Bird Count was held on Wednesday, December 30, 2015. The weather was between 2C and -1C all day with weather events which included everything from the sun peeking through the clouds to rain, sleet and snow. During several snow events, there were times when visibility was reduced to less than 1/4 of a Concession. Lake Huron and all inland creeks and rivers were free of ice.

Thirty-nine people and 7 feeder watchers were involved with the count. Two volunteers canoed the Saugeen River. Two parties did some early morning owling, without success. 64 species were recorded and a total of 12,225 individual birds were sighted. The previous high of 59 species occurred in 2011. The 12 year cumulative total is 97 species.

Five new species were added to the cumulative count - Canvasback, Tundra Swan, Barred Owl, Harlequin Duck and Cackling Goose.

Highs: (previous high - year) Canada Goose 5058 (3655 - 2014); Rock Pigeon 609 (477 - 2005); Downy Woodpecker 45 (38 - 2011); Horned Lark 17 (12 - 2014). This is the 4th time Horned Larks have been sighted on the count.

Notable: Mallard - the second highest year at 204 - 2014 was the highest year at 402; Bufflehead - new low at 12 - 11-year average is 38; Bald Eagle - tied high at 36 with 2011; Golden Eagle were not present this year (they have been sighted every year but one since 2008); and Merlin have been present on the count for 3 of the last 4 years. Herring Gull numbers - 1457 - are the highest since 2006; Snowy Owl were absent from the count for the first time since 2011; Black-capped Chickadee at 458 is the highest they have been since 2005; European Starling were recorded at the highest they have been since 2006; and American Goldfinch were the only finches present in



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good numbers.

Christmas Bird Count *continued*

Wiarton Count: Compiler Jarmo Jalava

The 42nd annual Wiarton Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 20, 2015. Nineteen field observers and five feeder watchers volunteered to count birds for the day.

There was a very light, patchy dusting of snow on the ground and most waters were ice-free. Temperatures ranged between -2 and +2C under generally sunny skies, with brisk southerly winds developing in the afternoon. The 4,509 individual birds counted was well above the 40-year average of 3,386, and the species total of 51 was slightly above the average of 48.

The warm autumn and early winter weather meant that many birds that would normally have moved further south were still in the area. This no doubt contributed to the high totals, especially of waterfowl. Very exciting was the sighting of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a species that normally winters in the tropics and has only been recorded on the Wiarton count once before. All-time high counts were recorded for the following species: Mute Swan (13 counted), White-winged Scoter (8 seen, tied record set in 2008), Bald Eagle (19 observed, continuing the positive trend for this regal raptor) and American Crow (253 seen).

The count round-up was hosted by the Green Door Café, where volunteers enjoyed delicious food and good company.

Bruce Peninsula National Park (Tobermory) Count: Compiler John Haselmayer

The Tobermory CBC, held on December 16, 2015, reported a total of 41 species which is about average for this count.

Notable were Chipping Sparrow, Wood Duck and Canvasback which were all new for the count. Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup were both second records for the count.

Of interest were White-crowned Sparrow - the 5th record for

the count and Brown-headed Cowbird with the 3rd record for the count.

Pike Bay Count: Compiler Andrew Keaveney

The second annual Pike Bay CBC took place on December 29, 2015. The weather was wild but so were the birds! The near freezing temperature brought about a confusion of light rain and snow. A few inches of snow already lay on the ground from the first significant snowfall just days before and there were vast areas of open water along the Lake Huron coastline. Only streams and inland lakes and ponds were slightly frozen.

Three species were flagged as unusual for the count. A Snow Goose spotted by a local in the Pike Bay area the day before the count, a Eurasian Tree Sparrow which had been coming to a feeder in the Stokes Bay area and continued into the New Year, and a White-eyed Vireo that popped out of Doug and Mary Vann's cedar tree in the village of Pike Bay. The last two highlights were extremely rare birds for the Bruce Peninsula and neither are likely to be found on a Christmas Bird Count here again. The sparrow is likely a stray from the spreading north-central U.S. population that was introduced a few decades ago and the vireo breeds in Carolinian Canada and should have been in the southern U.S. wintering in balmy weather. I found it by 'pishing' (pursing one's lips and blowing air out to make a sound). It was quite an inquisitive little fellow.

Other birds of interest included Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, White-winged Scoter, Rough-legged Hawk, Snowy Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Lapland Longspur, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and Red-winged Blackbird.

Ten observers (up from 3 last year!) reported 55 species in all which is an incredible total and will only be repeated on counts when the lake hasn't frozen.

Results for all Christmas Bird Counts can be found on the Audubon website. Follow this link <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx> and look for the count name that interests you.

Volunteer with the Piping Plovers at Sauble Beach

Interested? Contact volunteer@ploverlovers.com or talk to Norah Toth or Lynne Richardson.

The Piping Plover Committee is excited about the educational projects they are working on: a Beach Talk series this summer and securing a Florida-based Sister School for Amabel-Sauble Public School.

This is your chance to be a Citizen Scientist, help out an endangered species and learn stories about Sauble's plovers.

Training sessions are April 28 at 2 pm and May 31 at 7 pm at the Sauble Beach Community Centre.

<http://www.ploverlovers.com>

The Story of Mr Lonely

There were some pretty special Piping Plovers at Sauble Beach in 2015. One of them was "Mr Lonely". He hatched at Wasaga Beach in 2014 and came to Sauble Beach looking for a mate on May 23, 2015.

