

Hart's Tongue Herald

The Newsletter of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists

Winter 2016

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Website: owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca

Editor: Norah Toth



President's Report

I am writing this just after we have turned our clocks back, autumn is lingering with gorgeous colours, dramatic light and kind temperatures. Paddling a quiet lake yesterday meant having to strip off layers of clothes, just short of indecency, because the sun was so hot and the air so calm. Most of the fish have gone to the lower areas of the lake but one spunky pike still took the bait.

This autumn the OSFN meetings have been very well attended, with many new members joining us. Welcome to you, especially if you are also new to the area. Our club can help you learn more about the nature of this diverse landscape and show you many hidden natural treasures. Monthly indoor meetings provide opportunities to learn things you may not ever have thought to be interested in: freshwater mussels, for example. A subject that seemed at first glance to be rather ordinary was quickly and thoroughly turned into an amazing world of extraordinary wonders! The following month we were mesmerized with stories from an explorer who is mapping remote areas mostly via canoe - and alone. Then a passionate presentation about phragmites and the very serious impacts it is having on wetlands and shorelines gave us much to ponder.

OSFN partnered with the Bruce Peninsula Bird Observatory to host a presentation of the beautiful film *The Messenger*. Such tragedy. There is so much to be concerned about, that it almost overwhelms viewers. There were great questions raised and lots of lively discussion afterward.

Outdoor activities have also been well attended, especially when the weather has co-operated! Weather has been the focal point of most conversations lately, it seems.

The warm fall has tricked some of the dogwoods into thinking it's spring: they are in full flower once again.

My old farmhouse has almost no cluster flies this fall for the first time in 35 years! Is that also caused by the drought? Or is it the warmer climate? Did the predominance of catbirds this year affect their numbers? While enjoying a home eerily free of this plague, I will not be complacent. Winter forecasts are dire due to the relatively warm waters of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. Expect deep snow and high winds. At least that's one view. Another one says that snow won't stay on the ground until swamps are full - which they are definitely **not**. How often have you been able to walk through wetlands in your running shoes and still have dry feet? (Such an odd feeling, as I am accustomed to checking my rubber boots for leaks before heading out.)

A local maple syrup producer claims we'll only get snow that stays on the ground after three significant snowfalls.

Then there's "the bigger the woodpile, the fiercer the winter" adage. Does that mean I should not be concerned that dry firewood has yet to arrive in my shed? Wishful thinking....

What does the Farmers' Almanac say about winter of 2016-2017?

Of course any naturalist knows the only reliable predictor is the Woolly Bear Caterpillar; but I can never remember what matters most - a narrow band is a short easy winter or a long tough one?

Nature must be leaving clues everywhere, if only we knew how to read them. I'm sure many of our OSFN members can provide some details about that. Please send me a note if you have the key to predicting what the coming seasons may bring.

I hope it brings all of our OSFN members good health, great hiking (or snowshoeing, skiing, tobogganing...) lots of reading and time to enjoy the fruits of your labour.

Kate McLaren, President

Cover: The access to Robson Lakes Conservation Area can be wet underfoot. Credit: Donna Giesler

Book Review

The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America. Douglas Brinkley. Harper Collins, 2014.

Rightful Heritage: Franklin D Roosevelt and The Land of America. Douglas Brinkley. Harper Collins, 2016.

Together these two biographies serve as a primer on nature conservation. The period they cover, roughly 1880 to 1945, gives birth to a new view of nature - that it needed protection from human exploitation.

First we meet the two U.S. presidents. Both were gifted, lifelong, dedicated naturalists – the only two such presidents. Both would have had careers in biology, had politics not claimed their energies. Both invested considerable amounts of their political capital in conservation. Without them, the Canada goose, the great egret and the white-tailed deer might have gone the way of the passenger pigeon and the great auk. Without them, we would not have anything like the park and reserve systems that we have, including those in Canada.

