

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

## JUNE 2016







## The beauty of a June day

### *From the editor:*

June, I think, is one of the nicest months of the year. It is the month in the Northern Hemisphere that has the most daylight hours. It is the month of the **Summer Solstice**, occurring in North Bay this year on June 20 at 6:34 p.m. This is the precise moment the sun reaches its northernmost position and does not move, but stands still over the Tropic of Cancer before reversing its direction and moving south. The word solstice is from the Latin *sol* meaning sun and *sistere* meaning to come to a standstill. The photo above was taken by me on the Summer Solstice on June 20, 2008, at Champlain Park, just before 9 p.m.

Although we think of the Summer Solstice as being the first day of summer, it is actually the first day of the astronomical summer. As far as seasons go, it is more like midsummer, although where we live it does not necessarily feel as if it is. And although we think that on the Summer Solstice the sun rises earlier and sets later than any other day, the earliest sunrise actually happens a few days before and the latest sunset, a few days after.

June is also a month of other celebrations, among them:

**Canadian Rivers Day** is held annually on the second Sunday of June, **June 12** this year. The day promotes the importance of the health of our rivers and the importance of rivers in

our heritage. Take a nature walk or ride your bike along one of our rivers, or take a canoe ride, on that day.

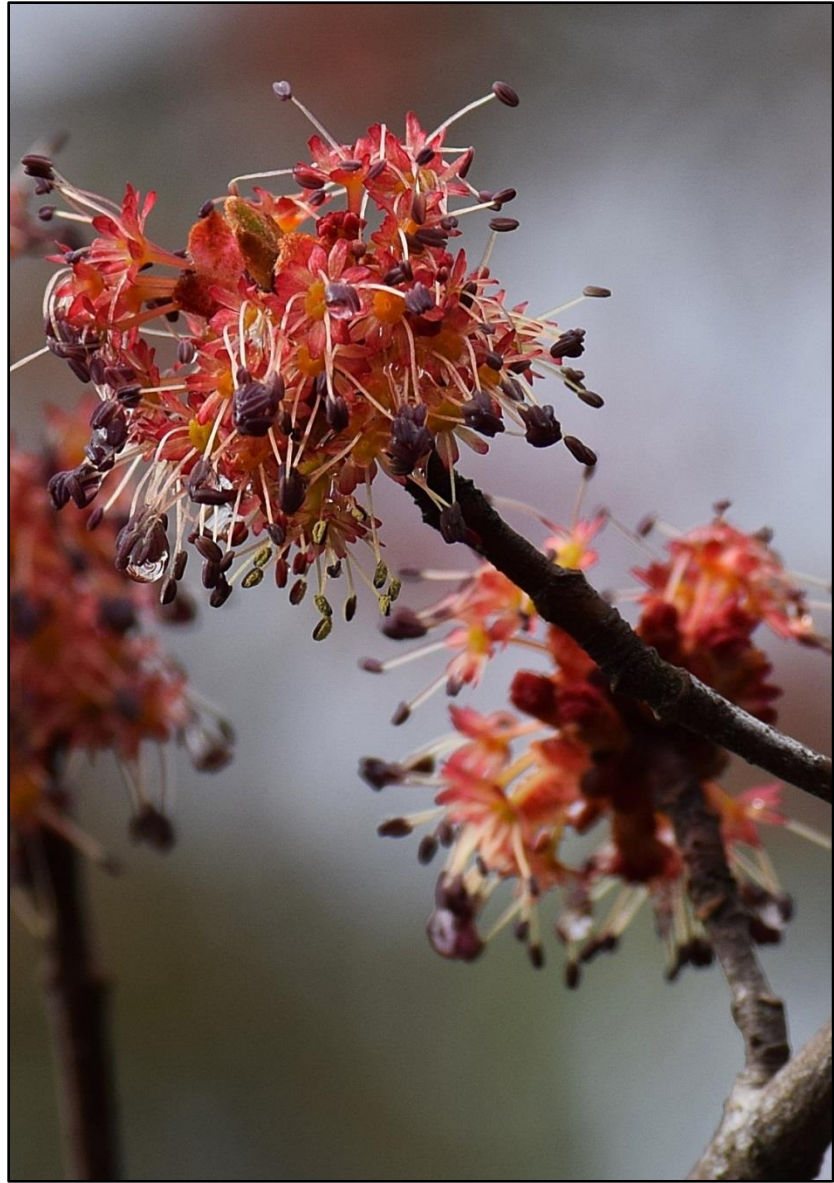
And **Bicycle Month** is from **May 25 to June 25**, an appropriate time to feature Part 1 of Paul Smylie's bicycle trip to the Arctic Circle. It takes the reader back to Paul's early bicycle trips and the first part of his trip last summer from Whitehorse to Dawson City along the Klondike Highway. Part 2, from Dawson City to Inuvik along the Dempster Highway, will be featured in July's edition. June is also an appropriate time to feature Paul's article, because around the Summer Solstice, the midnight sun is visible for a full 24 hours from 97 km. south of the Arctic Circle to the North Pole, weather permitting.

Also featured in this edition is Larry Dyke's presentation last month at our May meeting, his time in the Okavango Valley in Botswana and Canada's counterpart, the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

There is a delightful follow-up photo and short narrative on Bev Kingdon's Carolina Wrens, erroneously referred to by me as House Wrens in May's edition, but since corrected. Try and get out on **June 15** to hear Bev talk about Trumpeter Swans. Details can be found in this newsletter under *Other Events*.

In early May, Steve Pitt represented Nipissing Naturalists Club at the *Forest of Reading*, Canada's largest recreational reading program celebrating Canadian authors and illustrators. Steve gave us an account of that event, and Rebecca Geauvreau and Sarah Wheelan, an account of the bat monitoring project now underway.

The Laurier Woods guided May walks took place every Saturday throughout May, three bird walks led by Dick Tafel, and one wildflower walk led by Lori Beckerton. We saw the maple in flower (above), followed by its golden-hued leaves before turning green (see top of next page); we saw the blossoms of the Saskatoon Berry in great profusion come and go; and we went from hearing and seeing a few birds to many.







The guided walks in Laurier Woods now take place once monthly, the first Saturday of each month throughout the summer and into the fall. Those walks, up to and including August's, are listed in this newsletter under *Walks in Laurier Woods*. However, for Nipissing Naturalists Club outings you will need to refer to our website because I am not aware which outings have been confirmed.

Be sure to come out to our meeting on June 14 to hear Mike McIntosh tell us how to understand bears so we can learn to coexist with them.

The final profiles of the Board members, two not yet featured, will hopefully be in July's issue. There will be a July issue this year, although it will perhaps be a less lengthy version. There will be no August edition.

*Renee Levesque*





# The bicycle ride of a lifetime

## (Part 1)

*Dempster Highway, photo by Paul Smylie*

*By Paul Smylie*

### 1. The Apprenticeship

The image of the back of a bicycle loaded with the requisite cycle-touring gear and heading down a long expanse of lonely-looking dirt road that fades into the horizon never left my mind. It was the fall of 1985. I was studying biology at the University of Guelph and I was surrounded by like-minded early-twenties students who were full of youthful vigour and a sense of adventure.

