

Hart's Tongue Herald

The Newsletter of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists

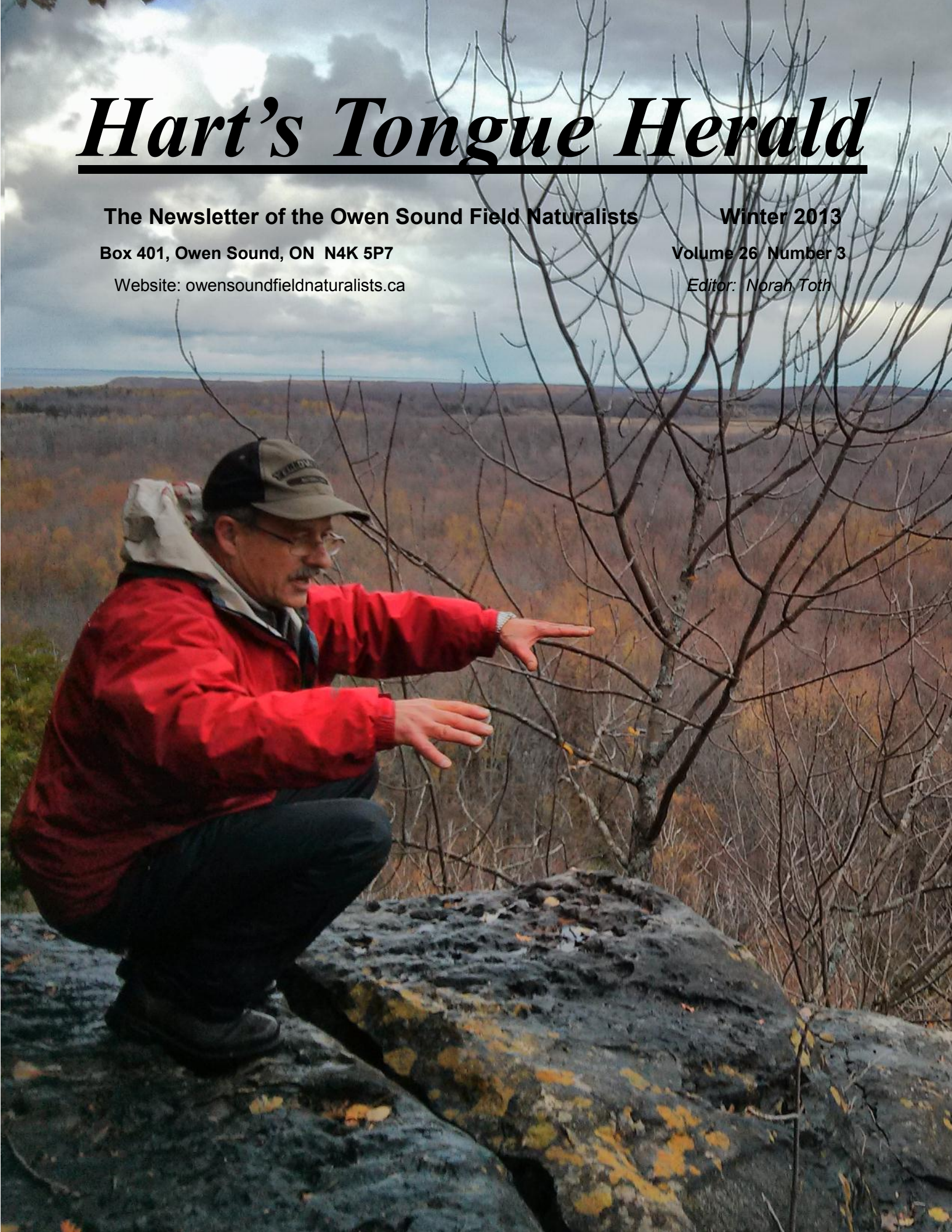
Winter 2013

Box 401, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P7

Volume 26 Number 3

Website: owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca

Editor: Norah Toth



From the President

We are well into the new year for OSFN and I am excited about our program for this coming year. It was wonderful joining the Young Naturalists for a visit to O'Keefe Grange, a heritage apple farm. More about this visit later in this newsletter but I want to encourage you to visit this farm and talk with Bill and Lynne about their complete focus on saving heritage apple trees. Their passion is making a difference for apple trees in Ontario and beyond.

