

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

APRIL 2019



NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

From the editor:

## Almost there

Spring is slowly coming to Nipissing. Still lots and lots of snow and frozen lakes and ponds, but there are little cracks letting us get a glimpse of what is around the corner after this long and deep snow-covered winter.

The most celebratory sign of spring is the American Robin, and as I write this, it has been seen here and there in small numbers in snowy berry bushes and on patches of brown grass. There are other small signs – the arrival of the Herring Gull just waiting for Lake Nipissing to open, but for now making great use of the landfill sites; the Ring-billed Gull, a couple here and there, a later arrival than the Herring Gull and the one seen hanging around McDonalds during the summer months; Canada Geese, seen in few numbers on small sections of open water on lakes and rivers and ponds and even lagoons; and the Red-winged Blackbird, like the robin, another iconic heralding of spring with its *conk-la-ree* song and the showing of its red shoulder patches, puffed out to the nth degree by the males as they sing from the tips of cattails. But for now, as Steve Pitt reports, “They look like tourists who booked a B&B and just arrived to find out the place is a dump. Where are the cattails they promised us?”



Grant McKercher



Renee Levesque

Birds herald the coming of spring more than any other animal. But there are other signs of spring in these early days – the first glimpse of a chipmunk popping out of its hole or scampering across the snow; buds swelling on the tips of branches of some trees; and a few Pussy Willows. But it will be a while before we see wildflowers, like the Spring Beauty, poking up through the deep snow.

Another sign of spring is when the sap runs and silver buckets are seen in sugar maple bushes. In Jeremy St. Onge’s article, you can read about how he and Delphanie, during this their Big Wild Year, invested in a sugar bush and all that it entails. It’s not all work, although there is a lot of that, but there is also the joy of being in the bush on an early spring day watching and hearing spring emerge.

Snowshoe and walking hikes continued throughout March for members who did not mind a continuing winter. Inside this issue, there is a collage of the three March hikes, as well as an article by Dick Tafel about a hike taken 20 years ago when he and Cal Osborne cross-country skied through Marten River Provincial Park and came upon an unexpected visitor, one that decided it liked their blue tuques.

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In Emails to the Editor, there is an item on green ice in response to Eric Mattson's article last month on blue ice, and one on the animals of winter and how they cope in response to Paul Smylie's article on the same subject. Response to articles is always welcome.

If you have read enough about winter and snow, in Katlynd Treiber-Vajda's article, you will find a change of scenery from our Northern snowy spring to the blue waters of the Caribbean. You may recall that back in October 2018, Katlynd and Matt Rideout talked to us about Caribbean Reef Buddy and the containment of Lionfish. Katlynd suggests a tasty way of helping get rid of this very invasive species.

The book review this month is one written by Grant McKercher on seabirds, like the albatross, for example, a seabird prominent in Samuel Coleridge's poem, "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner": *And a good south wind sprung up behind;/ The Albatross did follow, /And every day, for food or play, /Came to the mariner's hollo!* To many of us, the albatross is a mysterious bird, a bird most of us will never see, one that on its pelagic journey does not have a landscape, a seascape, but a windscape.

Well-known Ontario birders, Ken and Mike Burrell, write about their book coming out this spring, *Best Places to Bird in Ontario*. Although our immediate Nipissing District does not warrant a mention, think about visiting some of these places on your spring and summer road trips in Ontario.

It is time once again for Ontario Nature's Annual Gathering. This year it will be held in Hamilton to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. Registration details are inside. Do not be put off by the fact it is being held in Hamilton. Hamilton has so many nature trails, including the Bruce Trail, and many spectacular natural sites like Albion Falls and Cootes Paradise.

Our April club outing, provided the weather cooperates, will be to see Yellow and Blue-Spotted Salamanders, another sign of spring. Details are inside. And our speaker this month is Larry Dyke who will talk about the lower Mackenzie River Valley.

And finally, the captivating photo of the Red Fox gracing this month's cover was taken by Peter Ferris. Watch for Peter's article on his trip to the Yukon's remote Hart River in May's issue.