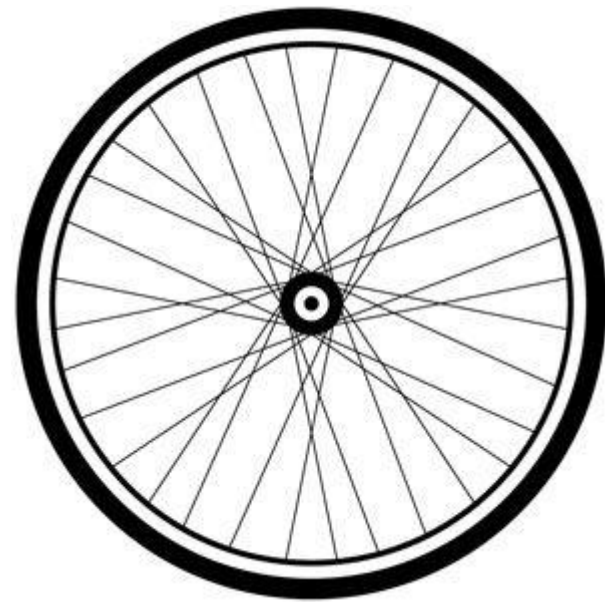
I had picked up an issue of *Equinox: The Magazine of Canadian Discovery*, and came across an article about the recently-opened Dempster Highway, the only all-weather road in Canada to cross the Arctic Circle, bringing the promise of opportunity to Canada's far north. I decided then and there that one day I would ride my bicycle along that highway, the 740 km from Dawson City to Inuvik in the Mackenzie Delta. I didn't know when I might have the opportunity to do



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this, but the decision was locked in the safe deposit box of my young mind to be investigated one day later in life.

My first cycling trip was around the Cabot Trail with my younger brother when we had just turned 23 and 20. A good friend of mine had recently completed the trek and her tales of the rugged beauty piqued my interest in a big way. I had recently bought myself a decent quality entry-level racing bicycle and had been logging what I felt were some pretty good quality training miles and was thinking that a trip by bicycle around the East Coast would be a nice way to finish off my summer after slugging asphalt for a local paving company and before returning to university.



To my surprise, my brother, Clark, agreed that he'd like to do the trip with me. The ride around the Cabot Trail was everything we expected it to be – beautiful scenery, great weather, friendly people and memories that have lasted a lifetime. And then there were the hills, mountains more like it. In fact, to this day, I don't think I've climbed worse. We're talking a solid hour uphill, in the lowest gear possible, standing up to get as much pressure on the pedal with each stroke as we could muster. But for every uphill there's a downhill, and on the Cabot Trail, you make sure your brakes are working before starting down those long-winding descents. We were hooked. There was no better way to travel than in the open air under your own steam. Despite the fact that my brother's entire training regimen for the trip consisted of a ride from North Bay to Callander and back, his natural athleticism let him ride right along at an even pace with me, the guy who spent all summer killing himself in preparation for the trip!

That first cycling trip was to be the start of a life-long passion for touring by bicycle. Our next trip was in 1988, an eleven-day ride through the Rockies from Calgary to Vancouver when I was in my physical prime. Although the hills were long and tough, they were still no match for the Cabot Trail ascents.

We spent a week touring through the beautiful countryside of the Laurentians in Quebec one summer, a more leisurely ride where the emphasis was more on sampling that French delicacy, poutine, of which there was plenty opportunity to do so. I'm sure we gained weight on that ride.

I spent close to six weeks riding around the South Island of New Zealand in the fall of 1989, a trip that reminded me of the Travelling Minstrels story from my youth where I ended up cycling in a group of four who were from faraway parts of the planet. I encountered the only hill ever that I couldn't ascend by pedal power, the Haast Pass, the height of land between the east and west sides of the South Island.

My brother Clark has always been my go-to guy for a cycling partner. However, our last ride together up the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland and then across the province to beautiful



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St. John's in July of 2001 was a tipping point for him. We were no less than lucky for the first few days of that ride. After we had battled the hills of Gros Morne, the wind literally blew us up the Northern Peninsula to St. Anthony - a wind so strong, if we'd been going against it, we would have had to abort the ride. We waited three days in St. Anthony before we could get a bus to Deer Lake to complete our ride to St. John's, a ride along the Trans-Canada Highway that was a little dull and very wet. During our 16-day Newfoundland trip, we encountered rain 12 of those days, most of them as we biked across the province from Deer Lake to St. John's.

With Newfoundland done, there was still another ride - the dirty, dusty, unpredictable Dempster stewing away in that cauldron in the basement of my mind, waiting for the flavor to peak.

## 2. The Dream

The years passed, and I have to admit, after Newfoundland, I wasn't all that anxious to get back on a pannier-loaded bike just yet. But it was still there. And maybe it was an awareness of starting down the far side of the middle-aged hump, or maybe I was finally forgetting the rain of Newfoundland, but whatever the reason, the Dempster once again crept up on me.

Clark was now off the list as a potential cycling pal, so it was time to do some recruiting. Finding someone you feel comfortable spending two to three weeks with, who has the desire, the time and the money, not to mention some level of fitness, was not that easy. I had a few takers but talk is cheap, and adventures always sound more appealing when fuelled by a pint or two at the local pub. Over time, it became apparent that if I really wanted to complete one of my life goals, I would have to consider doing it alone. I had ridden alone for a few days in New Zealand and for a few days in the Rockies after Clark had to abort the ride due to an aggravated Achilles tendon, but I had never ridden alone in an area as remote as I was planning. There was one serious potential partner by the name of Frank that serendipity would connect me with along the way; however, when I finally made my decision to do the ride, it was too late to contact Frank. More on that later.

For me, the most difficult part of doing anything is making the decision to do it. After the decision is made, the rest is just leg-work. Last May, I finally decided to do the ride on my own and had about two months to prepare for the trip. I planned to do it after the bugs had subsided as they can make or break the experience. The other consideration was to ride while the weather was still warm enough and anticipated rainfall was relatively low. A few nights of shivering





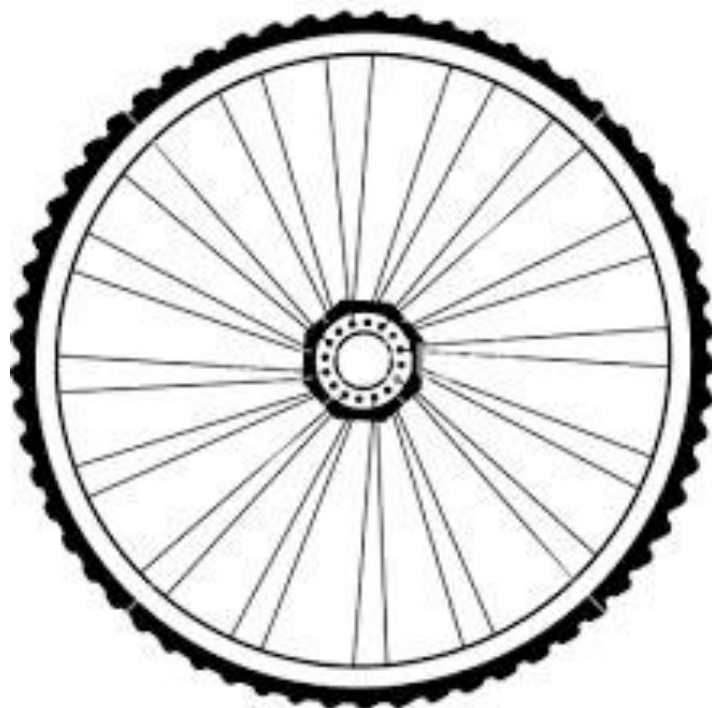
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while riding through the Rockies in late August those many years ago was a warning that I could experience some cold nights on the Dempster, which is quite a bit further north than the Rockies.