People like the O'Keefes are models for each of us. It is important that we all improve the environment in whatever way we can. By doing so we will leave a better world for future generations.

There are several projects we will be working on in the near future. Replacement of signs at the Oliphant Fens and monitoring activities on The Davis, Crowe-Barwell & Sauble Dunes properties are some current needs. Please let me know if you are interested in exploring any of these unique habitats.

On January 1, 2014 John Dickson is taking over as president of this organization. I am thankful for all the help from club members and especially the executive during my time as president. Please congratulate him and welcome him with continuing support throughout his term. We will also be searching for a new vice-president so let us know if you would be interested in joining the executive in this capacity.

Enjoy the last days of fall.

Stew Nutt, President

Did you hear the latest?

Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, Gord Miller, has released a [special report](#) slamming the provincial government for recent changes made to the once-gold standard Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA).

At a press conference at Queen's Park this Wednesday, the commissioner outlined the key points of the report entitled [Laying Siege to the Last Line of Defence: A Review of Ontario's weakened protections for species at risk](#). He explained that as a result of the regulatory changes, which came into force in July, "the full protections of the law no longer apply to activities such as forestry operations, aggregate pits and quarries, hydro-electric dams and infrastructure construction."

The regulatory changes "strike at the very heart of the law," says the commissioner, by lowering the standard of protection, undermining government oversight and sidestepping public participation processes. "Proposals to harm endangered species or their habitats will no longer show up on the Environmental

Registry, so the public won't have any ability to know or comment."

This report validates Ontario Nature's ongoing efforts to defend species at risk from the recent changes, including our decision to join forces with Ecojustice and Wildlands League to sue the provincial government. It confirms what we already knew – recent changes to the ESA spell disaster for Ontario's 155 endangered and threatened species. It's ugly, and it's all there in the report's title. You can find the report on the Environmental Commission of Ontario website along with Miller's related [blog](#) and other [supporting documents](#).

Sincerely,



Dr. Anne Bell
Director of Conservation and Education
Ontario Nature

New Mourning Dove Hunt in Ontario

It's open season on mourning doves. The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) quietly authorized a new mourning dove hunt in southern and central Ontario, beginning in early September and lasting until mid-November. The daily bag limit is 15 birds, while a hunter can have up to 45 in his or her possession at any one time. Ontario Nature is opposed to the hunt on the grounds that there was inadequate consultation with stakeholders and the rationale for opening the hunt, which has been closed since the 1950s, is weak.

Youth Summit for Biodiversity & Green Solutions

September 2013 marked Ontario Nature's biggest youth event to date – our fourth annual Youth Summit for Biodiversity. 104 teenagers from across Ontario attended the weekend-long summit at YMCA Geneva Park in Orillia to hear a keynote speech by renowned conservationist and filmmaker Rob Stewart and to debate green energy issues. A warm thank you to all of our Nature Network sponsors – your generous support helped make the summit such a huge success!

Cover Photo: Bob Gray overlooking the Slough of Despond. **Credit:** Gordon Toth

Winter Program

Indoor meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month (except July and August) in the auditorium of the Owen Sound and North Grey Union Public Library at 7 pm. Speakers 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.

Outdoor programs are designed to help members discover new areas of natural interest, add to their knowledge of natural history or simply enjoy a walk in the woods with like-minded people. Participation numbers are limited on most outings to ensure the quality of the experience and to reduce impact on the environments visited. You will need to call to register.

Thursday, January 9, 2014
Patterns in Time: The Changing Arctic-Peter Middleton

The Arctic is in our minds these days as a place of importance, due to the changes occurring there. This program will focus on the natural history of the region, with reference to current pressures of climate change, social, economic and sovereignty implications.