To accomplish what they did, these two presidents surrounded themselves with the titans of conservation. In

these books, we get to watch Muir and Burroughs and Pinchot and Leopold and many more at work creating the concepts, the tools, and the public will that will form the foundations for the public conservation of natural resources.

The contemporary forces arrayed against the integrity of nature are also examined - from the stunning new ability to rifle species like the buffalo off the map to the impact of the railroads, the markets they opened and the era of rapacious capitalism they unleashed.

Today, we face different hazards: pollution and globalization, but they are no less challenging. Despite the fact that we stand on the shoulders of giants, nature's welfare is no less threatened. If, in an urbanized world, we cannot anticipate another statesman of Rooseveltian stature, we can at least, in Brinkley's biographies, read of the stout defense of nature required.

Both these books are on the shelves at the North Grey Owen Sound library.

Submitted by: Freeman Boyd

Volunteers Needed

Are you looking for an opportunity to get outdoors on your own time, to walk in the woods at your own pace, to study nature up close and personal, or, perhaps to even practice your carpentry skills? If so, we are looking for you.

Your OSFN club has several very interesting Conservation Projects that require a volunteer to actively monitor both lands and projects to ensure their ongoing success. For complete information on these opportunities and to learn more about how you can be a valued part of our Conservation Projects group, please get in touch with Dennis Knight, Conservation Director, 519 538-4729, dennisknight@rogers.com.



Friends of Hibou work crew preparing boardwalk for Hibou Conservation Area. Credit: Don Sankey

Congratulations to Clarke Birchard, Chesley who was recently awarded the Latornell Leadership Award for his extraordinary contributions to the natural environment. For over 36 years, Clarke has been an educator and a strong proponent of outdoor education; he was the Supervisor of Outdoor Education for the Bruce County Board of Education for over 20 years. Clarke helped found the Saugeen Field Naturalists and is a past member of the Owen Sound club.

Walter Crowe—1928-2016



Walter Ramsey Crowe passed away on November 3, 2016. Walter made some significant contributions to the naturalist community.

I have many fond memories of Walter. He volunteered on the

piping plover recovery project and always accompanied Joan to the Huron Fringe Birding Festival as her right-arm man. I worked with him organizing an Ontario Nature conference and later learned about his love for architectural heritage as he presented about stained glass windows found in Britain's cathedrals. He did each of these things cheerily and with the uncanny wit that he was blessed with.

Perhaps his greatest and most lasting legacy is the donation of their property at Long Swamp located west of Owen Sound to the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This donation helps to preserve a large portion of this



Hart's Tongue Fern, Robson Lakes. Credit: Donna Giesler

important wetland and ensures that it will remain natural and undeveloped.

Walter was a Professor Emeritus in Business Administration at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay from 1966 to 1993. I can imagine he made business classes very enjoyable; in fact they were probably fun!

In 1993 he and Joan, his wife for 64 years, retired to Owen Sound.

Walter was always active. In addition to serving as President of the OSFN from 2001—2003, he had volunteered at the Grey Bruce Health Services for 20 years, at the Billy Bishop Museum, with the project to save the St. George's Anglican Church tower and spire, and with the Sydenham Bruce Trail Club.

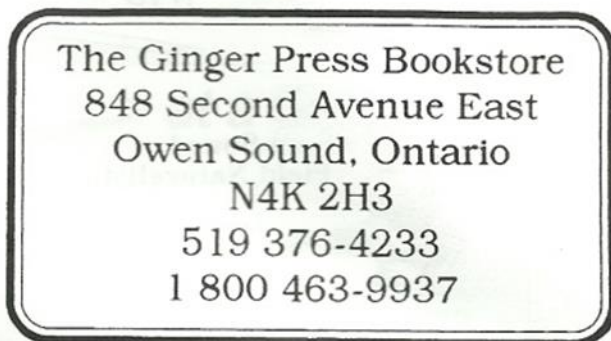
In August, I met Walter and Joan at Sauble Beach. They had spent the afternoon swimming and had stopped into a local "burger joint" for a very "healthy" meal. They were laughing, joking and had obviously enjoyed the beach experience. I will treasure this memory.