Since I would be riding a dirt road with a surface that could range from chunks of tire-shredding slate to loose gravel and thick, impassable-by-bike mud, my first notion was to ride a mountain bike. However, as intrepid as I may appear, I am not the first to bicycle the Dempster Highway and fortunately those who had were kind enough to share their experiences online. After some research, I decided that the most logical choice of bike would be a ten-speed style, with a wide range of gears and a mid-size well-treaded tire. I bought myself a brand new Devinci Tosca Cyclocross bike, and from that point on, I was committed. Once I booked the tickets to Whitehorse via Vancouver, I knew there was no turning back.

I spent the next two months looking at the route. I decided I would ride from Whitehorse to Dawson, spend a few days in Dawson and then start up the Dempster. It soon became apparent that I would probably be able to stay in campgrounds along the way and, on the odd occasion, in a motel if I needed to. This set my mind at ease because I have to admit I had some trepidation at the idea of camping alone in the middle of nowhere in what is best described as Grizzly country. Although I knew rationally that the likelihood of a bear encounter was very unlikely, I still wondered just how well I would be able to relax alone out in the wilds of the Yukon without the security of at least some indication of human civilization nearby. I spoke to a friend who had done the ride a number of years ago and she had not seen any bears. This was typical of others who had written blogs about their experience on the Dempster.

Having done a number of trips in the past, I had most of the gear I needed – panniers, racks, mirror, bike pump, spare bolts for the racks, adjustable wrench, Allen keys, spoke wrench, chain lube, water bottles, and the bug jacket just in case. It took a few days of sun-washing on the clothesline to get the mouldy hockey equipment smell out of my panniers so that their odour would be tolerable for the ride. I tried to anticipate anything that could go wrong or make me uncomfortable on the trip and I felt as if I had most of my bases covered – which turned out to be the case because I encountered very few mishaps along the way. I had extra bungee cords for securing camping gear; zip ties, duct tape and Gorilla Glue for repairs; and Ziploc bags which proved to be invaluable for compartmentalizing food and gadgets, as well as keeping things dry. A sharp knife is always a must, so I made sure I had three, and cord always comes in handy for lashing and making a clothesline.





*Whitehorse, photo by Sonje Bols*

I've kept up a pretty steady fitness regimen since my teens and usually log an average of 40 to 80 miles of cycle training per week, interspersed with running, weights and swimming. I did ramp up the cycling for the Dempster ride because I knew it was probably going to take some effort riding on gravel. I disassembled my bike and stuffed it into a box as per the airline requirements, and threw in some of my gear as well so I wouldn't have as much to check. There was nothing left to do now except grab my cycling shorts and helmet and make my way to Whitehorse.

I was very fortunate to have a friend working and living in Whitehorse. Her bubbly personality and generosity as she picked me up at the airport and took me around Whitehorse to purchase a few last supplies made for a wonderful introduction to the Yukon. There is a certain flavour to the start of every new adventure, and this time the flavour was sweet. I find that it's not the visual or physical aspects that we remember about a new experience, but the feeling that is connected to the experience that stays with us. After picking up bear bangers and bear spray at a local sporting goods store (understandably these items could not be brought with me on the flight), we enjoyed a wonderful dinner at one of the local restaurants with a Caribbean theme, the juxtaposition of which was not lost on me.

### **3. From Whitehorse to Dawson City**

It's always most pleasant to start any adventure with a good night's sleep and I was grateful to wake up well-rested to a cool, sunny morning in Whitehorse. I was eager to get on the road, so I unpacked my bicycle and within an hour had the bike back in one piece with panniers loaded. I slipped into the mandatory padded black cycling shorts and jumped on my bike to take a little tour around Whitehorse before I started my journey northwards. Whitehorse is a picturesque city, surrounded by mountains, big enough to have all the amenities you'd ever need, but small enough to have that friendly northern charm. After a quick stop at a local bike shop for a tool I was missing, I stopped in at one of the local downtown cafés for a couple of cups of joe to get



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psyched up for the job ahead. The clientele struck me as mostly fit, young to middle-age adventurous types, just what I expected to see in the Yukon.

My initiation for my Yukon adventure started with a two-mile uphill slog to get out of Whitehorse and onto the Klondike Highway that would lead me 536 km to Dawson where the Dempster Highway begins. The road was paved and in reasonably good shape between Whitehorse and Dawson. Even though the highway lacked a shoulder, traffic was light enough that I always felt safe, and if I needed to, my knobby tires allowed me to veer off onto the gravel. The first day's ride was largely uneventful, the weather was pleasant, high teens to low twenties, and it was not far along the way that I was standing on the marge of the lake made famous by Robert Service, Lake Lebarge. I did give some thought to what the shimmering blue surface of that lake must look like in mid-winter when Sam McGee made his final plea for warmth.



*There are strange things done in the midnight sun  
By the men who toil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.*

I finished my first day on the bike at Fox Lake after a modest 75 km. As any camper knows, getting a fire going without some way of breaking wood into small enough pieces to encourage a flame can be a chore without the proper tools. I chose not to bring an axe or hatchet with me in an effort to keep my load as light as possible. The couple camped beside me in their very comfortable looking house-on-wheels took pity on me and asked if I'd be interested in using their axe to make some kindling. I eagerly accepted their offer and promptly took a large swath of skin off my thumb. The first piece of firewood I attempted to split spun around on me pulling just enough skin off to expose the many thousands of sensitive pain receptors that lie just beneath the protective layer of skin. It would almost heal by the time I finished the trip.

I was greeted the next morning by another friendly couple offering what can only be described as one of the most memorable cups of coffee I've ever enjoyed. Peter Reeves and his wife, Joanne, were from a small town near Rosport, Ontario, between Wawa and Thunder Bay. Because I had worked in the area the previous summer, it was fun to find out we knew people in common. Six degrees of Kevin Bacon, whom I keep being told I look like. Joanne and Peter shared part of their mammoth-sized cinnamon bun which I was told I could look forward to finding about twenty miles up the road in a little community named Braeburn. Twenty miles of riding usually



*Klondike River, photo by Paul Smylie*

signifies time to get off the bike and stretch my legs, so after saying my farewells to Peter and Joanne, this would put me right in giant-sized, exquisitely delicious, cinnamon bun territory. But when I got there, I opted for bacon and eggs instead!

Over the next few days, I settled into the ride, averaging around 100 km a day. This is long enough to feel as if you've put in a good day in the saddle, but not long enough to make you so weary at the end of the day that you have no energy left to set up camp and put a meal together. My days were dictated primarily by the location of places to camp. This provided me with a destination so I knew how many miles I had left to go. After a few days on the bike, I noticed my legs starting to get a little weary. I don't recall many flat areas, so I expect it was the hills that took their toll on my legs. Hills can be deceiving and it's only when your speed starts to increase without any extra effort that you realize that you've just ended a steady but gradual uphill grade for miles. It can work the other way too. My last day into Dawson, I rode 100 miles in high 20s temperature with what didn't seem to be that much of an effort. Only when the Klondike River converged with the highway and I realized that I'd been riding with the flow, did I know that I'd been riding with a downhill advantage all day. My first stop in Dawson was a convenience store where I bought a bottle of Coke and bathed in the guilt-free pleasure as that



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entire litre of throat-prickling, caramel-flavoured liquid rushed down my esophagus, finding its way to each and every one of my tiny cells to imbibe them with much-needed liquid and calories.