His bands: Left Upper: Metal, Left Lower: Yellow. Right Upper: Orange, Right Lower: Yellow (#022) or X,Y:O,Y(022)

Every day volunteers would see him standing on the beach all by himself looking for a female. Females were scarce last spring as even Port Elgin's "Port Boy" was unsuccessful in locating a mate.

However, Mr Lonely was a very determined bird, to the point that he was seen several times trying to take over another male Piping Plover's nest, while the female was incubating the eggs! As an unattached male, that did not stop him from helping out when he was needed. He was seen joining the other Piping Plovers as they protected their young / nests from predator Ring-billed Gulls.

In the end, he did not find a mate and was last seen on



Mr Lonely Credit: Cheryl Ferguson

Sauble Beach July 18, 2015.

What was really exciting was to have Florida photographer, Danny Sauvageau, contact us on the Plover Lovers Facebook site three weeks later and confirm

that Mr Lonely was no longer lonely. To quote Danny: "He made it to his winter home in Florida! I saw him on 8-12-15 at Anclote Key State Park in Pinellas County, FL. He was not lonely here.....I saw 48 Piping Plover in the area he was in. Follow my page and see the other Piping Plover Adventures I have". Danny also mentioned that this is Mr Lonely's second winter there since hatching.

It's experiences like this that pique a Plover Lover's interest.

Submitted by: Cheryl Ferguson

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Thank you to the members who have provided content for this newsletter or who have proofread. Submissions for the next issue can be sent to ntoth@rogers.com prior to July 15, 2016.

Hospitality at Meetings

At each meeting, coffee and tea have been provided so that you have the chance to socialize. Thank you to Audrey Armstrong who has been job sharing with Norah Toth for the winter. If anyone else is able to spend an extra hour prior to the meeting helping out the club by preparing and serving coffee and tea, please contact Norah Toth—ntoth@rogers.com

To help provide coffee supplies, a financial donation has been welcomed at the coffee table.

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Custom Embroidered Clothing

SBP Custom Embroidery, located at Story Book Park, will embroider our Club logo onto the left chest of preselected clothing items. Included are a t-shirt, a crewneck sweatshirt and a hooded sweatshirt with zipper. These items are unisex. In male and female cuts are golf shirts as well as light weight and water proof jackets. They are also able to embroider the logo on a ball cap or toque.

Any OSFN member can go to their shop, view items and order what will suit them.

Listed below are the items and the current pricing which includes the embroidery and taxes.

Gildan Cotton T-shirt: S - XL \$12.43; XXL - XXXL \$15.82

Gildan Crewneck Sweatshirt: S - XL \$22.60; XXL - XXXL \$27.12

Full Zip Hooded Sweatshirt: S - XL \$44.64; XXL \$49.72; XXXL \$55.14

Men's or Ladies' Cotton Golf Shirt: (M) S - 5XL; (L) S - 3XL \$37.06

Men's or Ladies' Polyester Performance Golf Shirt: (M) S - 5XL; (L) S - 3XL \$35.60

Men's or Ladies' Lightweight Unlined Jacket: (M) S - 5XL; (L) XS - 3XL \$37.29

Men's or Ladies' Soft Shell Jacket: (M) XS - 4XL; (L) XS - 2XL \$61.02

Men's or Ladies' Team 365 "Waterproof" Jacket: (M) XS - 4XL; (L) XS - 3XL \$76.84

Ball cap with contrast peak: \$15.03

Basic Fold toque: \$10.17

Add your name to the sleeve: \$3.39



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Calling ALL Volunteers!

2016 International Piping Plover Census

Carolyn Hann, a biologist under contract with Environment Canada, has started preparing for the 2016 International Piping Plover Census.

The International Piping Plover Census is conducted every five years across North America. The primary function of the breeding census is to gather data for monitoring moderate-to-long-term population trends and to assess the success of recovery efforts in meeting recovery objectives. Census data also provides information on the species range and use of local habitat and the connectivity of breeding and wintering regions. Data is currently being collected for the winter component of the census.

Dates and guidelines have not yet been released for the 2016 census; however surveys will likely run the first two weeks of June. Volunteering involves at least one survey (walk on the beach) of suitable habitat during the census window. Locations are predetermined and assigned.

Carolyn is coordinating the Ontario portion of the census and is looking for volunteers to survey census sites. Census sites will be filled on a first come first serve basis.

Are you interested? Please send Carolyn an email if you would like to participate.

Carolyn Hann, Ontario Coordinator - International Piping Plover Census

Phone: 902-312-1052

Email: carolynhann09@gmail.com

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Membership is due in September each year and can be paid in cash or by cheque at any indoor meeting or by PayPal on the website. The OSFN Membership is current from September 1 to August 30 each year.

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Knowing Nature Better

The Owen Sound Field Naturalists advocate and nurture the appreciation, understanding, and conservation of our natural world. We are like-minded individuals who enjoy programs and activities that help us increase our understanding of natural history and conservation in Grey-Bruce.



Horned Larks among Snow Buntings. Credit: Merri-Lee Metzger



Note the ice on the wings of this White-eyed Vireo which was in distress after a change in the weather. This photo was taken after the Pike Bay Christmas Bird Count. Credit: Doug Vann



Enjoying winter. Credit: Doug Pedwell