Submitted by: Norah Toth



Turkey Tails at Robson Lakes Conservation Area. Sharply contrasting concentric zones of colour are characteristic of these fungi found on dead hardwoods.

Credit: Brian Robin



Joe Johnson Writes A Benchmark for the Botany on the Bruce



This past season ended a 40 plus year immersion into the natural resources of the Bruce Peninsula for Joe Johnson. Joe moved to the Bruce Peninsula in 1971, drawn by the botanical riches found here. As an ardent naturalist and contract field botanist who has been

lauded for his attention to detail, he developed an intimate knowledge of the Bruce by walking much of its length and breadth and diligently recording his many sightings.

I'm wondering if I first met Joe at the same meeting Peter Middleton did. It was at Red Bay Lodge and I believe it was a Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario workshop. Later, our paths crossed again when he worked as a park naturalist at Cyprus Lake Provincial Park and then yet again as Joe was often the go-to person for botanical inventories on provincially managed properties in Bruce County.

Joe has made significant contributions to many citizen science and natural history projects over the years including the Ontario Nest Records Scheme, the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, Christmas Bird Counts, Forest Bird Monitoring Program, the Marsh Monitoring Program and a number of other projects. As a skilled naturalist, he has also been welcomed by field naturalist clubs and other groups as a field trip leader.

In my estimation, perhaps the greatest contribution Joe has made to the understanding of the natural resources in Grey and Bruce counties is found in the many technical reports he prepared or co-authored for provincial parks, conservation areas and areas of natural and scientific interest. And, while these reports were prepared for professionals or government officials, Joe's involvement with the Bruce /Grey Plant Committee brought his vast knowledge to members of the public like you and me.

Prior to Joe's return to Nova Scotia, he had the goal of

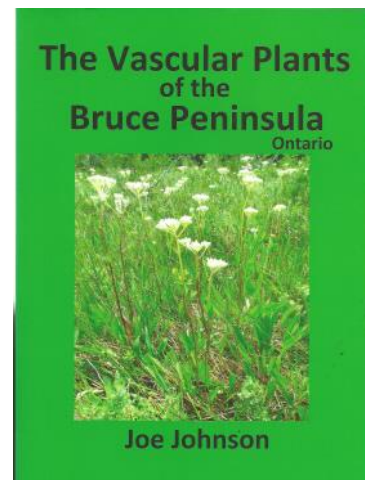
writing a book that would be a summary of over forty years of observations - *The Vascular Plants of the Bruce Peninsula*. This book is a testament to his dedicated devotion over more than 4 decades of observing and recording the diverse and special botanical riches of the Bruce, and includes as well, credible records from many other observers. It is not a field guide that you could use for identification purposes, but discusses each of the plants growing in the wild on the Bruce Peninsula, where they are found, their degree of occurrence, the habitat they are found in and often their flowering dates.

Mike Oldham, a botanist with the Natural Heritage Information Centre, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry stated: " This work will become the essential reference for anyone interested in plants on the Bruce Peninsula and an important reference for decades to come and a benchmark against which future changes will be measured."

Thank you, Joe, for contributing to the knowledge of the botanical history of the Bruce Peninsula in this unique manner.

The Vascular Plants of the Bruce Peninsula authored by Joe Johnson is available at the Ginger Press and other local bookstores or by contacting Bill Moses at billmosesos@gmail.com.

Submitted by: Norah Toth



Young Naturalists Update

Lead by Krista McKee, Community Relations Coordinator for Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA), the Young Naturalists Program (Young Nats) is a great opportunity for children to gain exposure to the natural world around them, and learn about the importance of protecting our natural environment.

There are 17 young naturalists registered for the 2016-2017 program, mostly between the ages of 7 and 12. In order to create a more family-oriented atmosphere, older and younger siblings are also welcome as are parents.