The ride to Dawson went about as well as it could have gone. It took five days and I was able to stay in a campground each night. One would almost think that the campground locations were planned with bicycle tourists in mind. I was blessed with great weather with only a light sprinkle of rain for a couple of hours as I left Carmacks on my third day of riding – an opportunity to test my shiny new chartreuse rain coat. Wildlife along the route was sparse, unless you count the Arctic Ground Squirrels of which the distinctive high-pitched *sik sik* warning call became commonplace as they dove into their road-side burrows. I took a quick break at Five Finger Rapids where I had a chat with another traveller who had just seen two Black Bears along the road in the direction I was travelling. I kept my eye out for them, but wasn't lucky enough to see them.



Confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers overlooking Dawson City, photo by Paul Smylie

One of the more poignant memories I have of the ride from Whitehorse to Dawson was on the morning of the last leg of that ride. I had camped for the night at Moose Creek Campground and in the morning when I tried to fire up my camp stove, the pump mechanism broke. As luck would have it, I had passed Moose Creek Lodge about two km before the campground. I recall that there was a restaurant there, so it was a good excuse to start the day with that most Canadian

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way of breaking the fast, bacon and eggs. As I was sitting there thoroughly enjoying my meal, as I did all meals on the trip, I noticed an older gentleman come shuffling in. My first thought was that this fellow had to be 80 years young if he was a day. My next thought was, “Is that cycling gear he’s wearing?” He was looking at me as if he wanted to say something – after all, my black spandex shorts and famished look was probably a dead giveaway that I was the owner of the only bicycle parked outside the restaurant.

The gentleman slowly made his way over to me and in a slow, soft-spoken voice, asked if I was the fellow on the bike. After I told him I was, he asked me where I was headed and I told him I was planning to cycle up the Dempster Highway. He introduced himself as Dan, and to my great surprise, he told me he was planning to do the same thing, that he had started riding it two years earlier, but had to abort the ride as the highway got washed out. He was now about to complete the ride, to finish his goal of riding to the furthest points in Canada by road in all four cardinal directions, south, east, west, and finally north. This was a moment of great inspiration to me, to see someone who despite the hardships nature had burdened him with, continued to pursue a life-long dream. He had been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease a couple of years earlier, but continued to ride. This to me is what it means to live. This past winter, months after my trip, I caught just a few words of Stuart Mclean on CBC talking about an older gentleman pursuing a lifelong dream. I immediately knew about whom he was talking - it was Dan McGuire, the soft-spoken fellow I had met at Moose Creek Lodge. He had made it up the Dempster, completing the northern leg of his dream!

A trip to the Yukon would be incomplete without spending some time soaking in the Klondike charm of Dawson City. This was a great place to let my aching legs recover, and it took the full three days in Dawson before I felt ready to do any serious time on the bike. I have to admit, I also took a little time to recover from the lovely Yukon Brewing products I sampled. Although the days of the Klondike Gold Rush are long over, the sentiment of the era hangs heavy in the air more than a hundred years later. Efforts have been made to keep the memory of the feverish days of the gold rush of 1896 alive. The roads are still unpaved and the sidewalks are raised boardwalks. To complete the charm, there is the nightly can-can show at Diamond Tooth Gerties Gambling Hall, a favourite hang-out for the local restaurant workers to congregate after a long day on their feet and to mingle with the tourists from all parts of the planet.

Dawson in mid-summer was bustling with activity and friendly faces wherever I went. It seems to be the hub of Yukon social life in the summer during those long days when you can walk out of a pub at midnight and realize that lights are not a requirement to make your way back to your campsite. My stay in Dawson lived up to all of my expectations. After three days of fun, my legs had recovered, I was rested, and now it was time to tackle the Dempster Highway!







# The continuing story of the wrens and the wreath

*Text and photo by Bev Kingdon*

On May 5, the first Carolina Wren was born, followed by four more on May 8. There was a fifth egg, but it did not hatch.

The nest is in the wreath which hangs on the small garage door beside the front door to our home. Mother Carolina sees us come and go from the house and garage and just watches us. When we sit out at the front of the house with Penny, our dog, she flits in a circle around us and then flies directly into the nest, but while I was taking this photograph, the male was above my head in the tree, scolding at the top of his lungs.

It was the most amazing month to be living with this little family, just pure pleasure!



## Forest of Reading celebrates authors

*By Steve Pitt*

On May 7, I had the honour of representing Nipissing Naturalists Club at a *Forest of Reading* celebration held in the East Ferris Community Centre and Arena in Astorville. The *Forest of Reading* is Canada's largest recreational reading program celebrating Canadian authors and illustrators. The Nipissing Naturalists Club was asked to participate because of our recent efforts to create an historic plaque in memory of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence (right), local ornithologist, author of seven critically acclaimed books and winner of three writing awards.

I had come prepared with a display and a short PowerPoint presentation. The first part of the presentation informed the audience about who the Nipissing Naturalists are and what they do. The second part outlined the remarkable life and achievements of de Kiriline Lawrence, from her arrival in the Near North as a Red Cross Outpost Nurse in the 1920s to her five decade long evolution into a world-respected naturalist and writer.

