

Hart's Tongue Herald

The Newsletter of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists

Spring 2017

Box 401, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P7

Volume 30 Number 1

Website: owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca

Editor: Norah Toth



President's Report

Hart's Tongue Fern, *Asplenium scolopendrium* by its Latin name. (How I regret that Latin was removed from my high school curriculum just as I got there.) The Hart's Tongue Fern is found on limestone formations such as our own Niagara Escarpment but is rare in most of the world. In the early days of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists (OSFN) we adopted this rare fern to be our logo and renowned local artist George McLean created the design. I'm mentioning this in case you're new to the OSFN. Thirty-one new members joined us for the first time this year and I want to extend a warm welcome to you all! If you have questions or ideas, if you want to be involved in projects or if you have a passion to share with us please don't hesitate to get in touch with me or any other OSFN director. We're a grass roots organization. Pun intended!

Elaine Van Den Kieboom recently agreed to be on the OSFN Board of Directors. She has been very active with the Young Naturalists for several years as well as with the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA). She brings with her a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm: welcome aboard! Elaine collaborates with Krista McKee from GSCA to provide the Young Naturalists program. A big thank you to Krista for her participation and leadership. Parents and siblings of Young Nats often help out with the outdoor activities and they too are appreciated.

On that note, do you have an activity that would be fun for kids? Do you have a young family or know of children between 7 and 12 who'd enjoy being part of these activities? Please get in touch with anyone on the OSFN Board or call Krista at the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority office in Owen Sound, 519-376-3076.

A packed house at the January meeting was the perfect opportunity to celebrate someone whose contributions to the OSFN are literally too numerous to count. Peter Middleton was presented with an Honorary Life Membership in the OSFN. Such a well-deserved award for such a vital member of our organization from its inception. Among his many gifts is his passion for nature and how it fuels his capacity for teaching others of any age in any setting. Congratulations Peter!

OSFN director Dennis Knight has been working to collect and itemize the list of projects that OSFN has been an integral part of from our beginning. He has determined which have become obsolete, which remain "status quo" and which require active stewardship. He is seeking volunteers so if he asks you, please say yes! It was a long slog with government paperwork but our dauntless past-president John Dickson has obtained charitable status for the OSFN! Donations of \$20 and over are eligible for a tax receipt. John also made the first donation to the OSFN as an official charity. Thank you John.

After last year's dry summer, the lovely prolonged autumn, the roller-coaster winter, I wonder what spring will bring? Besides fiddleheads and peepers, blackflies and blossoms.....

Go outside!

Kate McLaren, President

We Welcome New Members Matthew & Roberta Cunliffe, Liz Head, Evelyn Holey, Bonnie Mills, Bonnie Paterson, Joanne Sarrasin & Jim Porteous, Carl Sadler

Cover: Can you spot these Snowy Owls seen from a back road in Bruce County?. **Credit:** Brian Robin

Christmas Bird Counts

Owen Sound Christmas Bird Count

The 46th Annual Owen Sound Christmas Bird Count, December 17, 2016.

The Owen Sound Christmas Bird Count began in 1971 and is conducted in a 12 km radius circle centered on the 10th Street Bridge. This year, 32 Volunteers, in 8 groups, walked 16 km and drove 852 km to produce the days results. 55 Species (10 year average is 57) and 7548 individual birds (10 year average is 7000) were counted.

Highlights for this year include:

14 Mute Swans – 9th year in a row on the count, numbers continue to grow.

12 Bald Eagles - count high, numbers continue to grow. Nesting swans and eagles are becoming a much more common sight in Grey-Bruce.

2 Great Black-backed Gulls – only the second year recorded in the last five. Much more common in the 90s, when for 15 years an average of 15 were recorded every year. Both the number and species of gulls counted declined dramatically when the Genoe landfill site closed in 2004.

12 Red-bellied Woodpeckers – count high. First sighted in 1991, they have been recorded 4 times in the next 12 years. Recorded every year since 2013, with numbers trending slowly up.