Saturday, January 25, 2014
Snowshoe to the Grotto with Park Staff John Haselmayer

Noon—3:00 pm
(Limit: 10 participants)
Register: John Haselmayer
john.haselmayer@pc.gc.ca

There is no such thing as bad weather. Just wrong clothes.

Children & Nature Network

Thursday, February 13, 2014
Nature Photography Large & Small-Save Irvine

Join local potter and esteemed photographer Steve Irvine for a visual journey from the cosmos to the close-up! Explore the world around us through his recent photographs.

Saturday, February 22, 2014
Shadows of Summertime - A Winter Hike at Bognor Marsh to Look at Plants Above the Snow— Peter Middleton

1:00 pm—4:00 pm
(Limit: 12 participants)
Register: Peter Middleton
peter.middleton@sympatico.ca
or 519-376-3242

Sunday, March 9, 2014
Who Made Those Tracks & Why? An Interpretive Late Winter Tracking Hike with Jeff Kinchen

1:00 pm—4:00 pm
(Limit: 12 participants)
Register: Andy Koshan
akoshan@yahoo.ca
or 519-372-9480

Thursday, March 13, 2014
What Has Happened With The James Bay Project-Robert Knapp

Bob, an experienced and well-traveled canoeist, will present an up-to-date report on the James Bay Hydro Electric Project. He will then focus on The Great Whale River, which he canoed about 20 years ago, showing photos of this powerful river and what has been saved to date.

Thursday, April 10, 2014 *The Wonderful World of Birds-Fred Jazvac*

Through pictures, stories and tales, Fred will narrate the interesting, amazing and sometimes bizarre lives of birds.

Sunday, April 27, 2014
Wonderland of Rocks: Cliffscape Ecology Hike at Rural Rootz with Tom Ashman

1:00 pm—4:00 pm
(Limit: 15 participants)
Register: Tom Ashman
ruralrootz@sympatico.ca or
519-534-2522

The Enigma of Curly Grass

It was with interest that I read the announcement of the new Sauble Dunes Nature Reserve, especially when it mentioned the presence of "wet swales". It was in a wet swale in the Sauble dunes that Eugene Moxley accidentally collected the tiny fern called "Curly Grass" (*Schizaea pusilla* Pursh) in 1928. This find caused considerable controversy at the time with many experts saying it could not possibly be in Ontario, so he must have mixed up his collections, and it actually came from the Atlantic coast where it occurs in similar wet swales among the sand dunes.

His specimen is still, however, in the herbarium at the Royal Ontario Museum (formerly the University of Toronto Cryptogam Herbarium). Eugene Moxley was a well-known and dedicated botanical collector who worked in Owen Sound at that time. There are good reasons for believing that he did find it at Sauble.

First, he found it accidentally in frozen soil. He had been asked, in the spring, by one of his professional botanist friends, to collect some *Selaginella selaginoides* for him. This is a small Spikemoss, one of the Fern Allies, that is



found in moist areas but grows among mosses so is easily overlooked. He found it in one of the wet swales among the dunes at Sauble but the ground was frozen so he hacked out some chunks. When he thawed them out at home, he found the Curly Grass among the *Selaginella*.

Secondly, this fern is insignificant in size. The sterile fronds are only 8 cm long and grass-like. The fertile fronds have

longer stalks with tiny spore-bearing heads, but would not be very noticeable among other vegetation and probably not visible when the ground was frozen.

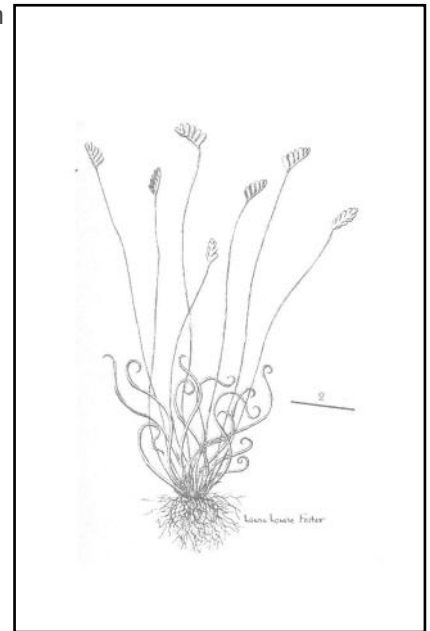
Thirdly, in post-glacial times there was a connection between this area and the Atlantic.

