



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

JULY 2016

NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

From the editor:

You'll wish that summer could always be here



July marks the beginning of those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer, starting with Canada Day. This year we are 149 years old, one year away from our sesquicentennial.

There are many ways to celebrate our Canadian heritage and one way was Paul Smylie's bicycle trip to Canada's Arctic last summer. Part 2 of Paul's trip along the Dempster Highway is featured in this issue. Paul may be the only person to have written for *The Woodland Observer* to receive an award of excellence based on Part 1 of his trip, featured in June's issue. At June's meeting, Dick Tafel presented Paul with a vintage poster of a bicyclist in France. From now on, Paul truly can be referred to as "the award-winning writer, Paul Smylie."

To participate in club summer activities, you can take part in the Laurier Woods walks or in Nipissing Naturalists Club outings. You can read about the Laurier Woods walks from July to September in this issue or check them out, as well as club outings, on our website, <http://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/outings-and-events/>.

Wildflowers abound at this time of the year and the cover, a photo I took on a recent canoe outing in Cache Bay, reflects this. Another wildflower I recently saw, and one I rarely see, was a Jack-in-the-pulpit on Bidwell Road off Hwy. 11 North, pictured at the right.



Chimney Swifts, Blanding's and Snapping Turtles and Eastern Swallowtail Butterflies are also featured in this issue, as are Pink Lady Slippers and the Summer Solstice Strawberry Moon. The articles in this and previous issues come with some wonderful photos, and for those who want to enter our photo contest, it has been reinstated after a year's absence. Details can be found in this newsletter.

The exact spot at Pimisi Bay where the Louise de Kiriline Lawrence historic plaque will be placed has been determined and plans are well under way for the plaque ceremony on August 18, followed two days later by the Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival. Be sure to mark both dates on your calendar.

At the end of July, two of our members, Bonne Brownstein and Steve Belfry, are moving west. They have invited members to visit them, but not before they get a place to live. They assure me that wherever they eventually settle, there will be lots of room for guests.

Dick Tafel has written a tribute to his birding pal and former Nipissing Naturalists Club president, Greg Boxwell. I did not know Greg well, but I did go on two all-day birding outings with him, once to Sandy Island, along with Dick and Kevan Cowcill, and once during a cold April Bird Bash, along with Dick. There had been a fairly significant snowfall the night before and both Greg and I had to tell Dick to stop waxing poetic about how lovely the scenery looked as a result. We did not need any more snowy days, no matter how lovely, after a long, cold winter.

Greg taught me to check the links in my Bird Wing reports and to proof my reports thoroughly, because if I didn't catch a typo or a link not working, Greg certainly did! But my fondest memory of Greg is the time I attended a Nipissing Naturalists Club meeting and didn't know anyone and Greg gave up his usual seat and came and sat beside me. It was a gracious moment.

There will be no August issue of *The Woodland Observer*. The newsletter will return in September, but for there to be a round-up of summer events and activities featured in the September issue, I will need your photos and articles.

Renee Levesque



Greg Boxwell, 1943-2016

By Dick Tafel, with photo by Kevan Cowcill

Greg Boxwell and his wife, Pat, joined Nipissing Naturalists Club in 1984, shortly after moving to their home near Bonfield, a home Greg built virtually by himself.

After moving out to this lovely location, Greg noticed an announcement in the Nugget about a bird identification class I was giving at the time. With all the birds in their new vicinity, he and Pat decided it might be good to learn more about them and so they enrolled in the class. Thereafter, and over the decades, Greg and I went on numerous bird outings together.

We saw many, many birds over the years in many, many places, but the most exciting bird Greg found was at the back of his own property. I well remember my first sighting there of the beautiful Golden-winged Warbler, a bird Greg learned to locate by its sibilant song. Today, it is rarely found anywhere in Ontario.

Other interesting and fairly rare birds in our area that Greg located not far from his home were the Vesper Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher and Upland Sandpiper. He was devoted to and very knowledgeable about the numerous Snow Buntings he would get on his property each winter.

Greg was always keen to learn more about the natural world, in particular wild flowers and mushrooms, including edible mushrooms.

Greg was President of the Nipissing Naturalists Club from 1992 to 1994. He and Pat attended at least three provincial Ontario Nature conferences – in Ottawa, Peterborough and Orillia. And if that wasn't enough, he and Pat also edited *The Woodland Observer* for nine years, from 1998 to 2006.

Greg died peacefully in our local hospital on June 13 at the age of 73. He will certainly be sadly missed by many friends, particularly within our nature-love community.





The bicycle trip of a lifetime

Part 2

Text and photos by Paul Smylie

It felt good to get back on the bike and ride the 40 km east from Dawson to the beginning of the Dempster Highway. I wondered with excitement what adventures awaited me. After a quick stop for the obligatory photo with my loaded bicycle leaning against the sign at the start of the Dempster, there was nothing for it but to get on and start pedalling.

The first km or so was paved, leading to fantasies that maybe the Dempster had been paved recently and I just hadn't heard yet. That fantasy was quickly put to rest when the pavement abruptly ended to be replaced by butt-hammering, jaw-rattling, panniers flying-off washboard. My heart sank, thinking there was no way I could ride 450 miles on this type of gravel, but luckily the washboard soon gave way to very rideable, solid gravel road that, for the most part, continued the entire length of the ride.

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My first night on the Dempster was at Tombstone Territorial Park, about 70km in (see photo below). The Tombstone Mountains are part of the Richardson Range, a must-see for anyone visiting the Yukon. This is the Yukon in all its wild splendour! Mountain peaks and open sky everywhere you look, with hillsides inviting you to come and make your own path, no trails required. The low-lying vegetation presents easy walking with an unobscured view to whatever destination your heart desires. My only wish is that I could have stayed longer, but I've left room for further exploration. Next time, I'll visit Tombstone in late summer, toting canvas and easel. It is a painter's dream with the valleys and hillsides releasing their chlorophyllic hues, revealing the vivid crimsons, siennas and oranges that transform this landscape into a fiery autumnal pallet.