1 Tufted Titmouse – 1st ever! Species number 125 in the 46 years of the count.

Notable misses: Ruffed Grouse, first ever miss. In the first 30 years of the count, an average of 20 grouse were recorded every year. Since the introduction of the Wild Turkey, first recorded on the Owen Sound Count in 1999, the average has been 3. 266 turkeys were recorded this year.

Submitted by: Freeman Boyd

Wiarton Christmas Bird Count

The 43rd annual Wiarton Christmas Bird Count was held on Thursday, December 22, 2016. Nineteen field observers and two feeder watchers volunteered to count birds for the day. With the exception of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, virtually all lakes, ponds and shallow bays were covered in ice, and slower-moving sections of rivers and streams were frozen. Snow depth averaged 18 cm, quite a contrast from the ice- and snow-free conditions of 2015. Temperatures ranged between -0.3C and +2C under generally sunny skies, with light northwesterly winds throughout much of the day.

The species tally of 49 was slightly above the long-term average of 48. The 3,790 individual birds counted was above the 40-year

average of 3,395, but below the 10-year average of 4,253. The early arrival of winter this year no doubt contributed to the lower than normal numbers of individuals, especially of waterfowl.

Interesting observations included a Winter Wren, which has only been found twice before on the count, and 30 Bohemian Waxwings, a berry-eating bird of the Boreal forests that's been recorded on fewer than half of all the Wiarton counts. Even more unusual was the discovery of a hybrid goldeneye - Hooded Merganser duck at the mouth of the Sauble River. This hybrid combination has only been reported a few times in Ontario.

All-time high counts were recorded for the following species: Tundra Swan (4 counted), Sharp-shinned Hawk (4 counted) and American Crow (257 seen). After nearly being extirpated from much of North America due to the pesticide DDT, Bald Eagles have recovered in recent decades and continue to do well in the Wiarton area, with 16 (13 adults, 3 immatures) counted.

The count round-up was hosted by the Wiarton Inn, where volunteers enjoyed tasty food and good company. The compiler, Jarmo Jalava of Stratford, Ontario, thanks all the volunteers who contributed their time, effort and birding skills to this citizen science initiative, which has been ongoing in North America for more than a century, the longest of its kind in the world.

Submitted by: Jarmo Jalava

Meaford Christmas Bird Count

The 46th Meaford CBC was held on Wednesday December 28th in -3 to -1 temperatures, light winds, and cloud-covered skies. Snow cover had melted down to about 3 cm from a recent 12-15 cm. Georgian Bay waters were open, with no ice edge; but millponds, sewage ponds and other ponds were ice-covered.

With the mild weather, counting was steady, and a few lingering migrants bolstered the totals. Green-winged Teal and American Coot were recorded for the second time each. Eastern Bluebird was counted for the third time and Northern Flicker and American Robin, both recorded every few years, rounded out the 'summer' bird contributions.

The species total was a healthy 54 species; the third highest total over the last 25 years.

It is interesting to see that since 2006, this count, which formerly had a species average of 45 over its then 35-year history, has now increased, in the past 10 years, to totals usually over 50 species.

Christmas Bird Counts Continued....

No new species were added to the count list leaving the 45-year cumulative total at 120.

A total of 4649 individual birds were recorded. This is a little over the average numbers of the last 10 years. Three new highs were established, including one that shattered the previous record by 17!

Highs: Wild Turkey – 378 (199-05); Red-bellied Woodpecker – 9 (7); Golden-crowned Kinglet – 19 (2)

Ties for Highs: none

2nd Highest: Mallard – 220 (376 in 2015; the first 20 years of the count few Mallards were recorded and not every year); Downy Woodpecker – 2nd highest in 34 years; Hairy Woodpecker – 2nd highest in 25 years; White-breasted Nuthatch – 79 (81 in 1981); American Robin – 59 (160 in 1998)

Notables: Golden Eagle – 1 This is the 4th year in a row; 1st recorded 2001; counted 8 years since. A definite trend. White-winged Scoter – never recorded until 2004 – now recorded 6/12 past years. A bit of a trend.

Misses: Sharp-shinned Hawk; Great Black-backed Gull; American Kestrel

Count Week: Gadwall (1); Northern Pintail (2); Great Black-backed Gull (1)

Submitted by: Lynne Richardson

Tobermory Christmas Bird Count

Tobermory's annual Christmas Bird Count was held on December 14th, 2016. The day proved to be a challenge due to the weather, but the high winds mixed with snow squalls did not stop 40 participants from coming out and contributing to this ongoing citizen science project.