There is a good chance that it still lurks somewhere in that vicinity, especially in an area that seems to be relatively untouched.

Moxley was one of those rare people gifted with the ability to spot unusual plants.

Nels Maher, who we miss so much, was another. It takes a special talent to distinguish a plant with no outstanding colour or other characteristics from other vegetation. It would be nice to think that maybe one day someone with that gift will relocate Curly

Grass and prove Moxley's critics wrong!



Note: For more details on this fern see page 108 in "A Guide to the Ferns of Grey and Bruce Counties" (available among our other publications at the Ginger Press) or page 130 in the "Ferns and Fern Allies of Canada" by Britton and Brown.

Joan Crowe

Huron Fringe

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Christmas Bird Counts

The 114th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count takes place Dec 14, 2013 to January 5, 2014. This is the longest running Citizen Science survey in the world and provides critical data on population trends. There are tens of thousands of participants who know that it is also a lot of fun. Locally, there are 6 Christmas Bird Counts that actively advertise for participants.

Saturday, December 14—Hanover-Walkerton—Gerard McNaughton gmcnaughton@wightman.ca

Saturday, December 14—Owen Sound—Freeman Boyd boydsproduce@gmail.com

Sunday, December 15—Wiarton—Lynda Steinacker lyndajoy@bmts.com

Wednesday, December 18—Bruce Peninsula National Park—John Haselmayer john.haselmayer@pc.gc.ca

Thursday, December 19—Kincardine—James Turland jaturland@gmail.com

Thursday, January 2—Saugeen Shores—Norah Toth ntoth@rogers.com

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 March 30, 2014.

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At each indoor meeting Rob Kearns has coffee or tea available for purchase. This coffee is purchased through the Creemore Coffee Company. Motivated by concern for nature and birds, the company provides quality shade-grown coffee which is bird friendly. Your purchase supports habitat both locally and in Central America. The money raised through coffee sales is invested in field naturalist projects.

The Board is reviewing whether we should be providing coffee and tea sales. Please let them know how you feel.

At each meeting, coffee and tea are being provided by a fellow club member so that you have the chance to socialize. Please make sure you thank them.


December: Bob Rice

January: Joanne Veerman

February: Audrey Armstrong

March: Nancy White

Are you able to help out in April or May? Contact Norah Toth—ntoth@rogers.com

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Club News

Hawk Cliff Outing

On Monday, Sept. 16, sixteen very fortunate OSFN members took part in an outing to Hawk Cliff to experience first-hand one of the most amazing wonders of nature to be seen in Ontario. Everything about this day had to do with precision. Our leader, Peter Middleton, had been watching the weather patterns closely well in advance, and chose the perfect conditions for the perfect day.

Four cars left Rockford at 7:30 a.m. and met the "chick car" from Port Elgin/Southampton at Mitchell. Yet a sixth car, from Thornbury, met us on site at Hawk Cliff, on the north shore of Lake Erie just east of Port Stanley. Upon our arrival at 11:30 a.m. (the folks from Thornbury were there by 10:30 a.m.), there were thousands of birds in the air, primarily Broad-winged Hawks, in huge masses called kettles, with straight lines of hawks flying in at the bottom, and circling up high on updrafts within the kettles, before streaming off in lines to the southwest following the shoreline of Lake Erie. What an amazing sight! And there were constantly other species coming through individually as well including Bald Eagle, Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel and Turkey Vulture. But not a Monarch to be seen anywhere. By the time we had finished our lunches and were leaving by 1:30 p.m., almost 30,000 raptors had already been counted that day. Peter later reported to us that almost 45,000 Broad-winged Hawks and almost 47,000 raptors in total had been recorded that day. We were certainly there during the peak of activity.