At our first meeting in September, the Young Nats were cleaning out the Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes along the trails at the GSCA administration centre. Unfortunately there were no bluebird nests to report. It was educational, however, for the kids to learn about the structure of the nests observed from tree swallows, wrens and chickadees who had occupied the boxes this past summer.

During a hike along the Sydenham River to the salmon spawning channels, the children learned about the life of salmon and the importance of the spawning grounds to their life cycle. The salmon were working their way up river, which provided plenty of entertainment as the kids watched them splashing their way upstream to the spawning grounds.

During October's meeting we hiked from the GSCA administration center to the Sydenham Sportsmen's Fish Hatchery. There we were given a very informative tour of

the hatchery by Dennis Wiseman. Dennis explained the process of collecting fish eggs, how they are fertilized and how the hatchlings are raised until they are released into the wild. Dennis also conveyed the importance of raising the fish in the hatchery as this allows them a head start to ensure a healthy population survives in the wild.

At our November meeting, we will be touring a local blueberry farm in the Big Bay area. This sounds yummy!

Historically there is no meeting in December due to the holidays, but January will start us off with a winter activity such as snowshoeing at the Bognor Marsh.

Members of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists are encouraged to join the Young Nats on any of our outings. We appreciate your input or assistance as that helps us provide the best experience possible for the kids.

Submitted by: Elaine VanDenKieboom



The Sydenham Sportsmen's Weaver's Creek Fish Hatchery being explained to the Young Naturalists. Credit: Kate McLaren



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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.**

Sunday, February 26, 2017 1 p.m.

Snowshoe Nature Hike on the Bruce Peninsula

Andy Koshan will lead this snowshoe hike on the Bruce.

Location: TBA. **Register:** Andy Koshan, akoshan@yahoo.ca

Limit: 12

Saturday, March 4, 2017 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Who Made Those Tracks and Why? An Interpretive Late Winter Tracking Hike

This popular winter interpretive hike will be led by Jeff Kinchen.

Register: Jeff Kinchen, bognors.finest@gmail.com or 519-372-7499 **Limit:** 12

Monday, April 17, 2017 to Saturday, April 22, 2017

Earth Week—Updates about Earth Week hikes in e-Heralds.

Saturday, April 29, 2017, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Inglis Falls Arboretum & Propagation Area

Join Bill Moses for this perfect opportunity to see what's happening at the Arboretum. **Register:** Bill Moses, bill.mosesos@gmail.com **Limit:** 12

Mid-May, 2017 Date & Time TBA

Wildflower Walk at Old Baldy

Stew Hilts will conduct this walk along the trail at Old Baldy.

Register: Stew Hilts, shilts@uoguelph.ca or 519-986-1475 **Limit:** 12

Wednesday, May 17, 2017 6 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. (Sunset at 19:59)
Grassland Birding

Beth Anne will lead you across Farmer's Fields in former Sarawak Township (Church Road & Grey Road 1) to discover grassland birds. **Register:** Beth Anne Currie, bethannecurrie@sympatico.ca or 519-376-7237 **Limit:** 10

Sunday, June 11, 2017 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Field & Forest Birds of the Blue Mountains

Loree Forest is located on the Bruce Trail and provides a variety of habitats. **Register:** Lynne Richardson, lynnerrichardson@rogers.com or 519-599-3618 **Limit:** 15

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.

January 12, 2017 Willy Waterton & Audrey Armstrong

ANTARCTICA, FALKLANDS AND SOUTH GEORGIA: A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPEDITION INTO SOUTHERN SPRING

Through the eyes of Willy's camera, you will experience whales, seals, albatross, penguins and icebergs! You will definitely feel like you are there!

February 9, 2017 Bob Gray

BPBO BIRDING TRIP TO NICARAGUA

In December 2015, 8 residents of Grey and Bruce Counties toured Nicaragua for 10 days. It was a birding tour hosted by the Bruce Peninsula Bird Observatory. Come and experience some of the sights and stories of this grand adventure.