In the end, dedication persevered. 36 species were observed on count day plus an additional 7 species on count week. This is below the long-term average of 40 and 10-year average of 43. A

total of 1042 individuals were counted, which is also below the long-term average of 1658 and 10-year average of 1580.

An all-time low record was set for Common Goldeneye at 2 (average 49) and all-time high count for Red-bellied Woodpecker at 7 (average 1). Two new species were added to the count - Tundra Swan and Green-Winged Teal.

Submitted by: Tricia Stinnissen

Saugeen Shores Christmas Bird Count

The 13th Saugeen Shores Christmas Bird Count took place on January 4, 2017 with 26 people participating and 6 feeder watchers.

The weather was challenging and at the outset we determined to do a shortened day. This was a wise decision as throughout the morning we experienced white-out conditions, snow squalls, drifting snow and later in the afternoon, closed highways. The west wind had speeds from 25 to 60 kilometres. Snow depths were listed as 10 cm. Visibility ranged from fair to poor to nil. Lake Huron was wild with huge waves crashing into shore. Creeks and rivers inland were open to partially frozen.

We found an all time low of 2606 individual birds; however, despite the weather they represented 50 species which is slightly below average. Two species were new to the count. Tufted Titmouse were found at two separate feeder locations and an Iceland Gull was tallied. This brings the cumulative total for the count to 102 species. An Oregon Junco was photographed at a feeder. Purple Finch, Northern Shrike and Snowy Owl were count week species.

The challenging weather and the shortened day make it impossible to identify trends. Participants benefited from knowing the locations of bird feeders throughout the count area.

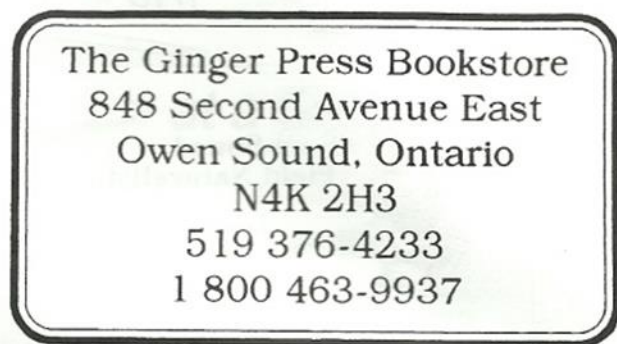
Thank you to all the participants, some of whom traveled a distance to help, who contributed their time, effort and skills. Thanks, as well, to each of them for braving the challenging weather and road conditions. Everyone made it home safely before dark.

Submitted by: Norah Toth

Cape Croker Christmas Bird Count

The sixth "official" Cape Croker Christmas Bird Count was held on Tuesday, January 3, 2017. The count is centred on Neyaashiinigmiing (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation).

Snow cover averaged about 15 cm, ponds were mostly frozen, streams were generally open, and Georgian Bay was largely ice-free. Temperatures hovered between +1C and +3C throughout the day, with generally very light (<10 kph) easterly winds, making it possible to hear the calls of distant birds. There was





Tufted Titmouse. **Credit:** Bob Taylor

some light rain overnight prior to the count and drizzle in the early morning, with very low cloud cover and patchy fog throughout the day, but conditions were generally very pleasant for birding.

The total number of individual birds observed (1,134) was very close to the average (1,157), and as was the species total of 40 (average 41). Two new species were recorded for the count,

Sharp-shinned Hawk and Iceland Gull. High tallies were recorded for Bufflehead (44, previous high 39), Wild Turkey (53, previous 32), American Crow (15, previous 9), Black-capped Chickadee (329, previous 236), American Robin (2, previous 1), Northern Cardinal (12, previous 11), and Purple Finch (8, previous 6). No all-time lows were recorded for species that have been recorded on all five previous counts.