Happy spring whenever it arrives!

Renee Levesque, editor [rlevesque1948@gmail.com](mailto:rlevesque1948@gmail.com)



# ‘The shining buckets slowly, slowly fill...’

By *Jeremy St. Onge*

This year maple syrup holds special significance for Delphanie and me because we are in our Big Wild Year – 365 days of eating only wild and feral foods. We have probably consumed over 10 litres of maple syrup in the past two and a half months, so we are anticipating the need to stock up!

Normally I would tap 30 or so trees with my students and putter around with collecting sap and boiling it at Canadore College’s culinary program kitchen. But this year, I started in on a lifetime investment in a sugar maple bush on my parents’ property in Redbridge.

Work began last fall with our scouting a location and making trail improvements. I decided on a temporary location on a good trail where I estimated 100 tappable trees within 100 metres. We cleared some brush, piled up several cords of good, dry firewood and set up a steel-frame tarp shelter to house our equipment. Then it snowed. And snowed. And snowed. Unfortunately, at some point in January our parking shelter caved under the snow load. Luckily, the new evaporator I had purchased for this venture



hadn’t yet arrived, and we had only a chainsaw and some minor items stored in the shelter.

A couple of weeks ago when I received word that my Dominion & Grimm evaporator had been shipped from the factory in Montreal, we began to dig in earnest and uncover and dismantle the parking shelter, replacing it with a pole-framed tarp shelter of our own making. (See photo at left.) We also had to excavate the firewood to allow it to dry in the sun. Our four-foot tall piles of firewood were pretty much even with the top of the snow!

Although we were feeling the time crunch, we couldn’t help but enjoy the simplicity of a quiet snowshoe hike, hearing the calls of the chickadees change from foraging to territorial marking, and seeing the buds on branch tips swelling in anticipation of spring weather. The period of



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time between when the snowy woods transition through all the melt and mud to spring is probably when I spend the least amount of time in the woods. But this year, I am looking forward to spending all my spare time immersed in the seasonal changes while collecting and processing sap.

Because I like the look of a traditional sugar bush, I have a collection of old metal buckets, lids and spiles. We have about 120 to put out this season. I will add to that collection whenever I find them for sale. Although the evaporator that I have is a bit big for me now, it will accommodate a few hundred more trees as I expand.

The evaporator is a good fired stove with a large shallow pan. As raw sap is fed into the evaporating pan, it passes through a series of baffles and heats rapidly to a rolling boil. As the sap is reduced, the concentration of sugars increases.

By watching the physical properties of the syrup carefully and by checking the temperature or the sugar content with a Brix metre, we can stop and bottle the syrup at the perfect amount so it does not spoil or crystallize. We will also boil some past this point and let it condense as solid maple candy or, by stirring it rapidly as it cools, allow it to condense and break up as maple sugar.

The maple sap flow is very dependent on weather conditions and most specifically on the night and day temperatures. If there is a long run of freezing nights and warm days, we will collect a lot of sap! Even though it must be reduced by a ratio of between 28:1 and 40:1 to get syrup, we can expect to net approximately one litre of finished syrup for each tap and bucket. Therefore, with 100 tappable trees, we have our fingers crossed that we will make 100 litres of finished syrup!

As the nights warm up and spring continues on, the trees halt their flow of sweet sap and we will then wrap up our operation. Our work is not finished until we pull our taps and buckets, thoroughly wash up our equipment and store it securely away from rodents, bears, raccoons and other curious or hungry animals.

We just started tapping our trees on March 20. That first sound of maple sap dripping into an empty bucket is magical, only eclipsed by the sound it makes dripping into a full bucket! A friend of mine came out to help one evening and we drilled and tapped trees while a nearby Barred Owl called repeatedly. Now that's magical too!

**Editor's note:** The article's heading is from "In the Sugar Bush", by Canadian poet, Janet Armstrong, 1935; Cornelius Krieghoff is a Dutch-Canadian painter known for his landscapes and outdoor life paintings. Jeremy and Delphanie are doing well three months into their Big Wild Year.