News of poor weather coming along in a couple of days hastened my leave of

Tombstone. My greatest fear, even more than the mighty Griz, was getting caught in rain and not being able to ride due to mud. I knew I had at least one day of good weather ahead of me before it was to turn sour. I took my premature leave of Tombstone Territorial Park on my birthday, August 9, and rode to Engineer Creek. By the time I got to Engineer Creek Campground, it had started to drizzle a little, but only enough to dampen the ground, not my spirit.



As I was setting up camp, a tall, tousle-haired fellow with a decidedly nature-loving look to him passed by my campsite on foot and jokingly asked where I thought I was going on that bike. I replied that I was hoping to get up to Inuvik, to which he responded, "Drop over later for a drink once you're all set up. I'd like to talk to you." After introductions to Frank and his partner, Tova, and a couple of belts of warm whiskey (Northern Comfort?), which he claimed he had to get rid of, the



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conversation eventually came around to Frank's telling me that his niece was doing her master's degree in Forestry at Nipissing University. What!!!! This was the same Frank whose niece, Corrine, had been urging me to contact over the past couple of years as a cycling partner for the Dempster. And here he was, right in front of me, on the Dempster! Small world, but I wouldn't want to cut the grass, maybe cycle it though.

The next morning, I awoke to a light drizzle. However, there was no recourse but to pack up and get going. I said my farewells to Frank and Tova and then sat at the edge of Engineer Creek and filled five water bottles by pumping the less than appetizing-looking water through my water purifier. I'd read that the area between Engineer Creek and Eagle Plains was pretty scarce for water and I wanted to make sure I was prepared for what could be a dry 120 km. I got off to a late start but the rain was light and I felt good. Seeing an opportunity to stop and do some Arctic Grayling fishing in the river that ran alongside the highway, I stopped after riding for about 20 km and threw in a few unproductive casts. As I was doing so, I was surprised to hear what could best be described as Bridget Jones asking if I would "fancy a cup of coffee?" from the back of a camper van. The cup of coffee also included a tuna fish sandwich - second best cup of coffee and best tuna fish sandwich I've ever had! After a wonderful chat with Bridget Jones's doppelganger and her partner, Harry, both from Britain, I got back on my bike late in the afternoon with a contented belly and head full of giggles.

Maybe I was just putting off the inevitable with my slow start that day. The notorious Seven-mile Hill was lying in wait for me, the biggest climb on the Dempster. The rain was still light but it was getting cool and windy. It took over an hour to grunt my way up the very accurately named hill. Having to stop and pump up a low tire a number of times didn't help my progress or my ever-darkening mood. I could have stopped and pulled everything off my bike and repaired the flat, but I was getting cold and wet and I just wanted the hill to be over. Not once did I ask myself why I was doing this, but I do recall thinking that with my heart trying to make an escape out of my chest and my legs feeling as if they were bags of broken glass shards, this was just not a lot of fun. Luckily, pleasant memories over time trump the memories of pain and hardship. Maybe that's a human adaptation so we continue to engage in



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difficult activities that further our cause in life.

After over an hour of puffing and panting, I crested the hill to find a rest area where I stopped to recharge for a while before continuing on for another 20 km or so. I was quickly cooling down in the cold and wind even though the rain had stopped, and being wet and muddy from the ride, I was fast losing any desire to continue. It was then that I looked over to a grassy knoll and spotted a small tent with a bicycle parked outside it. Another Dempster highway road warrior!

Walter was a very affable young man and seemed very pleased to have some company. He eagerly helped me set up camp and get dinner together. I was impressed that he had no unkind words for the weather or how it might be affecting him physically or mentally. I was decidedly cold by this point and was wearing just about every piece of dry clothing I had. I had to cook in the shelter of the outhouse because the wind was howling quite intensely. The conversation seemed to flow naturally between me and Walter whose good looks and chatty demeanour would serve him well in his native land of Starbucks. Despite his youth, he had logged an impressive number of kilometers by bike, some 15,000 if I recall correctly. He suggested that one day we ride to Patagonia together, that the Dempster was just a warm up for that trip.



After a reasonably restful sleep despite the cold and wind, I reluctantly got out of the tent in the morning and with cold hands began to prepare my usual out-of-the-bag oatmeal. The gods must have been pleased with us, because not ten minutes after crawling out of the tent and into the cold and wind, a truck driver came trotting over to us with a box in hand that could only have been carrying pizza. “Do you guys want some pizza?” Do we??? I’ve never devoured pizza so eagerly in my life, and I’m still trying to decide if I should feel guilty or not for eating more than my share. Walter didn’t seem that interested or maybe he was just being polite. My tire was devoid of all air now and Walter gave me a hand repairing it so I could get back on the road. With my tires fully inflated, I said goodbye to Walter as we headed off in opposite directions with socks on our hands and toques on our heads.

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The next couple of days would prove trying as I suffered two more flat tires and spent time on the side of the road feeling like so much bear fodder trying to get a patch to hold. The tire pump I brought with me had settings for two valve types, Schrader and

Presta. Unfortunately, I didn't notice that the Schrader fitting on my pump was broken, and because all I had left were tubes with Schrader valves, I had no way of getting air into



my tire. I spent a frustrating two hours on the side of the road one afternoon just past Eagle Plains, bike in pieces, bags and camping gear strewn about, trying to re-patch tubes that I could pump up, but to no avail. I was nearing wit's end when a friendly fellow from Colorado stopped and asked if I had a spill. "No, just trying to pump up my tires. All I need is a tire pump." He gladly pumped my tire, as well as my spirits. I was now back in the saddle and on my way to Rock River, the next campground along the way. That was the last trouble I had with flats. My tires had been underinflated the entire trip, leading to what are called pinch flats. This is where the tube gets compressed between the tire and the rim when you hit an object, such as a train track or a rock that pokes up through the gravel, resulting in what looks like a snakebite, two little side-by-side punctures in the tube. This doesn't happen when you have adequate pressure in your tires.

The night before I reached Rock River, I camped at Eagle Plains, a wonderful and solitary oasis of near-civilization along a barren stretch of road. I thoroughly enjoyed my first shower in a few days, as well as a delectable cheeseburger and fries with a couple of Yukon Red ale to make everything just right. While enjoying my meal, I overheard a young man and woman talking about catching dragonflies. My biological interest was piqued, so I went over and introduced myself to find out that Will and Manpreet were in the Yukon looking for *Somatochlora*, a genus of dragonfly that had been documented there some 50 or so years ago. A professor they were studying under at Rutgers University in Indiana had researched this genus of dragonfly in the

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Yukon in the past and Will and Manpreet were interested to find out if its range has been altered in response to climate change.