Miptoon (Anthony) Chegahno is thanked for organizing the count, Rhonda of Cozy Cats B&B is thanked for preparing the spectacular annual pre- and post-count feasts, the many volunteer bird-counters are thanked for their efforts and enthusiasm, and the Chippewas of Nawash community is thanked for once again being so welcoming and hosting this very special count.

Submitted by: Jarmo Jalava

Summaries of all Christmas Bird Counts can be found at; <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/Historical/ResultsByCount.aspx#>



Piping Plovers Need YOU!

The Piping Plover Committee of Stewardship Grey Bruce and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry have met to discuss the 2017 season. It is our joint desire to work in partnership and to ensure some success for this endangered species at Sauble Beach as well as a positive experience

for volunteers.

The Piping Plover Committee is searching for a Volunteer Coordinator. This person needs to have an interest in birds and in people. Information is available at www.ploverlovers.com/coordinator

We will also be looking for volunteers who can commit to a minimum of 6 shifts on the beach. Beach visitors are very interested in learning about and observing the plovers and we are able to provide you with the tools needed to make it a fun experience.

There is nothing more rewarding than following the story of each bird on the beach and seeing the faces of the beach goers as they get excited about these wee birds.

As a naturalist organization, the OSFN should be a good repository of volunteers. It has not been for the last several years. Please talk to either Lynne Richardson, lynnerrichardson@rogers.com or Norah Toth, ntoth@rogers.com to discuss what is holding you back. It may be something that is easily solved.

Check out our website at www.ploverlovers.com

Submitted by: Norah Toth



The club has made a \$2000 donation from the Lorraine Brown Conservation Fund to the Friends of Hibou Interpretive Signage Project. We are also supporting this project by helping to write the signs and brochures for the Hibou Conservation Area, its trails and boardwalks.

Conservation and Stewardship Report

Over the past year, your Board of Directors has been researching and compiling information on the many conservation and land stewardship projects that our club has been involved with over the years. This has been done to preserve this important history of our club. It will become an integral part of our archived materials kept at Grey Roots.

Equally important, was a determined effort to ensure that all of our ongoing conservation projects are being properly monitored so as to ensure that our past commitments to these projects, whether it has been donated monies, "boots on the ground" labour or, more likely, a combination of both, are well protected and perhaps even improved upon, as time passes.

In mid 2016, in addition to compiling as many past records as could be located, we committed to writing a detailed operating manual. This will cover important details needed to follow to ensure that our past investments in these projects are not lost. Further, this program will ensure that our continued involvement in each project is properly recorded for future reference. Some of the many aspects of this program include: semi annual onsite inspections and annual written status reports, maintenance requirement reports, arranging organized Nature outings to study flora and fauna, and so forth. Further, it is hoped that our group of Land Stewards and Conservation Project Managers will form the basis of an ad hoc conservation committee to explore opportunities for other local conservation projects to

participate in. These are all volunteer positions and, while most project volunteer positions have now been filled, we would still like to fill a couple of more positions.

Interested in learning more? Want to become one of our volunteers? Then we invite you to get in touch with Dennis Knight, Director Conservation Projects dennisknight@rogers.com, 519 538-4729.

Submitted by: Dennis Knight



The interpretive signs along the Hibou trail system are a stewardship project of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists. Credit: Dennis Knight



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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 newsletter@owensoundfieldnaturalists.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 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

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

Tuesday, May 9, 2017 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

Friday, May 12, 2017 9:00 a.m.

Spring Bounty—the Birds, Bees & Everything in Between—A quest for spring wonders with Esme Batten and Miptoon (Anthony) Chegahno. **Register:** Esme Batten, 613-612-9085 Esme.Batten@natureconservancy.ca **Limit:** 12

Wednesday, May 17, 2017 6 p.m. – 7:15 p.m.

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, lynnerichardson@rogers.com or 519-599-3618 **Limit:** 15

Wednesday, June 14, 2017 11:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Butterflies of Bognor Marsh—**Register:** Chris Rickard, crickard@sympatico.ca (705)444-6671 **Limit:** 12

Friday, June 23, 2017 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Saugeen Valley Lookout – A Tour of Nels Maher and John Weir's Fern Garden and 40 Acre Naturalized Property with Jean Maher and Brian Maher. **Register:** Brian Maher, Brian_Maher@manulife.com or 519-373-2477 **Limit:** 20

Check www.owensoundfieldnaturalists.ca for more details, rain dates and age suggestions.