March 9, 2017 Keith & Joni Reid

THE ALUS PROGRAM IN GREY & BRUCE

ALUS (Alternate Land Use Services) is a voluntary program that allows for community-led, farmer-delivered conservation initiatives. Keith and Joni of Grey Bruce ALUS will present about the history and development of the ALUS Program in Grey Bruce. Farming, Habitat and Wildlife as Partners!

April 13, 2017 Robert Burcher

CELEBRATE THE LEGACY OF JOHN MUIR

Robert will share the stories of Muir's time here in Grey County. He will evaluate the impact of his visions and their implementation, here and beyond.

Saturday April 22, 2017, 2 p.m. Alan MacEachern, PhD

CELEBRATE EARTH DAY & 150 YEARS IN 2017

Earth Day Keynote Address by Dr Alan MacEachern, Environmental Historian

Location – Royal Canadian Legion, 1450 2nd Ave W, Owen Sound

May 11, 2017 Lisa Grbinicek

NIAGARA ESCARPMENT COMMISSION DEVELOPMENTS

Here is an opportunity to learn about the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve designation and what it means to be a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Lisa will highlight some of the research and monitoring projects going on within the Biosphere Reserve.

June 8, 2017 6:00 p.m. SHARP ** Last meeting of the year**

ANNUAL POTLUCK SUPPER & PRESENTATION

Please note location – not at 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 to share, along with serving utensils.

Followed by -

Dr. Larry Peterson - University of Guelph

THE FASCINATING BIOLOGY OF ORCHIDS

There are over 800 genera and 25,000 species in the *Orchidaceae*. **Dr. Larry Peterson** will discuss features of orchid biology that have led to rapid speciation in the family. Topics will include pollination mechanisms, associations with beneficial fungi, adaptations to a wide range of terrestrial habitats and the success of this group as epiphytes. This amazing diversity in floral forms has led to a multi-million dollar horticultural industry. It has also resulted in many orchid species being poached from the wild. Because of this, and destruction of habitats, over 300 species are listed as endangered or threatened.

Celebrating Earth Day, Saturday April 22, 2017

2 p.m.

Keynote Address

The Dominion of Nature: Canadians' Attitudes and Actions toward the Environment, 1867-2017

Environmental Historian, Dr. Alan MacEachern

Location: Royal Canadian Legion, 1450 2nd Ave W, Owen Sound

Tickets are \$5.00 each and available at the Ginger Press in Owen Sound or at any Indoor Meeting.

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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.

We Welcome New Members

Duncan Appleford, Sheila & Kashter Austin, David & Dawn Bauman, Brock Bowen, Mark Brooks, Susan Comber-Dault, Rona Lynn & Brian Ferguson, Stephen Gile & Sandra J. Howe, Joseph & Susan Hardin, Ruth Anne Houston, Pam, Jeff & Aula Kinchen, Jean Koroway & Andrew Dinsmore, Diane Lawler & Jim Hastie, Lloyd Lewis, Shawna Macivor, Betty-Ann Methereel, Wendall Nadjiwon, Jerry & Nancy Primak, Carl Schwartzentruber, Jenna Skinner & Adam Carmichael, Laura Sparling, Lorraine Sutton & Robert Burcher, Marj Thomson, John, Gena & Jack VanDorp

Remember to pick up and drop off your name tag at the welcome desk.

Membership Application and Renewal Form

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone..... E-mail..... Check here if renewal.....

(your e-mail will be used for OSFN e-bulletin, last minute notices and digital receipt of the newsletter)

Membership Category: Single (\$25)..... Family (\$40)..... Student (\$15).....

Donation for Conservation Projects..... Donation to Conservation Trust Fund.....