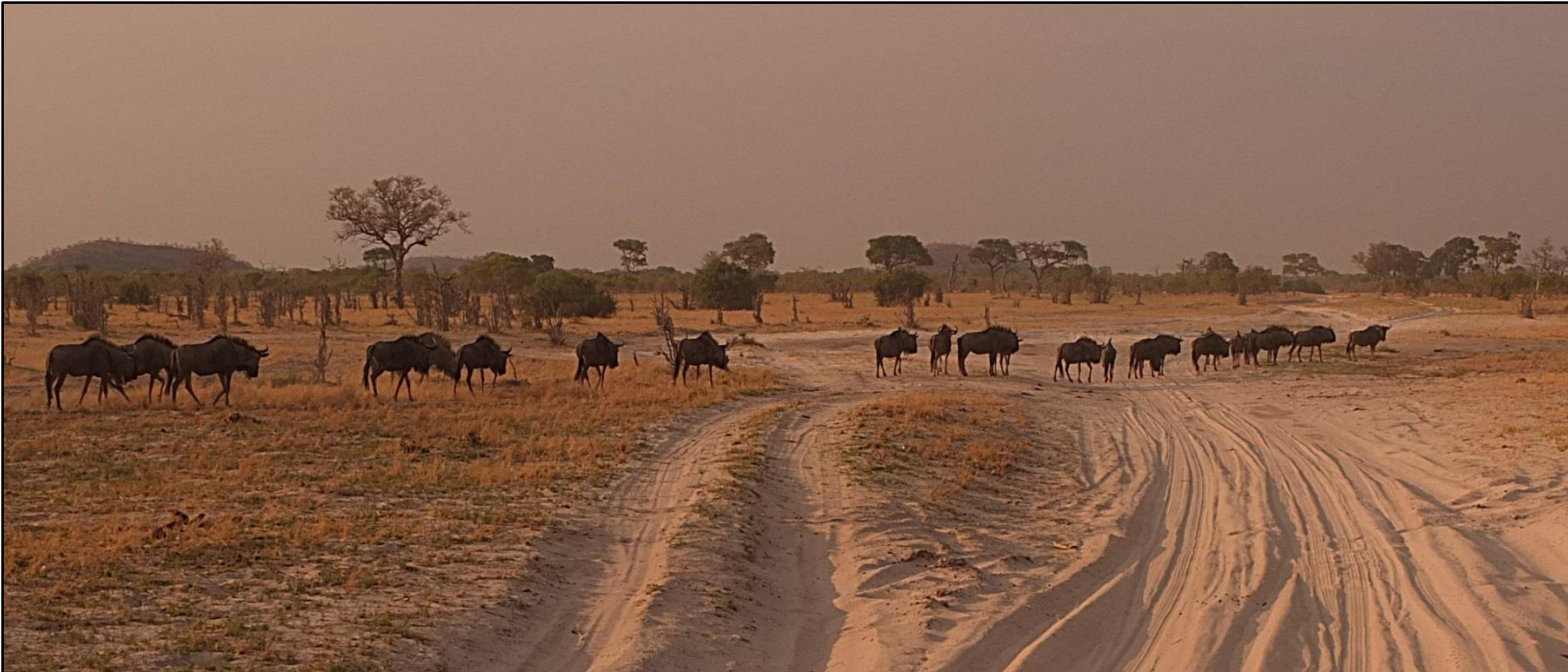


At least fifty people stopped by the display over the three-hour session. I was even lucky enough to meet Nancy Dewar Stenning whose mother, as a young girl, was a patient of Nurse De Kiriline. Like many rural Canadian children living in the Great Depression, Ms. Stenning's mother suffered from rickets when she was a young girl and Nurse de Kiriline used her Red Cross car to transport her to a doctor for treatment.

Many of the people who stopped by picked up a Nipissing Naturalists Club information sheet that was available as part of the display. We may see some new faces at one of our regular meetings or at the upcoming Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival this August.

*Editor's Note: Steve Pitt, Nipissing Naturalists Club member, is a writer, author and cook. Check out his website at: <http://www.stevepitt.ca/>.*





# Okavango: A spectacle and a privilege

*Text and photos by Larry Dyke, retired geologist, Geological Survey of Canada*

In the ten days spent travelling across the northwest corner of Botswana in September 2015, I saw more wildlife than during my entire career as a geologist in northern Canada. The trip was such a spectacle and privilege that I have felt compelled to tell people about it. Speaking to the Nipissing Naturalists Club was the ideal opportunity.

The trip focused on the Okavango Delta, which, as a geologist, I recognized as an enormous alluvial fan. It is a wetland fed by a river rising far to the northwest in the humid equatorial forests of Angola. This river flows out of Angola, across a thin finger of Namibia and into Botswana where it encounters the very southern extent of the East African Rift. The Rift is a plate tectonics feature acting to draw Africa apart and has produced a series of down-dropped valleys extending from Ethiopia to Botswana. The river that feeds the fan has, in fact, in-filled the southern-most valley or trough of the Rift. The fan is like a very, very gently sloping half-cone, formed as sediment filled in the trough. The slope is imperceptible yet consistent, allowing the annual flood to cover an enormous area, up to about 20,000 square km. This wetland, in an otherwise almost bone-dry region, is the attraction for all wildlife.

A yearly flood inundates the Okavango Delta, taking about five





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months to travel from the head of the delta to the downstream fringe. The two aerial photos below show the difference in water levels between the dry season in September 2015 and the wet season in April 2016.



Those interested in more background on what may be a unique environment should read Lauren van der Post's *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. Much of the story concerns his attempts, 70 years ago, to make contact with the Bushman by travelling through the hippo and crocodile populated lagoons and channels of the Okavango. Nowadays, the region has become a mecca for wildlife viewers, with good reason. Lions, cheetah, elephants, giraffes, wildebeest, water buffalo, kudu, lechwe, warthogs, zebras, hyenas, as well as a wealth of birdlife, are all to be seen.

In Canada, the vast herds of bison disappeared over 100 years ago. We still have caribou herds numbering into the tens of thousands, but they are hard to locate. Nevertheless, flat-lying carbonate rocks that flank the Canadian Shield to form the Hudson Bay lowlands on the east and the wetlands adjacent to a string of large lakes on the west have created refugia for these creatures. The thick peat of the Hudson Bay lowlands serves as denning habitat for polar bear mothers and the wind-swept peatland surface provides winter forage for caribou. The Peace-Athabasca Delta retains the last sizable bison herds and countless migratory birds. In their own way, these features are our North American counterparts to the Okavango Delta.

*Editor's Note: For those planning to go to Botswana, Larry recommends Penduka Safaris, a family operation that has been in business since the 1960s and whose guides are particularly respectful of the creatures and the environment.*

*Photos of Okavango Delta wildlife are by Larry, supplemented by a photo of a zebra from neighbouring South Africa by Renee Levesque, are featured on the next page.*







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## Club's bat monitoring project underway

*By Rebecca Geauvreau and Sarah Wheelan*

We have a least one Little Brown resident in one of our four-chambered bat houses!

On May 6, Rebecca Geauvreau led a small group attending the Ontario Nature Northern Regional Meeting to monitor the known maternal roost and some of the surrounding area. Little Brown and Eastern Red Bats were picked up on the acoustic monitoring equipment, and a peek inside one of the four-chambered houses revealed a single Little Brown in residence. If you have any bats in residence (in your bat house or elsewhere), we'd like to hear about it and, if possible, make arrangements to see who has moved in. Please contact Rebecca at: [rgeauvreau@gmail.com](mailto:rgeauvreau@gmail.com).

Before White Nose Syndrome (WNS) started spreading across North America in 2006 (see photo at right), bat populations were stable and of no particular concern. WNS was first reported in local bat populations in 2010.

With mortality rates estimated in the range of 90-100% for some bats species, such as the Little Brown Myotis, it has become critical to establish population estimates and relative abundance at the landscape (large) and local (smaller) scales.

For this reason, Nipissing Naturalists Club has received approval for funding from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) to conduct a bat monitoring project.

The project involves two parts: setting up and monitoring long-term *bat squares* using the [North American Bat Monitoring Program \(NABat\) protocol](#); and continued monitoring of a known Little Brown Myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*) maternity colony.



### **Part A: Setup and Monitoring of a Bat Square**

A bat square has been mapped out in the McConnell Lake area. The area was chosen because of its proximity; its variety of habitats; its reasonable ease of access; and it meets the NABat protocol. Monitoring involves passive deployments of bat recorders and two driving transects during the passive deployment period.



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## Passive Monitoring

For the passive monitoring of bats within the bat square, four recorders are deployed – one in each quadrant of the square. The recorders are deployed in four different and representative habitats for the square (e.g. wetland, utility corridors, etc.) and where it's expected to maximize the number and quality of recordings.

Eight possible locations were chosen based on imagery available, but the deployment locations are entirely flexible and can be refined in the field. An attempt was made to balance habitats where deployment is possible and reasonably accessible by vehicle or foot.

## Active Monitoring

The route identified on the map represents a 25-km driving transect that transects the bat square and meets other requirements of the NABat protocol. During the passive recorder deployment period, this route is driven twice, at low speed (about 32 km/h) with a bat recorder / microphone mounted on the roof of the vehicle.

## Field Visits by Volunteers

The field component of our bat monitoring project is conducted by interested volunteers who attended a preliminary training session on May 26 at FRi Ecological Services prior to deployment of the bat recorders. The project was designed to minimize the number of trips required. The equipment is set up and retrieved during daylight hours. In addition to the added safety of performing this task during daylight, this provides an opportunity to take photographs of the surrounding habitats for reporting and presentation purposes.