As if the Hawk Cliff experience wasn't enough, Peter treated us to many species of shorebirds and waterfowl at the West Perth Wetlands at Mitchell on the way home. Excellent views were obtained through telescopes in very good lighting with very precise identification tips

from Peter to help us all out. As you know, neither of these groups of birds is easy to identify, especially in fall/winter plumage. Birds spotted included Golden Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Widgeon and Green-winged Teal.

There were even two Whimbrel spotted by Peter in flight above our car convoy enroute to Mitchell in the morning. Norah's portable walkie-talkies were great fun in identifying birds along the way and for keeping some of us (from Kemble) from getting lost in the larger urban centres to the south.

What a great day! Thank you to Peter from all of us for providing memories for a lifetime.

Bob Gray



Look up, look way, way up! There are raptors up there!

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The Ontario Reptile & Amphibian Atlas

In October, Catherine Jimenea introduced us to the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas. We learned not only about the diversity of the reptile and amphibian populations in Ontario, but also about how at risk they truly are. She also pointed out that records are greatly lacking for Grey and Bruce counties.

More recently, Beth Anne Currie attended a Regional Meeting of Ontario Nature. She reported that the Atlas now has more than 180,000 records and more than 2400 contributors. They are aiming for 200,000 records by the end of 2013.

Reporting your sightings is easy. You can report on-line, place sightings on a spread sheet or fill out a form that you would send in.

If you feel it is important to improve the knowledge of the distribution and status of reptiles and amphibians throughout Ontario, then you have a responsibility to report your sightings at

http://www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofaunal_atlas.php

Club News

Stargazing at the ES Fox Observatory

The Saturday, September 16th visit to the ES Fox Observatory got a lucky brief break in the generally rainy weather (Friday and Sunday) that allowed a dozen Owen Sound Field Naturalists a chance to catch a glimpse of a few stars and even a view of the two planets Venus and Saturn low in the west. The moon brightened the sky somewhat since it was waxing gibbous, meaning that it was part-way past first quarter on its way to being full.

While the brighter moon discourages many amateurs from viewing since the views of the fainter, deep-sky objects like nebulae and galaxies are washed out, at the same time the moon itself is a fascinating world to observe. I hooked up a video camera to the telescope and projected a large-screen view of the moon that allowed everyone to see features of interest. Although the view through the eyepiece is certainly fascinating, a video camera allows large audiences to view features on the moon and to get a group tour of interesting lunar terrain. We got explanations of the large dark areas called maria- flat lava plains, craters with different types of interiors: some are flat, some have mountain peaks in their centres and even had the Apollo 11 landing site pointed out. (Sorry, the Apollo hardware left behind is not visible in the ES Fox telescope. You need to be in orbit around the moon to see it.)

Field naturalists are certainly keen on terrestrial ecology, but this night allowed us to explore some extra-terrestrial real estate as well. As John said at some point: "Let us not forget the world overhead. Earth ecology is certainly



fascinating in all its aspects, but the Universe is out there also waiting to be explored and it's pretty much limitless."

John Hlynialuk



On Thursday, November 21, 2013 Peter Middleton was a recipient of the Latornell Leadership Award at the A.D. Latornell Conservation Symposium. This award recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions, at any time and for any duration, to the conservation movement in Ontario. Peter was nominated by Grey Sauble Conservation for his leadership

accomplishments. Make sure you congratulate him the next time you see him.



Peter Middleton and guests at the presentation luncheon. From left to right John Cottrill, Krista McKee, Norah Toth, Stew Nutt, Jan Chamberlain, Judy Gay, Peter Middleton, Jan Middleton, Dick Hibma.