*Sugar Making in Canada, by Cornelius Krieghoff, 1852*

Winter hikes continued throughout March with hikes to Otter Lake, the Escarpment and Stepping Stones Trails. Photos by Fred Pinto, Bill Sikora and Rick Tripp.



## A Blue Moon encounter

*Editor's Note: The article below is reprinted from The Woodland Observer, March 1999, when Pat Boxwell was editor. Written by Dick Tafel in the third person, the article has been edited to fit the format of this newsletter. I thought it fitting to reprint Dick's article at this time even though his encounter with the Spruce Grouse took place on the last day of January because April is often the time to see these beautiful birds with, as Dick writes, "their eyebrows glowing crimson".*

*By Dick Tafel*

On a Blue Moon day on January 31, 1999, Dick Tafel and Cal Osborne were cross-country skiing at the far end of the thick 25-acre spruce bog in Marten River Provincial Park. They had made the trek there in hopes of finding a Boreal Chickadee, seen there the previous summer, and whatever other birds might make an appearance, especially a Spruce Grouse (above). For many years, Dick had trekked through all sorts of deep woods in hopes of seeing this bird within his home area, but without luck. It had become, in bird parlance, his nemesis bird.

January 31 was a beautiful winter's day – crispy cold and sunny, minus 15 degrees C, with Black Spruce and nearby trees laden with snow. About two feet of snow covered the ground, the top three inches recently fallen. The bog was a mixture of deep shadow and glistening white.



Renee Levesque



While Cal and Dick were *pishing* trying to lure even one Boreal Chickadee, what should appear but a male Spruce Grouse, its eyebrows glowing crimson. It didn't shy away, but came skittering across the snow towards the visitors, investigating them, walking round and round them only 2 or 3 feet away, and clucking very softly. This superbly beautiful grouse showed every inch of itself, from its long, thin toes to his velvet black breast and chest to its slate grey upper back. It had small white streaks on its dark head, large black eyes and a black, stubby, slightly-hooked bill.

Suddenly and surprisingly, it flew onto the shoulder of Cal and allowed Dick with his bare hand to scratch its breast. But then even more surprisingly, it flew onto Dick's blue-tuqued head. From there, it flew back onto the proffered palm of Cal, and then back onto Dick's head where it perched for a while. (Photo

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*above shows the grouse on Cal's hand on the second return to Marten River Provincial Park.)*

As the skiers glided along the trail, the grouse kept its balance on top of Dick's blue tuque for about 40 feet before flying off a short distance to a low spruce, showing off in flight its white spots under its tail and the lovely beige tips to the underparts of its black tail feathers.

Thinking the bird had left them for good, the skiers said their goodbyes to it and went on their way. But about 50 feet down the trail, they noticed the grouse behind them. They stopped and what did the grouse do? Yes, it flew back onto Dick's blue tuque, perching there even longer than before. Cal and Dick continued skiing with the grouse on Dick's head. At one point, Dick had to duck to get under a tree branch and the grouse did likewise, staying put even as Dick coasted down a hill.

Finally, about 100 feet along, it decided it had enough fun and flew to a nearby branch where it watched its new friends ski off. The skiers excitedly recounted to each other their involvement with their bird friend, telling themselves that because they did not have a camera with them no one would ever believe their story. It was indeed a rare experience, happening only once in a Blue Moon!

**Editor's Note:** *A great last sentence, Dick, but was it a once in a Blue Moon experience? No! A few days later, on February 6, Cal and Dick returned to the same area with Grant McKercher who had a camera with him, and lo and behold, the Spruce Grouse not only made another appearance, but also landed on Cal's and Dick's head! (Photo of Cal at right looking quite at ease, but bemused, with a grouse upon his blue-tuqued head.) Naturally Dick was wearing his lucky blue tuque too. Grant's camera batteries died after he got photos of the grouse on Cal's head and unfortunately, he was not able to get pictures of it on Dick's head. Unfortunate because for a bird Dick hadn't yet seen in our area, he surely saw it well twice in a week!*