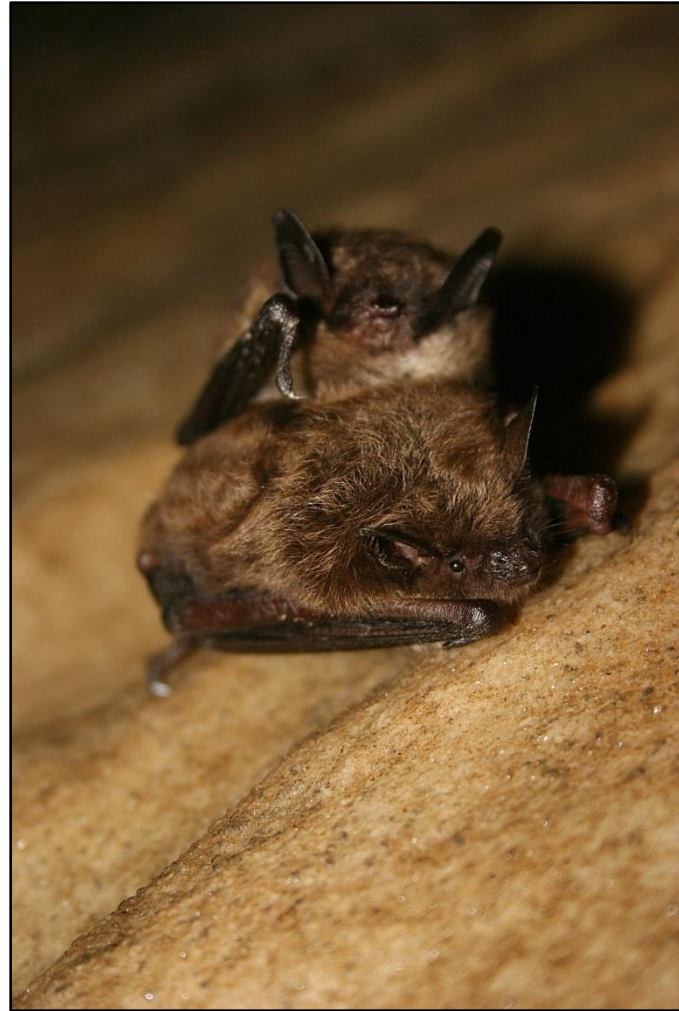
## Deployment / Monitoring Schedule:

Field Visit 1: Deploy passive recorders – daylight visit, first week of June.

Field Visit 2: Active monitoring route – evening visit, approximately one week after deployment.

Field Visit 3: Active monitoring route – evening visit during the same week as Field Visit 2 – both driving transects completed in the same week.

Field Visit 4: Retrieve passive recorders – daylight visit, end of June



*Healthy Little Brown*

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Recognizing that the field component is entirely supported by volunteer efforts, we seek to minimize the number of trips required. However, given the remote location and necessity of monitoring bats at night, additional day trips may be required to deploy and take down the bat recorders unless it can be done safely at night.

Driving transects are done during fair weather conditions with little to no rain and a temperature of at least 10°C.

## Part B: Maternity Colony Monitoring

There is a known Little Brown maternity colony on private property that in 2015 was home to more than 150 adult bats. Nipissing Naturalists Club has been monitoring this colony for the past two years. In addition to counting the number of bats seen exiting the structure, there has been active acoustic monitoring. This site, or a similar site in the area, will continue to be monitored.

Typically, two field visits are performed, one before the pups are pre-volant or incapable of flying, and the second, once the pups are post-volant or capable of flying.

Field Visit 1: second week of June

Field Visit 2: second week of July

By conducting this project, Nipissing Naturalists Club is contributing to the continent-wide program, the North American Bat Monitoring Program, in an effort to provide reliable data to promote effective conservation decision-making and long-term viability of bat populations across the continent.



**Bat cluster**

*Editor's note: The project is led by Rebecca Geauvreau, Species at Risk Biologist with FRI Ecological Services, and Nipissing Naturalists Club member. Photos are courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

*For more information on bats, see Steph Romaniuk's article, "Going to bat for bats" in the January 2016 issue of **The Woodland Observer**: <http://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.*



## May Bird Walks in Laurier Woods

*By Renee Levesque*

**Saturday, May 7:**



The brilliant sunshine earlier in the week was not to be for the first May birding walk in Laurier Woods, led by Dick Tafel. But the overcast weather did not deter the spirits of the 15 or so participants, many of whom were not birders but were keen to learn. In fact, one new birder, board member Sarah Wheelan, was delighted to add a Red-winged Blackbird and a Yellow-rumped Warbler (below, right) to her previous list of less than ten birds she could positively identify. We all start out able to identify only a few birds and I don't think we ever forget our first sighting of each new species and our delight in making a positive identification.

The birders in the group had hoped for more warblers, but we saw at least half a dozen Yellow-rumps, a Black and White, a Palm, a couple of Pine, and one person saw a Chestnut-sided. For those not familiar with warblers, it was somewhat of a difficult task to get a good view of them in the overcast light as they moved about at a rapid rate in the upper canopy of the trees catching insects. As someone said, "They look like black sticks at the top of tall black trees." If it weren't for Dick showing photos of the warblers on his iPod, it's doubtful the new to birding would have believed just how pretty and colourful they are. Warblers are not easy, not even for long-time birders – and we didn't even tell the new birders that some birds can look very different in non-breeding plumage and that females often look quite different from the males. If birding and bird watching were easy, it would not be an exciting and interesting hobby.



*Photos by Renee Levesque*



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*Photo by Renee Levesque*

There were some other highlights: hearing the ethereal song of the Hermit Thrush; watching a little Black-capped Chickadee at our feet taking hair to build its nest (above); seeing a few Purple Trilliums in bloom and a honeysuckle budding; admiring the flower of the maple; and seeing six Painted Turtles basking on a log, much as in Paul Smylie's painting. Other wildlife seen were a Beaver, a Snowshoe Hare still with white feet and a White-tailed Deer.

Dick, as judge, awarded a prize, our *Seasonal Checklist of the Birds of North Bay and Area*, to the person who determined what bird proved the most interesting. Janet Jackson, who said the Nashville Warbler, was the winner. None of us objected. It is a small, pretty warbler with its white eye ring and yellow throat, breast and belly.



*Photo by Kaye Edmonds*



# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

**Saturday, May 14:**



*Photo by Kaye Edmonds*

Once again, there was no brilliant sunshine, but lots of steady rain. In fact, the rain did not stop for the entire walk nor for the entire day! Yet nine intrepid birders gathered in the parking lot and did the two-hour hike without complaint. We were cold and soaked through by the end of the hike, but we had a lot of fun and a lot of laughs. What was even more amazing was that most of the participants were not birders, but again they were keen to learn even in the rain and without binoculars which made the warblers even harder to see clearly. Without binoculars, most just had to take our word for it that the Blackburnian (right) with its brilliant orange throat is a beauty and not just a black stick at the top of a black tree as someone said last week. And maybe even more amazing was that one of the women was celebrating her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday with a walk with her friends in the rain and the cold!

Sarah added even more species to her growing list – Common Grackle, and four warblers: Black and White, Nashville, Chestnut-sided and American Redstart (see top of next page). Everyone got a great view of the flamboyant male American Redstart, with splashes of brilliant orange against its black body. Perhaps a better name would have been Canadian Orangestart!