It was advised not to camp in the area between Eagle Plains and Rock River Campground. This was prime Grizzly Bear habitat, and the warning was in response to the entrails of Caribou being left near the road by hunters in this area, thereby attracting bears. I heeded the advice, but I did take the opportunity to get my binoculars out each time I stopped for a rest or a snack to scan the vast hillsides for any brown furry specs sauntering across the hills. To my great disappointment, I was not to see a Griz. After spending the night at Rock Creek Campground, I met a couple of friendly hunters from Inuvik who had come down to scout for bull Caribou. They offered me some dried fish, a local dietary mainstay, and it tasted just like dried fish! No salt, no seasoning, just dry, chewy and fishy, but not unpleasant. I told them that I'd had trouble patching a flat the day before because the setting on my pump was broken. Alan reached behind the seat of his truck, pulled out a bicycle pump and asked, "Is this what you need?" He gave me his name and number and told me to drop off the pump at the library when I got to Inuvik. Such trust and generosity! They informed me they had seen a Grizzly about five miles back and to keep an eye out for it, not as a matter of safety but of interest. As I made my way to the Mackenzie Delta, I

was not to see the bear, and I would soon be into a more boreal forest ecotype, more suitable for Black Bears.

My introduction to the Mackenzie Delta, where the hills are less formidable, was the crossing of the Peel River by ferry. I recall a swift downhill



towards the river on loose gravel that tested both my nerves and my brakes. I didn't need to be picking gravel out of my skin at this point. Nitainlii Campground was just across the river and I had a pleasant chat with the young Native couple working at the campground office. I've made no mentions of bugs so far and that's for good reason. Despite the horror stories I'd heard about

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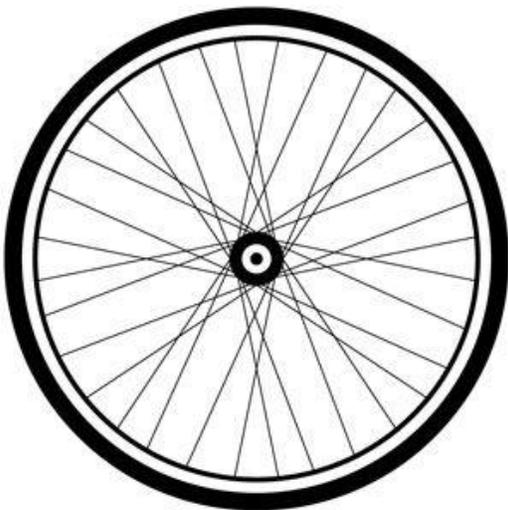
the Dempster, bugs just weren't an issue – that is until the Mackenzie Delta. The zipper on my tent was getting weary, but I could always manage to get it mostly zipped up until tonight, the only night the bugs were an issue. There were swarms of mosquitos in my tent. I tried sleeping with my bug jacket on and tried hiding in my sleeping bag, but they still got at me. I rarely use bug dope, but fortunately I had brought some with me. Spraying the zipper and a few shots inside the tent was akin to sleeping in a gas chamber, but it stopped the skitters, and I rested well.



Fort MacPherson was the next community along the way, about 10 km north of the Peel River crossing. In this small native community, I was impressed by the friendliness of the people. Maybe I expected to be seen as a stranger, or something odd, as I doubt that they get much chance to see a fellow prancing around in spandex cycling shorts. I visited both grocery stores, more out of interest than actual need. Because there were only two days of riding ahead of me, I didn't need many supplies. What I was really looking for was a satisfying cup of coffee and I was willing to put in some effort to find it.

Riding through the Mackenzie Delta was not overly inspiring from a scenic perspective. It was low-lying, flat land with stunted Black Spruce carpeting the landscape and small ponds and lakes inhabited by Arctic Loons and Mallards. It wasn't unlike a trip through Northern Ontario.

The cloudy, cool weather that dropped down on me around Engineer Creek had now subsided as I finished the second last day of the adventure. The winds had calmed and the sky was mostly blue. Only a few miles before my destination for the day, I finally got to see a bruin. An average-sized Black Bear ambled out of the muskeg and onto my path about 200 metres in front of me. It took notice of me but soon went about its business and continued across the road to safety.



As I crossed the Mackenzie River by ferry into the town of Tsiigehtchic, I felt a warmth and peacefulness inspired partly by the improving weather, but more, I believe, by the friendliness and spirit of this small subsistence community. I camped on the shore of the river with the blessing of the local town-folk. A couple came down on their four-wheeler to check their fishing nets which were set just off the shore and invited me to come along to watch them pull up the nets. I happily obliged and enjoyed seeing the smiles on their faces as they pulled up some rather large, heavily-scaled, silvery fish of the Whitefish family. I was told they had

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missed a large, four-to-five foot-long Inconnu earlier that day, about which they seemed disappointed. Fish translates into making a living.

My last day on the bike was a fairly uneventful 80 mile ride to my final destination of Inuvik. Just after leaving Tsiigehtchic, I had stopped to make an adjustment and as I was fiddling, I heard a very tell-tale *klippity-klop, klippity-klop* coming towards me. This could only mean a hoofed mammal, and sure enough I looked up to see a Caribou mother and her calf bouncing along the dirt road towards me. As soon as they noticed the caribou with round legs and brightly-coloured fur didn't look quite right, they high-tailed it into the bush.