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 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

You will learn about the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve designation and what it means to be a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Lisa will highlight some 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. Over 300 species are listed as endangered or threatened.

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 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 and submit it with your payment.

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, Sheila Gunby's Paper Art Creations at the Owen Sound Farmers' Market, or at Indoor Meetings. Proceeds will be used to support OSFN youth programs.

This event is open to people of all ages. Youth are encouraged to attend.

Dr. MacEachern will have publications available for purchase.

There will be complimentary refreshments, with tea and coffee, plus a cash bar.

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The Dominion of Nature:

Canadians' Attitudes & Actions toward the Environment, 1867-2017



Dr. Alan MacEachern

At the time of Confederation in 1867, what did Canadians think of “nature” in this new nation? How have our ideas about nature evolved over the past century and a half – in part because we have had access to so much of it? Alan MacEachern, Professor at the University of Western Ontario, will present this lively, visual history in honour of Earth Day and Canada’s sesquicentennial.

A dedicated historian, Dr. MacEachern will bring history to life, sharing his enthusiasm and deep understanding of the connections between past, present and future.

After the resounding success of our 2016 event, we have invited Dr. Alan MacEachern, an award-winning Environmental Historian and Professor, to help us Celebrate Earth Day and Canada 150. Dr. MacEachern, originally from Prince Edward Island, is an acknowledged Carson Fellow at the Rachel Carson Centre for Environment and Society. He has written several critically acclaimed books and many essays. He is also currently published in the press. He has edited others on topics as far ranging as the Phoenix Response (a rebuilding from the

ashes of a natural disaster); the development of national parks and their supporting policies; and phenology – the cyclical history of weather, plant and animal life and their related impacts on society. He has an interest in climate change and new opportunities for study of these phenomena, and has presented upon its impact on entire population patterns of species. Dr. MacEachern has also been a fellow panelist with Bob McDonald of the CBC's Quirks and Quarks.

While in Owen Sound, the OSFN has arranged for Dr. MacEachern to speak to local high school students on Friday April 21.

Be sure to watch the website for other Earth Day and Earth Week events sponsored by Caframo.

Submitted by: John Dickson

Young Naturalist, Erik Van Den Kieboom spoke about his experiences at the Ontario Nature Youth Summit at one of our recent indoor meetings.

Credit: Dennis Knight



Young Naturalists Update

The Young Naturalists Program headed up by Krista McKee, Community Relations Coordinator for Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, 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 7-12 but older and younger siblings are also welcome as are the parents, in order to create a more family oriented atmosphere.

Our latest meeting on January 29, 2017 had the Young Nat's snowshoeing down the trails and around boardwalks of the Bognor Marsh. There were numerous tracks of various animals to see, and we were happy to see that Ducks Unlimited had replaced the stop logs in the dam allowing the water level in the marsh to rise again.



Checking out the hot chocolate. **Credit:** John Dickson

After the hike everyone enjoyed a bonfire, thanks to Doug and Erik's skills. We all enjoyed the delicious hot chocolate and homemade bannock cooked on a stick. February's meeting is planned for the 26th when we will be snowshoeing the trails of the Pottawatomi Conservation Area. Hopefully fresh wildlife tracks will be visible for us to see.

For the March meeting, we always strive to have some sort of Maple Syrup orientated event, but it is always dependant on the conditions and timing of the flow of the Maple sap. Details of this meeting will be available at a later date and may result in an event with short notice. April's meeting will involve hiking the trail from the GSCA administration office up to Inglis Falls to visit the two dams

and then a tour of the Inglis Falls Filtration Plant on April 30th.

Our last meeting of the year will be on May 28 when we will be heading to the Bognor Marsh to see spring come alive in the marsh. We hope to see turtles, frogs, snakes and the variety of birds and waterfowl that occupy the marsh for the summer. Thanks go to Grey Sauble Conservation Area staff, and Ducks Unlimited that maintain and keep this marsh accessible for everyone to experience.