Club News

Young and Old Learn About Heritage Apples

On September 29, 2013 three representatives from the Owen Sound Field Naturalists along with 25 Young Naturalists and parents met at O'Keefe Grange for an afternoon with Bill and Lynne O'Keefe. Bill and Lynne operate a heritage apple farm and had several of their varieties available for tasting by the participants. Bill explained why apple varieties are reproduced by graft and not seed and also demonstrated grafting techniques. Many of the apple varieties were very rare, sometimes with less than five trees left in the world. He is also a great storyteller and gave the history of many of the varieties. We learned that the Wismer variety was developed at the Wismer House in Port Elgin in 1897. The present-day pub was formerly a nursery. The American Pippen, Dominie, and Belmont were also grown in Ontario and are presently very rare.

As we walked through his orchard sampling more varieties of apples, Bill talked about the reason and need to save these trees. Several of the participants commented about the excellent taste of these very rare fruits. The Pineapple variety tasted just as you would think it would.

Another hit was Lynn's donut-making machine. Nearly everyone got a sample!

O'Keefe Grange was open to the public Thanksgiving and the following two weekends.

They sell many things in their country store including their own honey, preserves, butter bowls, wool as well as apples. Their main focus is to encourage us to plant heritage apples and they take orders for tree varieties until the end of December. Bill then grafts the trees during the winter, plants and nurses them until the following fall for pick up.

For more information:

Call Bill & Lynne O'Keefe 519-934-3673

okeefegrange@yahoo.ca

1070 concession 2 Arran

We will post information on our web page as well as a list of varieties currently available at O'Keefe Grange.

Stew Nutt



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Extreme Water Levels on Lake Huron

The International Joint Commission's study on water levels in the upper Great Lakes and its recommendations to the U.S. and Canadian governments focus on placing engineered structures in the St. Clair River. The intended result would raise levels on Lake Huron by about 20 cm.

The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation has developed a position statement titled *Extreme Lake Levels on Lake Huron*. The Centre cautions against raising levels artificially. It suggests an approach that builds on the natural resiliency of the coast.

The Centre believes that natural factors, particularly climatic factors related to precipitation and evaporation are the key drivers of water levels. The state of balance between

precipitation and evaporation will result in higher, lower or static water levels. By understanding this, the Centre believes that adaptive management measures will be able to respond to future changing conditions.

The Centre hopes that its position statement will generate some needed discussion about this issue which is far more complex than what is being presented in the media.

This position statement is available at <http://lakehuron.ca/index.php?page=position-statements>

Should you have any questions pertaining to this document, please contact Geoff Peach, Coastal Resources Manager, Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation. Telephone: 519-523-4478 or Geoff.peach@lakehuron.on.ca

Ontario Nature Update

On Saturday November 2, 2013, the Saugeen Field Naturalists hosted the semi-annual Great Lakes West Fall Regional Meeting of Ontario Nature in Formosa at the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority headquarters. Peter Middleton and Beth Anne Currie attended on behalf of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists. Here is an update on what's happening at Ontario Nature:

- Ontario Nature's 2014 AGM will be held from June 20-22 at YMCA Geneva Park on Lake Couchiching.
- The OSFN is a member club of Ontario Nature and gets its insurance through them.
- **Greenway Program—Natural Heritage Systems Protection**—Ontario Nature is creating a guide designed for municipal planners across southern and eastern Ontario to better integrate Natural Heritage Systems planning into their municipal Official Plans. The planned release for this guide is January, 2014. — **Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)** is growing stronger. This community-developed, farmer-delivered program pays farmers to retain and reconstruct natural features such as wetlands, grasslands, riparian areas and trees on the non-productive areas of their land. ALUS projects have expanded into Grey-Bruce. ALUS has launched a new website at www.alus.ca.
- **Endangered Species Act (ESA) Lawsuit**—Ecojustice lawyers, acting on behalf of Ontario Nature and Wildlands League, have filed a lawsuit in Divisional Court alleging that the Ontario Government acted unlawfully in its decision to exempt major threats to species at risk from the ESA. Further information is available on their website at www.ontarionature.org
- **Nature Reserves Program**—Ontario Nature has received a TD Friends of the Environment Foundation grant for trail creation and maintenance at Reilly Bird, Petrel Point and Willoughby Nature Reserves. New interpretive signage is being developed.
- **Massasauga Rattlesnake Outreach Project**—This project is focused on residents and cottagers on the Bruce Peninsula. Ontario Nature conservation staff and interns hosted 5 workshops, spoke at community events and went door-to-door to dispel popular myths about the Massasauga Rattlesnake.