**Grant McKercher**

*I didn't live in North Bay then, nor was I a birder at that stage of my life, but I have since gone to Marten River Provincial Park at least three times over the past five winters, hoping for a similar twice in a Blue Moon experience, but to no avail. Instead, I have seen Spruce Grouse regularly on the trail to Louck Lake off Summit Drive, usually in April, but not once did it land on my hand, arm or head. I think I need a blue tuque for that to happen!*

*Spruce Grouse are actually quite tame and sometimes they can be approached and even caught. However, they are a quiet bird, thinly distributed in their habitat and, therefore, not always easy to find. They tend to more often sit motionless and unnoticed as you pass by.*

*January 31 marked the first Blue Moon in 1999. There was a second one two months later, on March 31, 1999. To have two Blue Moons that close together was a rare occurrence just like the two encounters with the Spruce Grouse. Interesting that Dick's and Cal's toques were also blue! Some coincidences here – or are they?*

# Conservation has never been so tasty

*By Katlynd Treiber-Vajda, Wildlife Biologist/ Dive Instructor  
Caribbean Reef Buddy Inc., Carriacou, Grenada, W.I.  
Photos courtesy of Caribbean Reef Buddy*

*Editor's Note: Some of you may have been at the presentation last October by Katlynd and Matt Rideout, Caribbean Reef Buddy. This article is based on that presentation.*

The Lionfish is an invasive species that has been around for quite some time, wreaking havoc in its invasive range. But if you are not from the Southern U.S. and haven't spent any time around the coasts of the Tropical Western Atlantic, perhaps you have never heard of it.

I am writing to you from Carriacou, a tiny island in Grenada, West Indies. Here, Lionfish pose a significant threat to the reefs in the area and to the livelihoods of many locals. At Caribbean Reef Buddy, the Carriacou-based marine conservation NGO for which I work, educating the local community about this clever invader is at the top of our priority list.

The elegant stripes and delicate fins of the Lionfish (*Pterois volitans/miles*) make for a stunning image under the water, as you will see in the photo at right. However, attractive as they are, these finfish are an invasive species that belong on the coral reefs of the Indo-Pacific region, not on those of the Western Atlantic where they pose a significant threat.



Although accounts vary, it is believed that the Lionfish was introduced into its invasive range during the mid-1980s, with the most likely explanation being escapes or releases from aquaria

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along the coast of southern Florida. Researchers suggest that the invasion could have started with the release of only 8 to 12 individuals. From this little number began one of the most rapid marine finfish invasions in history!

With a reproductive rate of up to 2 million eggs per female per year and no natural predators, Lionfish have spread rapidly throughout the U.S. Southeast and Caribbean coastal waters.

Lionfish are non-specific in their eating habits to the point where they can and will eat any fish they can fit into their mouths, known as “gape-size limiting”. The average Lionfish is capable of consuming prey items up to two-thirds of its own body size. (*And no wonder when you look at its mouth in photo at right!*) It is competing quite successfully for food and space with overfished native species, such as grouper and snapper, and posing a major threat to fisheries, habitats and ecosystem function.

And if that isn't enough, the Lionfish is armed with an arsenal of sharp, venomous spines, capable of delivering a painful sting upon contact. Instead of fleeing from potential predators, these fearsome fish will turn and face their enemies, dipping their heads and flaring their spines towards the threat.

Animals that eat Lionfish in their native habitat – of which there are many – consist mainly of sharks, groupers and eels. Though we have plenty of these in the Western Atlantic, they don't yet recognize Lionfish reliably as a source of food. Though many people have tried, attempts to “teach” potential predators to hunt invasive Lionfish have instead led to the association of food with human divers, and not with Lionfish. Not only is this rather embarrassing, but it is also potentially quite dangerous.

The photo at left is of a volunteer diver catching a Lionfish. He is using a Hawaiian sling spear and putting his catch into a Lionfish containment unit called a “zookeeper”.



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The only real headway made with attempts at biocontrol has been with grouper; however, many locations, including this one here in Carriacou, do not have a large number of grouper because of overfishing. This means that to protect our delicate reefs from these unwanted guests, we have to hunt them ourselves.