For your ease and ours, pay on-line using our PayPal option at www.owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca

Or, return with cheque to: Owen Sound Field Naturalists, P.O. Box 401, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P7

By signing this form, I am agreeing that OSFN may contact me by phone or e-mail.....

We hereby confirm that e-mail and mail lists will not go beyond the OSFN. (See privacy policy at owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca)

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.

Please complete and detach this form. It should be submitted with your payment.

The Feeder on a Stormy Day

Doris Laird, December 2016

The Bluejay and the Mourning Dove
Share the dish, but not the love.
Hiding out there in the tree
Cardinal waits wistfully
The Junco, Finch and Sparrow dance,
Hop and skip to take a chance.
Hairy, Downy and Nuthatch sidle,
Ever moving; they're not idle.
Flit around and fancy free,
Flies the cheerful Chickadee.
Then Squirrel runs in to grab a snack...
The birds swoop out, then come right back.
Wind and snow and nasty weather
Make them all "Birds of a Feather",
Then when the stormy weather ends
They'll all forget they ate like friends!



Northern cardinal.

Photos courtesy Bonnie Patterson-Collins.



Keeping the feeders filled.

Birds like to be fed at different levels.

Table level: cardinals, finches and jays.

Ground level: mourning doves, sparrows and juncos.

Hanging feeders: goldfinches and chickadees.

Tree trunks: woodpeckers and nuthatches.



*American tree
sparrow.*



House sparrow.

Grey Bruce Bird Records Committee News

The Grey-Bruce Bird Records Committee recently received a report of a pair of northern bobwhite visiting a yard in rural Grey County. This record will be reviewed by the GBBRC at an upcoming meeting and will be the subject of a good discussion.

Northern bobwhite are at the northern limit of their distribution in southernmost Ontario and a sighting in Grey County will almost certainly be the result of an escapee from a game farm. Bobwhite are quite sedentary, don't range too far and don't migrate, so they don't generally arrive, as many rarities do, with the push of a strong south wind during spring migration. If you have a Checklist of the Birds of Grey-Bruce you will see that five species have no 'status' code marked beside them. This is because these species are either extirpated (spruce grouse, gray partridge), escapees (northern bobwhite, ring-necked pheasant) or extinct (passenger pigeon).



Male and Female northern bobwhite. Credit: Else Eggimann

Origin aside, these birds are an interesting sighting, and have provided great photographic opportunities as a bonus. The birds have been lucky to find a rural property that meets their natural habitat requirements. They have adapted to visiting the property owners' feeders regularly and reportedly also love to take a dust bath in one of their raised vegetable beds! On their own it is doubtful they could persist through a winter this far north but with this feeder food source available, with any luck the property owners may be treated to loud 'Bob-Bob WHITE' mating calls next spring.

Thanks go to the property owners for reporting these birds. The OSFN's Bird Records Committee greatly appreciates receiving reports and pictures of any unusual birds. You never know what wonderful rarity you may bring to birders' attention!

Submitted by: Lynne Richardson

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 February 15, 2017.

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Hospitality at Meetings

At each meeting, coffee and tea have been provided so that you have the chance to socialize. Audrey Armstrong will be job sharing with Norah Toth in 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.

Phragmites australis: Control It We Must



Bev Cloud from Kettle and Stony Point First Nation is photographed cutting invasive phragmites in a Lake Huron coastal wetland in August, 2015.

Repeated cutting, in sufficient water depths, will stress and eventually drown host plants. All cut material must be removed from the water to prevent further spread since roots and shoots can sprout from stem nodes in wet conditions. **Credit:** Janice Gilbert

such as birds, turtles, amphibians or snakes may nest in the outer edges of a phragmites stand, but the interior becomes a dead zone. This invasive plant has a strong negative impact on a large number of species at risk.