We encourage any members of the Owen Sound Field Naturalists to join us on any of our outings and we appreciate any input or assistance from the OSFN members, so we can provide the best experience possible for the kids.

Submitted by: Elaine Van Den Kieboom



Young naturalists snowshoeing at Bognor Marsh. **Credit:** John Dickson



Club News

Winter Wonderland Excursion

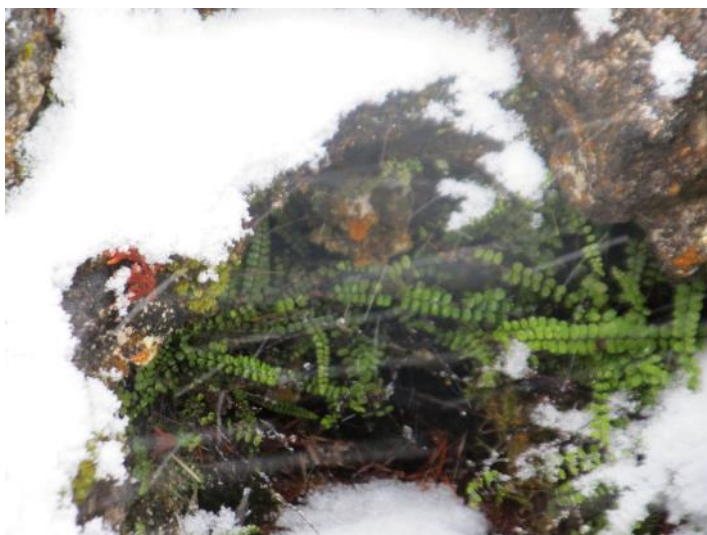
On January 27, Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC) staff member, Esme Batten, led a nature hike at a NCC property on the Bruce Peninsula. Her extensive knowledge about flora and fauna, also extended to the geology of the area.



Bob Rice, Duncan Appleford, Erik Van Den Kieboom and Esme Batten.

Credit: Bob Knapp

One highlight of the session was Esme's detailed description of karst. Karst topography can be defined as a landscape formed from the dissolution of limestone or dolomite. It typically has underground drainage systems with sinkholes and caves—this describes the Bruce Peninsula. Within this special landform she pointed out another geological feature, a gryke which is a large crack in



Maidenhair Spleenwort. Credit: John Dickson

the rock caused by the movement of water through the limestone rock. Grykes can be anywhere from a foot or so deep to over 10 feet deep depending on the amount of water moving through the limestone.

Grykes provide the perfect home to lime loving fern species (otherwise referred to as calciphiles) such as Maidenhair Spleenwort and Green Spleenwort. These ferns thrive in low light conditions with constant moisture and good drainage. This micro climate below the rocky surface did not fail to impress with its vibrant specimens of the Maidenhair Spleenwort.

Submitted by: John Dickson

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, 2017.

foto art

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and tripods*

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.

SIGNS OF STRESS IN OWLS

By Christian Artuso (Used with permission)

I am going to share a few pointers based on my observations made over the years on signs of stress that owls may reveal. Please note that it is hard to interpret what an owl is doing from a single photo so do not take these pointers as absolutes; they need to be used in trying to assess the whole picture as much as possible. Context is often key. The intention here is to get people to think about looking for behavioural clues when they are lucky enough to observe an owl in the wild. Furthermore, there are some situations where the observer is not the cause of stress as a few of the following examples will show. I have tried to talk about the features one by one below, but also remember to look for the combination of different clues and overall behaviour.

VOCAL CLUES:

You can learn a lot about an owl by listening to their song and calls. Owls of course signal to each other and other animals vocally. Owls have a repertoire of calls, in addition to their “song” (song is used in territorial defense and advertising and is what we humans hear most often). Imagine a situation where a nest predator such as a raccoon is approaching the cavity nest of an Eastern Screech-Owl – obviously a stressful situation. The screech-owls will make a few single-note calls at the first sign of danger (quite unlike their A-song or B-song). These may proceed to a series of 3, 4 or 5 single notes, often on a descending pitch: oooh-oooh-oooh-oooh. I have sometimes seen human observers ignore these subtle and soft calls. I even once had to intervene when a nonchalant dog walker was about to be whacked in the head. If the danger persists, the single note calls will sound increasingly agitated and start to sound more like a bark. Barks may be accompanied by whinny calls and aggressive rattle calls, especially as the owl switches from a defensive to an aggressive position. Some owls give a very cat-like call as well. If the perceived intrusion persists, the screech-owl starts clacking its bill and shortly after may strike or dive-bomb the intruder. If you notice any vocal behaviour along the graduated scale, and if you suspect that you are the perceived intruder, then back off sooner rather than later. If you hear bill clacking, you’re already at the high alert stage.