Though complete eradication is not deemed possible any time soon, we can make a very big difference by regularly culling the Lionfish population. What can we do with the Lionfish once they are out of the water? Eat them, of course!

One very common misconception is that Lionfish are poisonous and cannot be eaten. Although they are venomous, they are not poisonous. This means that their defense system only works when venom is injected into the bloodstream. They can be eaten safely once their venomous spines have been removed. Lionfish are not only safe to eat, but their meat is sweet and very tasty.

The photo at right is of Junior Stapleton, the man you call if you want Lionfish caught for you. He was a part of our Lionfish containment program and learned how to dive and hunt Lionfish with us.

So the next time you are visiting relatives in Florida, or on a warm, sunny Caribbean vacation, look for Lionfish on the menu. It tastes great and is an eco-friendly alternative to grouper or tuna. Conservation has never been so tasty!



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## Book Review

**The Seabird's Cry: The Lives and Loves of the Planet's Great Ocean Voyagers**

**By Adam Nicolson**

**Illustrator: Kate Boxer**

**William Collins, UK, 2017**

**Paperback 2018**

**416 pages**

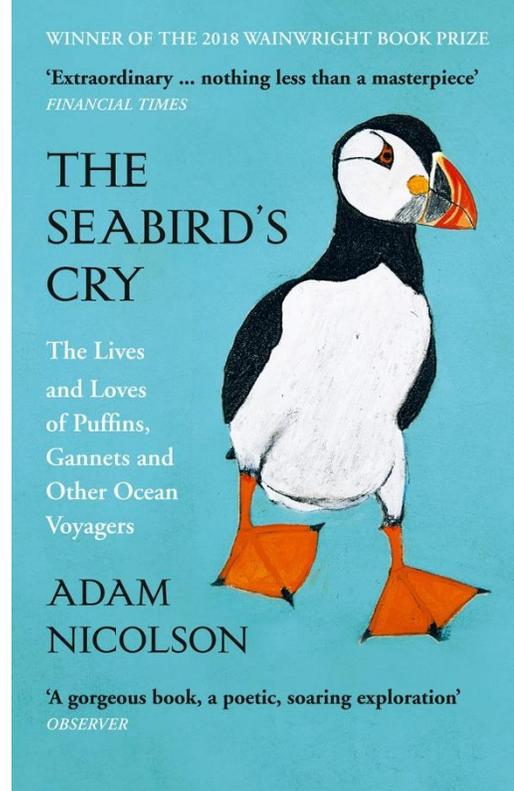
*By Grant McKercher*

I picked up this book by British author, Adam Nicolson, at a tourist information centre on the Orkney Islands on a recent trip to Scotland. It was a spur-of-the-moment purchase that I thought would complement my incidental pelagic birding while travelling on the ferries between various islands of the Hebrides and Orkneys. It isn't a field guide, but rather a scientific, poetic and historical

book, providing thoughtful and often surprising insights into the lives of seabirds found around the world.

Profiling ten species of seabirds, Nicolson takes us on an adventure, integrating history, man's place in nature, biology and technical advances that are allowing us to understand these highly adapted birds, "the only creatures at home in the air, on land, and on the sea".

I was intrigued with how little we actually know about the lives of seabirds (gannets, auks, shearwaters and albatrosses to name four) and especially their pelagic lives beyond their coastal breeding colonies. However, with the advent of new, miniaturized tracking devices, we are now gaining insight into the complexity of their migrations, feeding strategies and means of navigation. For example, it now seems that some seabirds, such as the shearwaters, use the ocean's "odour landscape", primarily



*Blue-footed Boobie, Grant McKercher*

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diethyl sulphide released by krill when they eat phytoplankton, to find feeding grounds. Others, like the albatross, are masters of the wind on which they are dependent – “weather systems are the metronomic masters of their lives.” On their pelagic journeys, “they have no landscape or seascape. They have a windscape.”