*Photo by Renee Levesque*

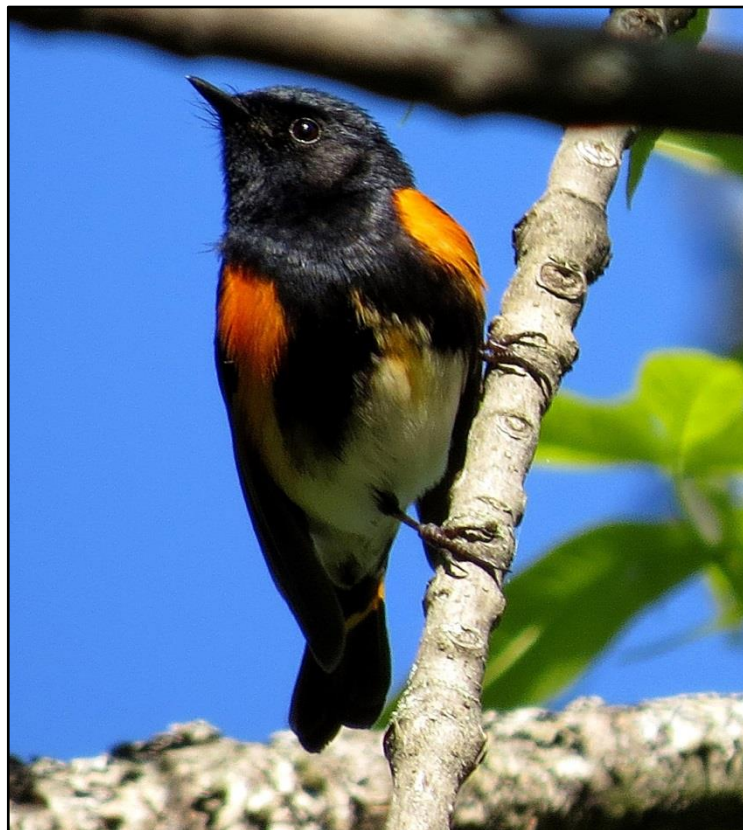


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Other birds seen included White-crowned sparrows which were migrating through on their way north; the lovely White-throated Sparrow with its *Oh Sweet Canada Canada*, song; and the Swamp Sparrow which wouldn't stay still long enough in the swampy areas for a good view. The only woodpecker seen were two Northern Flickers, although a third one was heard with its maniacal laugh. And, of course, the Black-capped Chickadee, the Canada Goose and the American Crow were seen. The Canada Goose we saw now has four chicks. We didn't see them, but earlier in the week Kaye Edmonds saw them.

Other than birds, no wildlife was seen during this outing. They were smart enough not to be out in the steady rain. But we did see some more wildflowers besides those seen last week – Goldthread (*Coptis trifolia*) and Early Blue Violets (*Viola adunca*) – and the many Serviceberry or Saskatoon Berry trees were in white bloom.

Again, Dick, as judge, awarded the prize, the checklist booklet, to the person who came up with the most interesting bird seen. With some promoting, the sole male participant, with the exception of Dick, was awarded the prize for his answer, Chestnut-sided Warbler (below). A pretty warbler, indeed, but I would have thought the



*Photo by Kevan Cowcill*

Blackburnian would have been the correct answer, but what is considered interesting, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. I might have also awarded it to the woman whose birthday it was, even if she said Black-capped Chickadee, but maybe Dick felt the only other male, quiet Devon Reichstein, deserved a prize for putting up with the more talkative women in the group.



*Photo by Matt Walter*



# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

**Saturday, May 20:**



*Photo by Kaye Edmonds*

Finally, a beautiful sunny spring Saturday morning, perfect for a birding walk in Laurier Woods, and as Dick likes to tell everyone, there are no black flies in Laurier Woods. Right enough, not a black fly was to be seen or felt. Other than a Mourning Cloak butterfly or two, no insects were to be seen, at least not by me. Maybe Brent Turcotte saw more.

However, birds were to be seen, and plenty of them. In fact, Dick was still talking to the large group of 25 to 30 at the Brule Street entrance before the actual walk began when four handsome Cedar Waxwings (right) flew overhead and landed on a tree where the trail begins. And as serendipity would have it, while Dick was still talking to a few stragglers at the Brule Street parking lot after the walk was completed, a Green Heron flew overhead. A nice book-end to a bird walk.

All the species seen previously were seen again more or less, so I will list only some not seen before or not mentioned elsewhere in this



*Photo by Renee Levesque*



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narrative: the small Least Flycatcher with its white eye-ring and its emphatic *che-bek!*; the American Goldfinch; the Veery, a thrush like the American Robin, singing its down-slurred *veer*; and the warblers – the shy Ovenbird with its orange crown patch, seen walking on the leafy forest floor if you are lucky; the Magnolia, often identified as the black and yellow warbler because of the black striping on its yellow breast and its black eye mask above its yellow throat; the Common Yellow-throat, the male with his black Lone Ranger mask and yellow throat and its rapid song, *witchity-witchity-witchy-witch*, although sometimes just *two witchities followed by a witch*; many Yellow (right), the only extensively yellow warbler, the male with pale red or rusty streaks on his breast; and the Black-throated Blue, the male easily identified by its name, but the female, the one we saw, not so easy to identify because it is neither black nor blue, but olive brown with a very small white wing spot.



Photo by Lisa Hackett

Lori Anderson and I, who lagged far behind, were the only two to actually see a Sora, although in the same area others heard the Virginia Rail. Not sure if anyone else heard them, but Lori and I heard the Eastern Kingbird and the Great-crested Flycatcher.

Sarah added the White-throated Sparrow and Cedar Waxwing to her growing list of species she can now identify and she reinforced her ability to recognize the Chestnut-sided Warbler.

A couple who joined us from the Laurier Street entrance met up with a skunk and I believe that was the only animal seen, except for the occasional chipmunk.

One of the highlights of the walk for me was meeting up with Diane St. Pierre. Diane was in my class in grade 10 at Timmins High. I was flattered she recognized me from then, although if truth be told, we had run into one another 16 years ago. But as Diane forgot that, I think I can still feel flattered.

Kudos to Doug Patterson Sr. for doing the full two-hour walk, seemingly without any difficulty. His son told me he and his father added many new birds to their list of birds they had previously seen, proving that Laurier Woods is the place to see birds, especially in May during migration before the leaves are fully out on the trees.





*Photo by Renee Levesque*

At the end of the walk, Lori and I walked from the parking lot back to the second boardwalk to hear the Gray Catbird (above) that she had heard previously but I hadn't. Unfortunately, we didn't hear it and arrived back at the parking lot only to be told by Kaye Edmonds that she saw two by the parking lot while we were off looking for one. However, as we stood there not believing our bad luck, we eventually heard its *meow* and then saw it. Birding requires knowledge, yes, but it also requires lots of patience and often, luck.



The prize went to Herb Johnson for declaring the Virginia Rail the most interesting bird he heard. I can't disagree with Dick's choice this time. It is not easy to see this bird among the marsh cattails. It is a small rusty-coloured bird, about 9.5 inches, with gray cheeks and a long, slender reddish bill with a dark tip, as seen in the photo at left. And if you can't see it, listen for kicking sounds, *kidick, kidick, kidick*, or grunting sounds, *wuk-wuk-wuk-wuk*.

*Photo by Matt Walter*





# Beauty among the wildflowers

*By Lori Beckerton, photos by Renee Levesque*

It began as another rainy Saturday morning May walk in Laurier Woods, although not cold this time, but very warm and humid. Half-way through the walk, the sun came out showing off the wildflowers in all their subtle May beauty. The weather kept the number of participants down, but still seven showed up, although three got ahead looking for birds, while also looking at wildflowers.