VISUAL CLUES:

1) The Eastern Screech-Owl (Winnipeg, Manitoba) in this photo is highly stressed. Before you read on, take a

moment to look at the photo for any clues. This bird is in the situation I described above – a raccoon approaching their nest. At this point, the male has signaled to the female with a few single note calls and she has come off the nest. About 5 minutes later, in what looked to me like a coordinated attack, the male flew in front of the raccoon and then the female whacked the raccoon on the back of the head with her talons—a bold and risky manoeuvre that may have saved the lives of their 5 nestlings. I know



Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

this owl is stressed from the context but there are a couple of visual clues in the photo too. Note the fairly stiff and erect posture of this owl with the ear tufts close to fully extended (not complete because this is fairly early on in the proceedings – I put my camera away after this so I could observe). This is sometimes called the “tall thin posture” and owls use it in a variety of contexts including as a way to make themselves look less visible to

a potential threat but also in direct response to some threats. If you are observing an owl and notice the body posture change to become more elongated (“tall and thin”) then I would suggest you back up and give the owl more space. On species with ear-tufts like this, the position of the ear-tufts is an added clue. The tall thin posture doesn’t always mean the same thing but you should be on the look out for it.

2) This roosting Eastern Screech-Owl (Winnipeg, Manitoba) is also in the tall thin posture. This bird is trying to avoid detection by some noisy pedestrians on a popular suburban trail. You can see how stretched the body looks and even though the ear-tufts are partially hidden, you can also see that they are raised. This owl is using another trick too – “squinting”. Squinting refers to the practice of almost closing the eyelids so that the owl’s eyes are barely visible but still permitting the owl to see. This seems to be most prevalent in species with yellow eyes (perhaps because yellow is an obvious break from their otherwise brown/grey colouration) but it is not exclusive to those species. It is presumed that this behaviour is an attempt to

Continued: SIGNS OF STRESS IN OWLS



Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

avoid detection by a potential threat. This is subtly different from having the eyes closed (owls are certainly not opposed to closing their eyes for a daytime snooze). If you see an owl with open eyes and notice that the eyes appear to be closing or squinting then the owl has seen you. It is wisest to give the owl some space. Never risk scaring an owl from a roost site in the day as this costs

them energy and may expose them to mobbing. This may make them vulnerable (especially small owls).



Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

I backed up. In fact I backed up a fair distance and retraced my route to avoid causing the owl to move. This owl's head has turned 180 degrees and once again you can see the raised rictal bristles. This told me immediately that I had startled the owl. I was lucky on this occasion as the owl didn't leave the perch and seemed to settle back down once I had backed away.



Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

3) This female Great Gray Owl is highly agitated by an intrusion near their nest site that she perceives as a threat to her chicks (Great Gray Owls on

the nest must be vigilant for black bear, ravens and other threats). Great Gray Owls don't have ear-tufts but you can see one key sign of stress in this bird. Look closely at the rictal bristles (the long thin feathers at the base of the bill). These feathers normally fall over the nostrils to protect them from dust but they are raised here leaving the nostrils clearly visible. This clue may be subtle and is not always easy to see under field conditions, but it is a key indicator! If you see this behaviour, back off immediately! An owl in this state of alert may seem to be "frozen" and may remain motionless for quite a long period but never mistake that lack of action for tolerance—this owl is not happy and could even choose to attack.