With a feeling of triumph, I rode the last 10 km on pavement into Inuvik, the transition from riding on



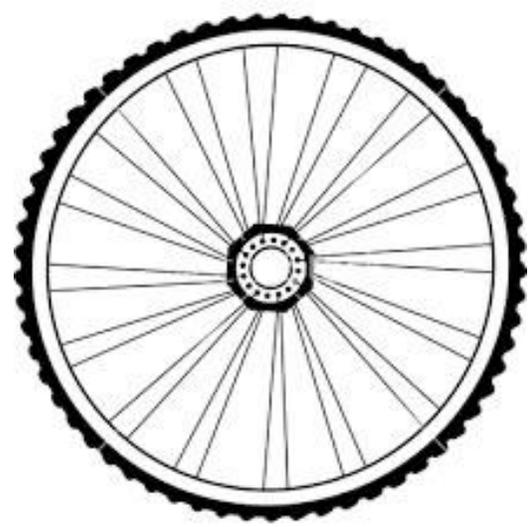
gravel to a paved surface feeling like a dream. The weather had turned cool and cloudy again but now it didn't matter. I was done! I set up camp at the local campground in town, once again made to feel very welcome by the young woman working in the office, her summer job before she was to head off to college in the fall. I enjoyed a very much-needed shower, basking in the warmth of the water and the feeling of having just completed one of my life goals. After sampling some of the local cuisine in the form of a cheeseburger and French fries, I enjoyed some of the local nightlife at the Mad Trapper Pub, a perfect ending to a wonderful adventure.

As time passes, the memories that remain of my ride alone along the Dempster are truly fond ones. It takes a bit of effort to recall that for most of the ride my hands were numb, accompanied by the nerve pain of carpal tunnel syndrome that shot up into my armpits. Sitting down on anything for any more than a few hours, you'll be sure to take notice of your aching backside. It doesn't take quite that long on a bicycle seat, and I will be a lot choosier in the seat that I use on the next trip. There is no opportunity to change a seat on the Dempster, so you take your chances with the seat you have. Getting off the bike regularly was more to give my butt and hands a break, rather than actually needing a rest.

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The Yukon is the land of the midnight sun and although it wasn't exactly afternoon sunshine at 2 a.m., it was interesting to watch the sky stay lighter later and later as I made my way north. Sleeping was never a problem because it did get dark enough that the light wasn't a factor.

When I finished the ride, I felt an immense feeling of accomplishment and pride, which I'm sure was a combination of psychological and physical factors pushing a huge surge of endorphins into my being. Bicycling the Dempster Highway renewed my interest in adventure and seeing the world by this environmentally friendly mode of transport. I have no definite plans yet for another trip, but I think I feel a little baby Patagonia sprouting in the soil beneath. Better hang on to Walter's phone number.



Shine on, Strawberry Moon

This year the Summer Solstice coincided with a full moon, a once in-a-lifetime occurrence. A full moon which occurs in June is known as a Strawberry Moon because it coincides with the beginning of the strawberry season.

The Summer Solstice occurred here on June 20 at 6:34 p.m. and technically the moon was at its fullest at 7:02 a.m. Therefore, the full moon and the Summer Solstice occurred on the same day. However, by the time we saw it here at around 10:00 p.m., it had waned a bit. **(Photo taken by Kaye Edmonds at 11:15 p.m.)** In fact, the moon on the evening of June 19 was fuller than what we saw on June 20. But none of that matters in terms of our enjoyment of a Strawberry Moon on the Summer

Solstice, the first occurrence since 1948 when the full moon and the Summer Solstice were extremely closely aligned, with the full moon occurring just 43 minutes after the Summer Solstice.





Birding marathon

By Renee Levesque

I joined the Tafel Team comprised of Dick, Lori Anderson and Brent Turcotte after I met up with them at 10:00 a.m. at Cranberry Trail. That's when I heard our team got delayed because Dick had to have breakfast at Tim Horton's! That, in addition to the teams not getting started until a late 7:00 a.m. was of some concern. How would we ever get more than 100 species with these two delays? To make up for it, we decided we would eat our dinner on the fly – grab-and-go from a fast food outlet. That seemed to pay off as you will see - that and, of course, our keen eyes, good ears, great route and our strategy – looking for as many common birds as possible.

The Tafel Team headed south after stints in Laurier Woods, Callander Lagoon and Cranberry Trail, while the McKercher team comprised of Grant and Shirley, Marc Buchanan and newcomer Sarah Wheelan, headed west. Dick, Lori and Brent may have wished we were heading west in an air-conditioned vehicle instead of walking in the heat and humidity down Cranberry Trail, known for its generous number of mosquitoes and black flies. (We would have had to pick the hottest day of the year so far to hold the Birdathon, but that is a whole other story!)

After Cranberry Trail, the Tafel Team headed south to Powassan Lagoon and the Alsace Road area. Turned out to be great choices, because we got the Solitary Sandpiper; saw the Mourning Warbler, after just hearing it on Cranberry Trail; the Sedge Wren; the Philadelphia Vireo; and the Wood Thrush. We saw many more than that, but to my recollection those were the highlights of that leg of the trip.

In the meantime, the McKercher Team was chalking up points with their envious views of Franklin's Gull, Black-bellied Plover and Wilson's Phalarope at Verner Lagoon, their highlights of the Birdathon I would think. (Would love to have shown you photos of these birds that they



took, but their photos are very fuzzy. However, I do have a photo of the Black-bellied Plover in its non-breeding plumage taken at Sunset Park, as seen above, so you can compare the non-breeding plumage to the breeding plumage in your bird book and note how it loses its black belly after the breeding season.) When we finally got to Verner Lagoon late in the day, none of these species was to be seen, but then the McKercher Team did not see the Solitary Sandpiper at Powassan Lagoon and did not get, to my knowledge, to the Alsace Road area for the species we had seen or heard earlier. (The McKercher Team may have had a little problem with grebe identification, but the next day they graciously capitulated that perhaps they were not correct in their identification.)

At Warren Lagoon, we made up for not seeing the Franklin's Gull and Black-bellied Plover by seeing Semipalmated Sandpipers and a male Red-necked Phalarope, the latter thanks to Dick's persistence and great eye. Neither of these species was seen by the McKercher Team during their morning visit to Warren Lagoon. The photo I got of the phalarope is too distant to be any good as a photo for the newsletter, but I do have a photo of the male and female Red-necked Phalaropes I took elsewhere (zoom in on photo below). Unlike a lot of bird species, the female Red-necked is larger and much more colourful with her very striking red neck than the male.