A major concept presented in the book, which may help expand our view of seabird and other animal behaviour, is that of *umvelt* - from German meaning “surrounding world”, originally proposed by the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexkull. Each species lives in its own unique sensory universe of which humans may have no, or only partial, understanding.

This is a very powerful book that educates and informs with scientific facts, while at the same time weaving a tapestry of vivid imagery taken from history and literature.

Nicolson presents sobering statistics and projected trends about the future of seabirds and how we have brought their populations into a precipitous decline through overfishing, pollution, destruction of habitat and the effects of climate change. But he is not without optimism that we can change the course of things by increasing our understanding of seabird (and planetary) ecology, and moving from the Anthropocene (human-dominated) epoch to the Ecozoic – “life lived in the ‘house of earth’, powered by empathy and enabled by understanding.”

***Editor’s Note:*** Adam Nicolson has written many books on history, nature and the countryside, and is the winner of many prizes, including the Royal Society of Literature’s Ondaatje Prize, the Somerset Maugham Award, the W.H. Heinemann Award and the British Topography Prize. For *The Seabird’s Cry*, Nicolson also won the Wainwright Prize in 2018 and the Jefferies Award for nature writing in 2017.



*Waved Albatross, Grant McKercher*

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# New guidebook focuses on Ontario's birding hotspots

*By Mike and Ken Burrell*

We took an interest in birds at an early age – Mike since he was old enough to hold a pair of binoculars and Ken, the late bloomer, not until he reached the ripe old age of eleven. Since then we've been obsessed with the birds of Ontario and have spent our free time (and managed to make it part of our paid work) travelling around the province and occasionally beyond in search of birds.

Our own interest in birds really hit high gear one spring in the 1990s when we were pre-teens and our parents, avid birders themselves, drove us to Long Point to drop off a few dozen Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes my father had built over the winter. We met the wonderful people of Bird Studies Canada and attended the Doug Tarry Young Ornithologists' Workshop.

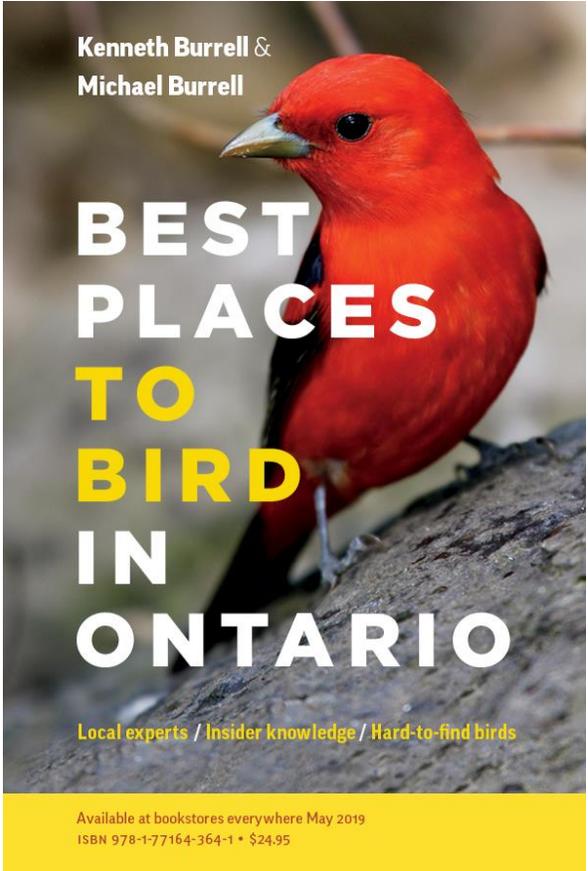
It wasn't long before we realized how lucky we were to live in such an ecologically and ornithologically rich region, and it wasn't long before we became aware that birding was an actual career path we could pursue. Both of us are absolutely obsessed with birds, spending most of our free time learning and chasing birds from one corner of the province to the next.