Phragmites australis (European Common Reed) was recognized in 2005 as Canada's worst invasive plant by scientists at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. An aggressive, quickly spreading, alien grass, it can reach heights of more than 5 metres and densities of over 200 plants per square metre. It prefers moist soils but will adapt to many conditions. Native plant species cannot compete against the alien phragmites (note that there is a native species, *Phragmites australis* var. *americanus*, that lives in harmony with other wetland plant species, but it too is no match for the non-native phragmites.) Wildlife

Phragmites colonizes new sites from its rhizomes, stolons and seeds (the latter are less of a problem but will take hold if they drop in high nutrient areas.) Humans are largely responsible for spreading phragmites throughout the province on contaminated heavy equipment and ATV use in vulnerable areas. There are no natural controls in North America. What's more, phragmites is allelopathic meaning its roots exude chemicals that are harmful to other plants. If left uncontrolled, it can develop into a dense mass that clogs drainage tiles and ditches, impeding water flow, causing flooding and reducing agricultural

crop yields. It can grow so tall and dense that cells become effective barriers along shorelines, preventing cottagers from enjoying their waterfront and decreasing property values. It blocks sight lines along roads creating safety hazards. During its dormant period, the standing dead biomass presents a significant fire hazard.

Learn to recognize this plant and do your part to control its spread. For smaller stands, establish a regular cutting regime and keep it up in perpetuity. Cutting should be done by pointing the spade right at the base of the plant. Start early in the season and do it often to stress the plants. Be aware that wildlife may be using the periphery of phragmites stands so that you



Once invasive phragmites becomes established, it can expand at an exponential rate. Parent plants send out stolons (visible in foreground of picture) or rhizomes (below-ground structures) from which new shoots emerge. These structures can be up to 40 metres in length with new shoots emerging every ~ 30 centimetres. Once mature, these plants in turn send out reproductive structures and the cycle of invasion continues. **Credit:** Janice Gilbert

Phragmites australis continued

don't accidentally harm them. Note that cutting must be done throughout the growing season, since growth is rapid even during hot dry periods. Cutting will not cause phragmites mortality but it may slow growth and reduce stand density and seed head development. The cut plants can be burned, composted at high temperatures or buried – but make sure you don't rebury any parts of the rhizomes.

For a larger area such as an infested ditch that requires heavy equipment, it is highly recommended that the phragmites stand be sprayed at least 3 weeks prior to undertaking the removal. Excavated phragmites material must be contained to ensure that seeds or other viable plant parts do not escape to colonize other areas en route to the disposal sites.

Sadly, the most effective way to control this out-of-control alien is through the use of specific herbicides. However, only Integrated Pest Management certified operators may apply herbicides in Ontario. For more information about which products to use and when to apply them, visit the Ontario Phragmites Working Group at www.opwg.ca. This information in this article came from two fact sheets produced by OPWG entitled Controlling *Phragmites australis* (European Common Reed) in Agricultural and Rural Areas and Smart Practices for Controlling Invasive Phragmites in Ontario's Roadside Ditches. Many thanks to wetland ecologist Dr. Janice Gilbert for her sobering talk about this invasive alien. She can be reached at janicegilbert@rogers.com or 519-875-1765.

Submitted by: Reenie Fedun

The start of a phragmites invasion in a bulrush marsh off Highway 26 near Woodford. Without human intervention this small invasion would take over the whole marsh in a few short years. Dennis Knight has removed the seed heads and dug up the roots in an ongoing effort to eradicate phragmites from the area. He will continue to monitor the stand and cut several times a year as the plants resurface. Credit: Dennis Knight



That Friggin' Phrag

In May of 2010, having just emerged victorious from a battle with periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) on a Nature Conservancy of Canada property in Chatsworth, I turned my attention to a patch of *Phragmites australis* var. *australis*. It was (and still is) just down the road from my house.

How did phragmites come to be there? Our municipality had "cleaned out the ditches" so that water would not back up onto the roadway. Almost surely their equipment carried bits of root from somewhere else and deposited them on bare moist soil resulting in phragmites being inadvertently planted in ideal conditions. A new colony was born.