Neither team saw the Hairy Woodpecker, but when I uploaded my photos, there in one of the photos was the Hairy as well as the Downy! We must have seen the Hairy also, but it was getting late and in our great excitement that we finally also saw a Downy as well as a female



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Purple Finch, we must have faltered in our observations. This begs the question: if the camera captures the image of a bird we thought we hadn't seen, does that mean we really did see it? We no doubt did, but obviously we couldn't count it. The rule is that two of the Birdathoners must see or hear the same bird, one point for seeing and half a point for hearing. The camera doesn't count.

As far as raptors go, the McKercher Team beat us there by seeing three we didn't see – Cooper's Hawk (seen at right); Broad-winged Hawk; and Merlin. But we got the Bald Eagle which they didn't get.

Our team was way ahead in the warbler department, probably because we got the wooded areas earlier in the day – Laurier Woods, Cranberry Trail, Alsace



Photo by Linda Stoner

Road

and area. We got 12 warblers to their 6. And in the flycatcher and vireo departments, we got 9 to their 5. We got all three wrens, Sedge, (at right) House and Winter, and they did not get any. Our team also heard the Whip-poor-wills, unlike last year when we didn't hear any. Interestingly, neither team saw any Common Loons and once again, as last year, it was at the very last minute our team saw a Great Blue Heron flying over Hwy. 17 East as we headed out to Dreany Lake for the Whip--poor-wills. Yet the McKercher Team saw many Great Blues.

Our team saw two Black Bears on Riding Stable Road (see next page). I think their team saw only Red Deer at the farm on Rainville Road, hardly worth comparing! But to be fair, they did see at Powassan Lagoon a Killdeer annoying a Painted Turtle while a group of Canada Geese looked on. I think one had to be there for that!





We all wearily gathered at Tim Horton's at 10:00 p.m. sharp to compare notes. Team Tafel had a total of 105 and Team McKercher, a total of 77. Our team did not gloat, but, if truth be told, we were secretly pleased. Perhaps where the McKercher Team went wrong was in stopping to take a group selfie (below), an oxymoron if there ever was one. (I think to avoid the oxymoron a group selfie is known as an *us-ie.*) Our team was too busy to stop for an *usie*, although I did quickly snap a photo of Dick and Brent looking for birds, not posing for the camera, as you can see in the heading of this article. Besides, it would not have been nice of us to take a smugie!

There is supposed to be a prize passed yearly from the previous year's winning team to the current winning team, but seems no one knows or can remember who last had it. Maybe time for another prize, unless whoever has it comes forward and hands it to someone on Team Tafel.

Note: The Great Canadian Birdathon, established in 1976 and formerly known as the Baillie Birdathon, is held to support "projects by individuals and organizations that increase understanding, appreciation and conservation of Canadian birds in their natural environment." I believe all of us who took part made a donation to a Birdathon team.



Puddling



By Renee Levesque

As I was walking along Bidwell Road off Hwy. 11 North on a warm, sunny June morning, I saw in the gravel at the side of the road a group of striking Tiger Swallowtails. They had gathered to *puddle*, the term used when butterflies gather to absorb minerals and salts from the soil.

The term puddling can be a bit misleading because standing water is not necessary. Morning dew condensing in the sand and gravel will do. Butterflies are drawn to dappled sunlit spots rich in salts and minerals.

Although butterflies get most of their nutrients from flowering nectar, the nectar lacks some important nutrients butterflies require for reproduction and so the need for puddling.

Puddling is mostly seen in the male butterfly. The male incorporates the extra salts and minerals into its sperm which are then transferred to the female. The nutrients improve the viability of the female's eggs, thus increasing the chances of passing on the couple's genes to another generation.

Turtle tales

By Ed Rowley

Kathy Byers and I saw two Blanding's Turtles about 1 km apart on Birchgrove Drive on Lake Nipissing's South Shore around 9:10 p.m. on June 11. We saw them on two separate gravel driveways. We also saw a Blanding's in the same area earlier in the spring, on April 16.



On June 11 and again on June 14, around 10:00 p.m., we spotted a Snapping Turtle near a creek in the South Shore area, digging holes in the shoulder of the road.

Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) is listed as *Threatened* in Ontario, as well as in Canada, due to habitat loss, road mortality and raccoons and foxes preying on their eggs. Above is a **photo of a Blanding's by Ed Rowley.**

Editor's Note: Blanding's Turtles have bright yellow throats and chins with domed shells that look like helmets. The shells have yellow flecks and streaks and the bottoms of the shells are bright yellow. Blanding's live in shallow water, although they can be found hundreds of metres from water when looking for a mate or travelling to a nesting site.



Snapping Turtles are the largest freshwater turtles in Canada. They are prehistoric-looking turtles with their long tails with triangular spikes. I chose the photo (left) of the Snapping Turtle, one I took late on June 16 in the same area Ed and Kathy saw theirs, to show its long spikey

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tail and to show it does indeed look prehistoric. Snappers do not reach maturity until they are 15 to 20 years old, and, if they survive, they can have a long life, up to 70 to 100 years.

The Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) is listed as *Special Concern* in Ontario, as well as Canada. Snappers are vulnerable to road mortality, poaching and hunting. Surprisingly, despite their status of *Special Concern*, hunting is legally allowed in Canada – up to two Snapping Turtles a day per person! The season in central and southern Ontario is from July 15 to September 15, and in Northern Ontario, year round. A fishing license is required and as of 2015, a catch must be reported to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

The female generally lays her eggs in early summer in a nesting site of loose soil, sand, loam, vegetation debris or sawdust in which she digs a nest 4 to 7 inches deep. She lays between 20 to 40 eggs the size and shape of a table tennis ball. Up to 84% of nests can be destroyed by predators – minks, raccoons and skunks.

Hatchlings emerge from their soft shells usually from 75 to 95 days, between August and October. They are about an inch long when they emerge.