4) I was walking on a narrow trail in eastern Manitoba when I came around a sharp bend and surprised this Great Gray Owl perched on a fairly low branch above the trail. We were both surprised as we found ourselves suddenly face to face. Since I had my camera in my hands I took this photo (two versions: first full and then heavily cropped) as



Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

5) Though some may assume otherwise, this Boreal Owl in southeastern Manitoba (photo heavily cropped) is actually not stressed. The rictal bristles are relaxed on this bird and the posture is "normal" (the owl's leaning forward has to do with focusing here and is not a sign of aggression in this case). Basically, this bird is hunting—listening and looking at a chickadee in fact. A few minutes after I took this photo, this owl flew out and tried to capture that chickadee but failed. A Boreal Owl would not normally attempt to catch a chickadee in daylight so this bird must have been fairly hungry to attempt it.



Boreal Owl (*Nyctalex borealis*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

The posture of this owl shows intense focus. The owl is

Continued: SIGNS OF STRESS IN OWLS

leaning forward and positioning their facial disk in order to best pinpoint their target. In this case the owl was following the chickadee visually but owls also frequently move their head to facilitate pinpointing sound acoustically (especially those species with asymmetrical ears).

6) This Snowy Owl (*Nubo* (Oak Hammock Marsh, Manitoba) is stressed and it isn't hard to figure out that the cause of this stress is aerial—a Peregrine Falcon to be precise (probably stressful for most birds). In the case, because the threat is from above, the posture is very revealing. The Snowy Owl appears recoiled like a snake before striking... any animal that recoils defensively in this way is usually getting prepared to turn defence into attack. This Snowy is prepared to do a full back flip, talons pointed skyward, to ward off the stoop of the falcon. Snowies are of course a *Bubos* species and very closely related to the Great Horned Owl. They have relictual ear-tufts which even show occasionally in these types of circumstances (other round-headed owls can also raise the feathers on their head or raise the top of the facial disk). You won't see this same posture in response to an intruder on the ground but there are still a few clues to look for such as the raised mantle feathers. Notice this Snowy Owl's "fluffed" feathers and how the wings are held slightly away from the body. This can be a sign of a defensive posture

and a way that the owl attempts to make themselves look bigger to the intruder. Look also at the eye of this bird - - the constricted pupils could be another sign of this type of aggressive posturing (stress can cause pupils to constrict, dilate or "flash" between the two). When you see this type



Snowy Owl (*Nubo*), Manitoba, Canada, © Christian Artuso

of combination, take it as a clear signal to back off. If you see these signs you know that something is bothering the owl.

Looking for the combination of the above postures and vocalizations may help you in your observations. Thank you for your time and patience and thank you for being observant and considering the best interests of the birds you observe!

Written by: Christian Artuso (Used with permission)

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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People who have been OSFN members for ten years or more are eligible for consideration for life membership if they fill **one or more** of the following criteria: 1. He or she has made a major contribution to the study of the natural world either through their career or through their hobby and interests. 2. He or she has made a major contribution in education about the natural world, either as a particularly dedicated school teacher or adult educator, or through being active in organizing the activities of the Young Naturalists club or similar organizations for ten years or more. 3. He or she has made a major contribution to the OSFN, either through a high degree of participation in OSFN projects or by being a member of the Executive for 15 years or more. 4. He or she has made a major contribution to the protection and preservation of natural areas in Grey and Bruce Counties.

Peter Middleton received an Honorary Life Membership on June 9, 2016. The recognition plaque stated the following:

In recognition of your many contributions to the OSFN over the years: leading numerous club outings; giving indoor presentations to the club; working on projects including Purple Martin houses, boardwalks, SwiftWatch and others; serving on the OSFN Board; serving as OSFN President; representing the OSFN on many Committees; and in recognition of your numerous other natural history activities in Grey-Bruce and beyond, which have inspired so many with a greater appreciation and understanding of birds, conservation and our natural heritage. Thank You!



Peter Middleton receiving his Honorary Life Membership from Ellen Hull and John Dickson.

Credit: Dennis Knight



Box 401, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5P7



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.



*Oregon Junco wintering in Bruce County. **Credit:** Bob Taylor*



Bear claw marks on a Beech tree observed during Tyler Miller's event at the Lindsay Tract. **Credit:** John Dickson



*Northern Pintail seen during the Ducking Around the Bay Club activity. **Credit:** Erik Van Den Kieboom*