So how am I dealing with it? I started by cutting down the old stalks with ordinary old-fashioned garden shears. Now I cut down new growth with a grass whipper. As other species of plants emerge, I try not to damage them by cutting only the part of the phragmites that sticks up above the other plants. I also snap off individual plants as low as possible by hand. I spend 15 or 20 minutes at a time keeping the space pruned and I feel that I am (very) slowly moving toward victory.

One common belief is that if you cut off a plant at the base, five more will take its place. Therefore, cutting off the plant only makes the problem worse. While it is true that there will be sprouting from the root system, I look at it this way: the root system is the real enemy. It gets its food from the aboveground portion of the plant. Every time you remove a plant (or leaves) you are depriving the root system of sustenance. All its stored energy then has to go towards producing new plants; with luck, there is no excess food that it can use to expand its area. As native plant competition flourishes, this also takes away sustenance from the plant. The real secret, as with any weed, is to realize that this will be a long-term (perhaps endless) battle.

This article was excerpted from one written for the summer 2015 issue of The Blazing Star, the quarterly newsletter of the North American Native Plant Society, www.nanps.org.

Submitted by: Bill Moses

The easiest way to distinguish the native *Phragmites australis* var. *americanus* is by noting the redness in the stem where it is directly exposed to the air and not covered by the leaf sheath towards the bottom of the plant. Unlike the alien, native phragmites coexists with other species such as red osier dogwood, marsh fern, pussy willow, safe-leaved willow, balsam poplar and spotted Joe Pye weed.



Taking the shot. **Credit:** Kate McLaren



Ducking the around the Sound with Fred Jazvac. **Credit:** Doug Van Den Kieboom



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Club News

Robson Lakes Conservation Area

Thanksgiving Sunday, October 9 2016

The morning began with inclement weather, windy and raining, not auspicious for an autumn ramble but it settled into a lovely day just as our group of 16 gathered. A flock of Sandhill Cranes flew over our heads interrupting Freeman's introductory remarks! It was a good thing that Freeman knew the way to this unmarked Conservation property, as it is easy to miss the access. The sideroad that leads to it is not suitable for cars, no matter what the maps may tell you. Also, in spite of the name, you don't actually see Robson Lake. (What is referred to as Robson Lake is actually a cluster of small lakes, much favoured by fishermen.)

The walking was easy over a wide path that took us through forests of varying maturity. Tree frogs were hiding in the leaf litter. Mushrooms were in abundance. Loads of different kinds of ferns and late blooming flowers delighted and challenged our skills at identification.

Is there a finer way to spend a Sunday afternoon than to take a leisurely walk surrounded by people with expertise in all kinds of natural history?

Thanks so much to Freeman for showing us this hidden gem!

Submitted by: Kate McLaren

In preparation for the Annual Meeting in June, the Nominating Committee is looking for board and committee members. If you are interested in leading club activities, please speak to John Dickson.



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Club News

Blueberry Delight!

About 15 people learned about growing blueberries with Sandy Pynn. He spoke about the soil and ph levels required by the plants and how to create that growing medium. He also explained propagation with cuttings or by germinating blueberry seeds. He made sure everyone understood how important peat moss, water, pine needles and pine bark are to getting the right ph level.



Sandy and his wife Lois offered everyone blueberry treats. We found out first hand how good blueberries are in cake, artisan loaf, jam and squares. We tried maple sap and a delicious soup with a wild turkey base. We also sampled Sandy's honey, blueberry juice, maple syrup, homemade blueberry ice cream and the adults were offered a sample of blueberry wine.

Submitted by: John Dickson

Photo Credit: Krista McKee



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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.



Orange Jelly Fungus or Witch's Butter is associated with dead pine trees. Credit: Brian Robin



Krista McKee showing what you find during the annual cleaning out of bluebird nesting boxes. Credit: Neil Kearns



These little brown mushrooms, Deadly Galerina, are not as innocent as they appear. They must not be eaten. Credit: Brian Robin