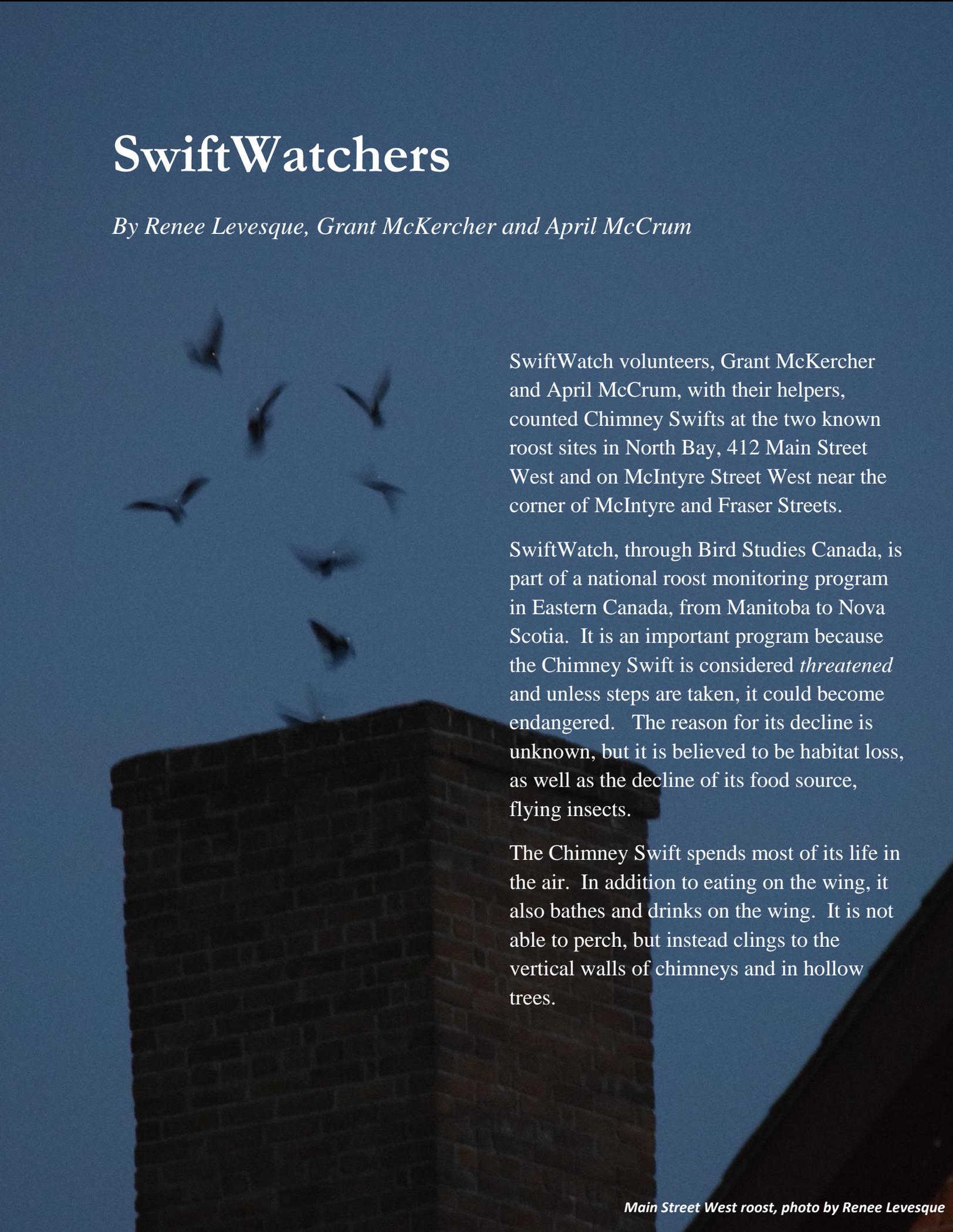
Below is a **photo taken by Marc Buchanan** on June 19 of a Snapping Turtle laying her eggs.

All turtle sightings can be reported to, and Blanding's Turtles **should** be reported to http://www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofaunal_atlas.php, or to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.



SwiftWatchers

By Renee Levesque, Grant McKercher and April McCrum



SwiftWatch volunteers, Grant McKercher and April McCrum, with their helpers, counted Chimney Swifts at the two known roost sites in North Bay, 412 Main Street West and on McIntyre Street West near the corner of McIntyre and Fraser Streets.

SwiftWatch, through Bird Studies Canada, is part of a national roost monitoring program in Eastern Canada, from Manitoba to Nova Scotia. It is an important program because the Chimney Swift is considered *threatened* and unless steps are taken, it could become endangered. The reason for its decline is unknown, but it is believed to be habitat loss, as well as the decline of its food source, flying insects.

The Chimney Swift spends most of its life in the air. In addition to eating on the wing, it also bathes and drinks on the wing. It is not able to perch, but instead clings to the vertical walls of chimneys and in hollow trees.

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The 2016 National Roost Monitoring dates were May 25, May 29, June 2 and June 6. Grant reports the numbers at the Main Street West site as follows:

Main Street West Roost

May 25: 81 seen entering the chimney; Grant and Shirley McKercher, observers.

May 29: 70 seen entering the chimney; Grant McKercher and Sarah Wheelan, observers.

June 2: 134 seen entering the chimney; Renee and John Levesque and Kevan Cowcill, observers.

June 6: 224 seen entering the chimney; Grant and Shirley McKercher, observers

On May 21, prior to the date of the official SwiftWatch, Grant saw 317 swifts entering the chimney. On May 22, John, Renee and Dick Tafel saw 127 entering the chimney. And on June 12, post official SwiftWatch, April McCrum saw approximately 860 entering the chimney.

On May 23, this video of Chimney Swifts entering the Main Street West chimney was posted on You Tube, thanks to Neil Brown:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pELCXCmsSo&feature=youtu.be>.

Last year, Grant did three counts in late May and saw between 12 and 150 swifts entering the chimney each evening. So numbers at the Main Street West roost are up from last year.

McIntyre Street West Roost

April McCrum was the SwiftWatch volunteer for the McIntyre Street West roost site. She reports the following numbers:

May 25: 2 seen entering the chimney and about 60 seen flying over, but not entering the roost.

May 29: 0 seen entering the chimney and 2 seen flying over.



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June 2: 0 seen entering the chimney and approximately 60 seen flying over.

June 9: 0 seen entering the chimney and 2 seen flying over. (April inadvertently did her count on June 9 instead of June 6, but given the numbers on the other dates, it is highly unlikely many more, if any, would have been seen entering the chimney on June 6.)