Some of the plants we saw blooming were:

Canada Mayflower, also known as  
False Lily-of-the-Valley  
Starflower (see above)  
Bunchberry, also known as Dwarf  
Cornel (seen at right)  
Dandelion  
Strawberry (bottom left of next page)  
Dwarf Raspberry  
Pink Ladyslipper  
Clintonia, also known as Bluebead  
Lily  
Wild Aralia, also known as Wild  
Sarsaparilla  
Blueberry - yes, they were already  
flowering!





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Red Trillium (right), also known as Bethroot,  
Wakerobin, and Stinking Johnny  
Honeysuckle  
Chokecherry

The Viburnums, Elderberry and Black Cherry had not yet opened their flowers, but there was a beautiful apple tree in bloom. The Saskatoons had finished flowering and were setting fruit.

We walked as far as the Haist platform and then we retraced our steps, so we missed the area where the Goldthread (below right) and the Blue Violets are in bloom. Many other plants were seen, but they were not yet in blossom.

Be sure to join Maxime Lefebvre on June 4 for his Ladyslipper walk, and I will be leading another walk on July 2, this time on summer plants and shrubs.





## Guided walks in Laurier Woods

From June through to November, there will be once monthly Saturday guided walks through Laurier Woods **from 10:00 a.m. until noon, with the exception of the walk on September 3 which will take place from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.** Walks from June to September are listed below. October to December walks will be highlighted in September's issue of the newsletter.

On **Saturday, June 4**, Maxime Lefebvre will conduct a **Lady Slipper** walk. See and learn about this fascinating plant (right) from Maxime, a Nipissing University graduate who did his 4<sup>th</sup> year thesis on the Pink Lady Slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*). Also see Paul Smylie's article in *The Woodland Observer*, November 2015: <http://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.



On **Saturday, July 2**, Lori Beckerton will lead a walk and provide information on summer **plants and shrubs**, like the Common Fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium*), pictured on the left. It is native across North America and around the world, and so named because it can blanket a charred landscape after a fire with its pretty purple flowers.













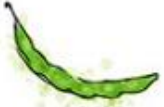













## Hiking Scavenger Hunt with **make and takes**

On **Saturday, August 6**, there will be a **wetlands walk** and a **nature scavenger hunt**.

**Valerie Vaillancourt, Biologist, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry**, will discuss what is found in wetlands; the role of wetlands in the ecosystem; and how wetlands support not only natural ecosystems but also human populations through flood attenuation, by cleaning water systems and by providing recreational opportunities.

For the nature scavenger hunt, Valerie will provide each family with a list with pictures of informative and interesting items to find and identify. Once identified, there will be a brief discussion on what the species are and their role and importance in the ecosystem. This will be a great adventure for children, as well adults.

 <input type="radio"/> green leaf	 <input type="radio"/> brown leaf	 <input type="radio"/> pine cone	 <input type="radio"/> mushroom
 <input type="radio"/> log	 <input type="radio"/> animal tracks	 <input type="radio"/> tree stump	 <input type="radio"/> moss
 <input type="radio"/> seed pod	 <input type="radio"/> y-shaped branch	 <input type="radio"/> spider	 <input type="radio"/> rocks
 <input type="radio"/> acorn	 <input type="radio"/> tree hole	 <input type="radio"/> animal hole	 <input type="radio"/> flowers
 <input type="radio"/> tree roots	 <input type="radio"/> insect	 <input type="radio"/> fern	 <input type="radio"/> grass

*Courtesy of makeandtakes.com*

On **Saturday, September 3**, from **6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**, **Rebecca Geauvreau, Species at Risk Biologist with FRI Ecological Services**, and **Bat Lady Extraordinaire**, will lead an exciting **bat walk**. Be sure to read the article by Rebecca and Sarah Wheelan in this month's newsletter.



*Photo by Renee Levesque*





## Other events...

*Photo by Renee Levesque*

On **Wednesday, June 15, at 7 p.m.**, Bev Kingdon will be giving a talk on **Trumpeter Swans** (pictured above) for the **Callander Horticultural Society at the Callander Community Centre** on Swale Street, off Callander Bay Drive. Meetings are free and open to the public and, as a special treat, **June's meeting will also include a Strawberry Social**. In the birding world and beyond, Bev is well-known for the work she has done to help in the restoration, conservation and security of Trumpeter Swans, once on the brink of extinction.

On **Thursday, August 18, starting at 1:30 p.m.**, Ontario Heritage Trust will have a ceremony formally approving the historical plaque for Louise de Kiriline Lawrence to be installed at Pimisi Bay. This ceremony will be held at the Bonfield Parish Hall, 408 Gagnon Street in Bonfield. All are invited to attend. Refreshments will be served.

The recent auction held online raised \$678.00 towards the \$5,000.00 Nipissing Naturalists Club is required to contribute towards the plaque. Combined with contributions from communities, citizens and organizations, as well as our silent auction at the Annual General Meeting in January, we have almost raised the total amount.

On **Saturday, August 20**, the Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Festival will take place at Laurier Woods, from **9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** This third annual event is hosted by Nipissing Naturalists Club, Friends of Laurier Woods and North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority. As in the previous two years, there will be fun and exciting nature activities for the whole family. To keep abreast of what will be taking place, visit our Nipissing Naturalists Club festival website at: <http://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/nature-festival/>.





## Final meeting of the season

The speaker for our final meeting until September takes place on **Tuesday, June 14, in the auditorium of Cassellholme, starting at 7:00 p.m.**

Mike McIntosh, Director of *Bear With Us Sanctuary and Rehabilitation Centre for Bears*, will talk about whether bears pose a threat to us; why food is such a driving force in a bear's life; how food relates to bear/human conflicts; and our general misunderstanding of bears.

*Bear With Us* and Mike are authorized annually by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to rehabilitate and release orphaned wild bear cubs; live trap and relocate perceived nuisance bears; and keep black bears in captivity.

The wonderful photo above of the three bears, minus Goldilocks, was taken by Mike McIntosh.



# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER



## Board of Directors, 2016

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## Bird Wing

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Gary Sturge, Treasurer

Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe.

The Bird Wing newsletter is published each month, except December, and sent to members by email and posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club website, <http://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/>. Also posted on the website are the monthly Bird Bash results and Year-end reports by Dick Tafel; the Christmas Bird Count Reports by Lori Anderson; and photos of birds by members.

*The Woodland Observer* is published electronically each month from September to June and sent to members by email and posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club website, <http://www.nipnats.com/> under the link, "Newsletter".

**Editor:** Renee Levesque: [rlevesque1948@gmail.com](mailto:rlevesque1948@gmail.com)

**Contributors this issue:** Lori Beckerton, Sonje Bols, Larry Dyke, Kaye Edmonds, Rebecca Geauvreau, Lisa Hackett, Bev Kingdon, Renee Levesque, Mike McIntosh, Steve Pitt, Paul Smylie, Matt Walter, and Sarah Wheelan.

**Special thanks** to the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Region for the use of their Little Brown Myotis photos and to makeandtakes.com for the use of their printable scavenger list.

## Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fees are: single \$20. 00; family \$30.00.

There is an **additional annual \$5.00 membership fee for Bird Wing** which meets the **fourth Tuesday of every month in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.** This fee is paid directly to Bird Wing.



The Nipissing Naturalist Club is affiliated with Ontario Nature: <http://www.ontarionature.org/>.