Submitted by Beth Anne Currie (with special thanks to Lisa Richardson, Nature Network Coordinator).



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Club News

The Slough of Despond

On Sunday, October 27, about 20 people spent an afternoon checking out various geological features in the Big Bay area with Bob Gray as our leader.

It had rained steadily on Saturday and Sunday didn't start out to be much better. While waiting for the last shower to end in Bob's sugar shack, we learned about the process he uses to make maple syrup. Once the weather cleared, we set out to look at the various rock formations found nearby.

We checked out a rock cut along the Kemble Rock Road, visited the cobble beach at Big Bay and had a look at an old beach ridge that helps to define the Slough of Despond. Our last stop involved a walk along a section of the Bruce Trail near Skinner's Bluff. This trail takes you past the ruins of an old barn, past apple trees with really tasty apples and then to a rock overlook of the Slough of Despond. Here, we stopped to look out over the Slough. We learned that the Slough is in fact an meromictic lake. It is a lake which has layers of water that do not intermix and the deepest layer of water does not contain any dissolved oxygen. The layers of sediment at the bottom of a meromictic lake remain relatively undisturbed because there are no living aerobic organisms.

But the most memorable aspects of the hike occurred when Bob sat on an outcrop of the escarpment which overlooks the Slough of Despond and read aloud out of Paul Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress*. Bob explained that *A Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Bible* were often the only books that the

early pioneers brought with them. When the first settlers came to the stinky slough it must have reminded them of these words found in *A Pilgrim's Progress*.

"This miry Slough is such a place as cannot be mended; it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore is it called the Slough of Despond: for still as the sinner is awakened about his lost

condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place; and this is the reason of the badness of this ground."

We weren't close enough to experience the stench of the Slough, but thanks to Bob, we got a wonderful view, found out that it is a meromictic lake and how it got its name.

Norah Toth



Bob Gray explaining the Georgian Bay Formation.



Joanne Veerman B.Sc., B.Ed.
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We welcome our new members:

Garry & Tresa Adams, Brock Bowen, Ross & Angelia Burkenshaw,
Frank De Matteis, Shirley Harrison, Robert Hart, Chris Tomsett

OSFN Board of Directors, 2013 – 2014

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Past-President: Peter Middleton, 519-376-3242, peter.middleton@sympatico.ca

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Treasurer: Barbara Fidler, 519-371-2919, fidlers.green@hotmail.com

Membership: Beth Anne Currie, 519-376-7237, bethannecurrie@sympatico.ca

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Member At-Large: Dave Taylor, 519-794-4860, dtmtlog@bmts.com

Hospitality: Vacant

Junior Naturalists: Elaine Van Den Kieboom, 519-371-1989, ekieboom@queensbush.ca & Krista McKee (Grey-Sauble Conservation Authority), 519-376-3076

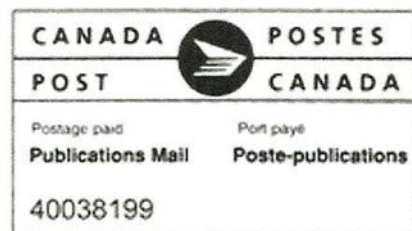
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Newsletter & Hospitality: Norah Toth, 519-376-2918, ntoth@rogers.com

Website: Bill Moses, 519-371-4559, bill.mosesos@gmail.com



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Bob reading the definition of the Slough of Despond from A Pilgrim's Progress.

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. The Grey-Bruce area is of particular interest to us.



A study of moss, lichen and liverwort on the Bruce Trail.