April reports the 2016 numbers are significantly down from 2015 when 320 entered the roost on May 24; and numbers are also significantly down from 2014 when 370 entered the roost on May 21.

The fly-overs April saw seemed to be heading to the Main Street West roost, and it would appear the Main Street roost was favoured this year and the McIntyre Street roost last year.

Grant and April used video recording this year to improve the count accuracy.

Additional Information on Chimney Swift

You do not see Chimney Swifts at every chimney because existing stone and brick chimneys have been demolished, capped or upgraded and newer chimneys are narrower and lined with metal which are not suitable for roosting or nesting.

Before Chimney Swifts adapted to chimneys, they roosted and nested in tree cavities and this may be more common than previously thought. They use a variety of live, dead deciduous and coniferous trees, but the trees need to have large hollow sections and the cavities need to have large diameters.

Chimney Swifts also roost and nest in air vents, wells and caves.



McIntyre Street West roost, photo by April McCrum



The lovely Lady Slipper, fit for a queen

By Maxime Lefebvre and Renee Levesque, Pink Lady Slipper photos

Maxime Lefebvre, a university graduate who did his 4th year thesis on the Pink Lady Slipper, led a walk in Laurier Woods on a beautiful June Saturday morning, a perfect day for the 15 to 20 people on the outing to learn about and see the lovely, delicate Pink Lady Slipper Orchids (*Cypripedium acaule*).

Max reports there are 50 tagged flowering orchids, part of a Nipissing University research project. In addition to the flowering orchids, there are over 250 vegetative orchids, orchids that are above ground but are not in bloom. The number of orchids is increasing, more so the young vegetative plants.

Below, Max outlines the life cycle of an orchid:

Orchid Life Cycle

- Annual plant
- Flowering season from end of May till mid-end June.
- Have two above-ground life forms, either vegetative (not flowering) or flowering. See photo at top of next page with one flowering plant and the others nearby that are not flowering.
- Successfully pollinated plants produce a seedpod.



Maxime Lefebvre, photo by Kaye Edmonds

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- Seedpod produces 100,000 or more miniscule wind dispersed helical-shaped seeds.
- Seeds contain no food supply to further develop and may remain dormant for 15 or more years.
- There is no true root system and plants rely on a symbiotic relationship with a specific mycorrhizal (fungus) network to absorb nutrients.
- Once the mature plants with their fungal network reach the seedlings, only then will they begin chemical transfer (nutrients) through translocation.
- Seedling connection to the fungal network allows the development of two



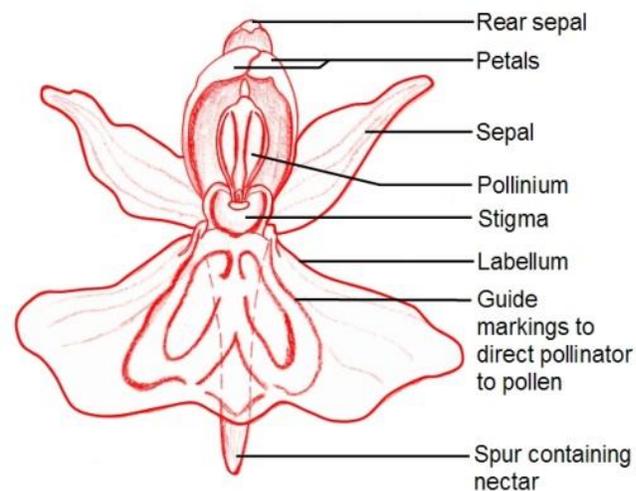
oval leaves (5-10cm x 10-20cm) capable of photosynthesis. This will allow the transfer of glucose from the plant to the fungus and nitrogen uptake from the fungus to the plant. (symbiosis)

- Once sufficient photosynthesis is possible (leaves are bigger) the plant will flower.
- This elaborate structure stands 10 to 30 cm tall on a single 3mm diameter stem.
- The inflorescence is comprised of a dorsal petal, two lateral sepals, a labellum (lip), stigma (female reproductive organs) and anthers (male reproductive structures). See diagram at left.

- These orchids are capable of self-

fertilization. Therefore, there is a reproductive structure layout inside the plant that deters this from happening when the right pollinator (bumble bees) performs his duty.

- Pollinated plants will quickly drop their flower to produce a seedpod.
- Only during the following flowering season will the seedpod ripen and open.



Orchid Flower Structure

De Kiriline Lawrence plaque to be erected at water's edge, Pimisi Bay

By Renee Levesque

It was a dull, rainy day, the sort of day that causes my hair to go frizzy, when Dick Tafel, Steve Pitt and I met with Brian Gamble, Ministry of Transportation, to determine the spot at Pimisi Bay where the plaque to honour Louise de Kiriline Lawrence is to be installed.

Brian was provided with a diagram and the dimensions of the pole and the plaque by Ontario Heritage Trust. Armed with that information, we all quickly and readily agreed on a spot – near the water's edge in a location where if you look across the Bay, you can see Louise's loghouse nest. (Brian and Dick are in the photo at right standing at the spot where the plaque will be installed.)

Brian suggested the post for the plaque not be installed until a week prior to the ceremony of August 18 to reduce any possibility of vandalism of a pole



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without a plaque on top.

We are not sure when the plaque to be placed on the pole will be sent to the Ministry, whether before the ceremony, the day of the ceremony or after the ceremony, but when it arrives, the Ministry will ensure it gets installed.

Brian will also look into the possibility of a sign being placed on the highway directing travellers to the plaque.

There will be no cost for the installation of the post, plaque and possible sign on the highway.

In the photo below of Pimisi Bay Rest Stop, taken that day, *x* marks the spot more or less, but on the cut grass. **(Put it in your calendars to attend the plaque ceremony at the Bonfield Parish Hall on August 18 at 1:30 p.m.)**



Ceremony and festival honouring Louise

On **Thursday, August 18, starting at 1:30 p.m.**, Ontario Heritage Trust will hold a ceremony to formally announce that the historical plaque for Louise de Kiriline Lawrence will 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.

Light refreshments will be served –soft drinks, tea, coffee and Swedish cookies cut into the shape of birds. Steve Pitt came up with the idea of the Swedish cookies when his research showed that Louise served Swedish cookies to her guests when they came to visit her.



This honouring of Louise will be followed two days later, on **Saturday, August 20**, by the Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival in 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/>.

Return of the photo contest



Members will be pleased to know that the photo contest has returned.

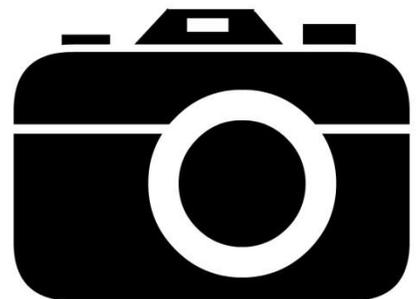
As in the past, there are four categories: **flora, fauna, landscape and people enjoying nature.**

The rules are as follows:

1. Members can submit up to **2 photos per category.**
2. Photos must be taken **within 50 miles or 80 km of North Bay** or on a sanctioned **Nipissing Naturalists Club outing.**
3. Photos must be submitted by **October 31, 2016.**
4. Photos must be taken within the 12 months of the deadline, **from November 1, 2015 to October 31, 2016.**

Please submit your photos to Sarah Wheelan at nipnatsphotos@gmail.com .
Members will get to vote on the best photo in each category at the December 2016 meeting.

The photo above, of Sarah concentrating on a damselfly portrait, possibly a River Jewelwing, is by Renee Levesque.



Guided walks in Laurier Woods

From July through to September, the following walks will take place in Laurier Woods: (October to December walks will be highlighted in September's issue of the newsletter, but can be found on our website and on Facebook for those who like to plan ahead.)



On **Saturday, July 2, from 10 a.m. until noon**, Lori Beckerton will lead a walk and provide information on **summer plants and shrubs**, like the Common Fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium*), pictured above right. 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.

On **Saturday, July 23, from 10 a.m. until noon**, Brent Turcotte will lead a **dragonfly and damselfly** walk. Come out and discover what dragonflies and damselflies can be seen in Laurier Woods. You might see some meadowhawks, hopefully the Band-winged Meadowhawk, Sedge Sprites, Marsh or Hagen's Bluet, Taiga Bluet if it is still there and a few mid-season skimmers, like the female Common Whitetail pictured at left.



 Hiking Scavenger Hunt with **make and takes**

On **Saturday, August 6, from 10:00 a.m. to noon**, 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.

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

 <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

ecosystem. This will be a great adventure for children, as well adults.

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**. **Please note this is an evening walk**.



Photo by Renee Levesque

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Westward ho!

Bonnie Brownstein and Steve Belfry are moving to British Columbia at the end of July to begin a new adventure in their lives. They have been members of Nipissing Naturalists for 13 years. For six of those years, Bonnie was on the Board and for some of those years, she was the representative for the club to Ontario Nature.

Bonnie reports that Nipissing Naturalists was a big part of her life in the North Bay area when she moved here from downtown Toronto. (Stephen had already been living in North Bay for some time.) At the first meeting she attended, members made her feel welcome and Katherine MacLeod invited her on a Christmas Bird count.

Steve was a Fish and Wildlife Technical Specialist with the Ministry of Natural Resources before he retired. As part of his job, he sometimes worked in Ontario's far north. He gave a talk at one of the Nipissing Naturalists meetings about his work studying Canada Geese at James Bay.

From Steve: *“Once we figure out where exactly we are going to live, anyone in the club will be most welcome to visit. Our plan is to have room for guests.”*

From Bonnie: *“We have enjoyed and learned from many of the talks and outings. My words to the club: Keep up the good work of helping people understand and enjoy nature.”*

With that sort of spirit, Bonnie and Steve will do well whatever they decide to do and wherever they may live.

Above is a photo of Bonnie and Steve trekking in the Amazon.



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Your Board of Directors

Below is the tenth of eleven Board members to be profiled. Perhaps in the fall when The Woodland Observer resumes publication, the eleventh Board member can be profiled.

Irene Kasch

Irene was born in Germany and immigrated to Canada in 1965, to remote Bella Coola, British Columbia, after her husband read a book on the adventures to be had in that area. Irene was eventually glad to move from Bella Coola, but not before the area instilled in her a love of nature. How could it not, when Bella Coola is considered the gateway to the Great Bear Rainforest.

When the sawmill in Bella Coola closed, Irene's husband headed for a new job in Hearst, Ontario, while Irene remained behind with their son to pack things up for the big move ahead. The train trip to Hearst necessitated a two-hour stop-over in North Bay. During the stop-over Irene's husband had the time to wander around North Bay, and he liked what he saw. He called Irene and told her about the town and his desire to settle here. Irene was willing and to North Bay she came in 1975. She has been here ever since. For 19 of her years here and until she retired, she worked at Leisure World.

Irene has always been very active in sports – downhill and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, roller blading, inline skating, biking, canoeing, and tennis, to name some. In addition, and since 1984, she has worked out at the gym four times a week.

Irene joined Nipissing Naturalists Club a few years back and has been on the Board and looking after the refreshments for the social for the last three years or so – and does a wonderful job of it for which we are all thankful.



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Board of Directors, 2016

Fred Pinto, President: fredpinto1@gmail.com 705-476-9006

Marc Buchanan, Vice-president

Joe Boivin

Sonje Bols-Hill

Irene Kasch

Mary Marrs

Stephen Mitchell

April Phelps

Oriana Pokorny

Paul Smylie

Sarah Wheelan

Past Presidents

Dick Tafel

Ted Price

Steph Romaniuk

Angela Martin

Greg Boxwell

Jeremy St. Onge

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Bird Wing

Dick Tafel, Chairman: rtafel@sympatico.ca. 705-472-7907

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

Contributors this issue: Bonnie Brownstein, Steve Belfry, Marc Buchanan, Kevan Cowcill, Kaye Edmonds, Irene Kasch, Maxime Lefebvre, Renee Levesque, April McCrum, Grant McKercher, Ed Rowley, Paul Smylie, Linda Stoner, Dick Tafel and Sarah Wheelan.

Special thanks to makeandtakes.com for the use of their printable scavenger list and to Brian Gamble, Ministry of Transportation, for his help in selecting a spot for the de Kiriline plaque.

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/>.