A few years ago, we were approached about co-authoring a new birding guidebook for Ontario. It was to be the third installment of a "Best Places to Bird" series, following *Best Places to Bird in British Columbia* released in 2017 and *Best Places to Bird in the Prairies* released in 2018. Both of us had previously talked about sharing our knowledge of Ontario birds in book form, so when the opportunity presented itself, we knew we couldn't pass it up, even knowing we were in for some late nights of pulling together all the bits of knowledge we had gained over two decades of birding.

We knew we wanted to make this book different from Clive Goodwin's *A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario*, published in 1995. And it soon became apparent that it would be a fair bit different, primarily in that it covers our favourite sites in more depth, including updated information on the sites and birds themselves, birding strategies, and natural and cultural history sprinkled with some personal stories.

Formulating a list of the top 30 places to bird in the province sounds easy, but we quickly found that wasn't the case. Making the list was easy enough, but whittling it down to 30 was not. We

Kenneth Burrell &  
Michael Burrell



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didn't apply a rigorous scientific method to the task; rather, each of us started with our top five areas to bird, and from there we added other favourites.

In making our final selection, we tried to find a balance of locations across the province and in different ecological zones. We also took into account where most of our readers would be, considering both visiting birders and birders who live in the province, which is why we have included many areas within a couple of hours of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Ultimately, we are happy with the sites we have chosen, but we know that not everyone will agree with our choices. We just didn't have space for some of the other excellent birding spots, including the Hudson Bay coastline, Haldimand County, the upper Bruce, Manitoulin Island, the north shore of Lake Superior, and Luther Marsh, to name a few.

There are definitely personal biases in the book, notably the Kingston and Pelee areas that are thoroughly covered. Mike lived for two years in Kingston, and Ken spent entire springs at Pelee doing research for his Master's thesis, which means we have lots of in-depth knowledge of these areas that we felt should be shared.

In every chapter, we have tried to provide detailed information that will be useful for birders of all skill levels, whether living in the area or travelling through. Included for each location is a site overview, a birding guide to the area with helpful tips, directions to get there alongside a map, and at least one photo of a specialty bird for the area.

We hope *Best Places to Bird in Ontario*, a user-friendly guidebook with its clear maps, beautiful colour photos and a wealth of useful information, will become an invaluable resource for birders of all skill levels and for birders from near and far.

*Editor's Note: The official release date of Best Places to Bird in Ontario is May 7, 2019. However, you can pre-order your copy at a reduced rate from Amazon.ca, <https://www.amazon.ca/Best-Places-Ontario-Kenneth-Burrell/dp/1771643641>, and once the book is published, it should be available at a local book store. Mike and Ken will be signing copies of their book at various spring events. The closest event to Nipissing is Gravenhurst at the Muskoka Discovery Centre on **Sunday, April 28 at 2:00 p.m.** For other spring events at which Mike and Ken will be in attendance see: <http://burrellbirding.ca/best-places-to-bird-in-ontario/>.*





## Interesting March find: Peregrine Falcon

Bruce Tuck

*By Renee Levesque*

It watches from its perch 3,000 feet up and when, with its acute eyesight, it spies its prey, down it stoops at speeds of over 320 km/h! An aerial assault, a swift and spectacular dive! The fastest animal on Earth!

It is a Peregrine Falcon, a powerful, fast-flying falcon, its long pointed wings and long tail enabling such a swift descent, its feet lying back against its tail and its wings half-closed.

It doesn't always watch from such a great height and it doesn't always stoop at such a speed. There is a difference between the fastest measured speed and the usual speed. Although the highest measured diving or stooping speed of the Peregrine Falcon is 389.5 km/h, the normal stooping speed is somewhere around 160 km/h, depending on the height of its perch. It takes a lot of energy to dive at such speeds, and on its familiar home grounds, it will conserve its energy. When not hunting, its average speed is around 64 to 97 km/h. (Depending on the consulted source, these speeds vary somewhat.)

You would think the Peregrine Falcon would be named after its power and world-class speed, but it isn't. Instead its name is derived from Medieval Latin, *falco peregrinus*, meaning pilgrim falcon. Because the Peregrine's nest is inaccessible, medieval falconers who wanted to train young Peregrine Falcons had to capture them on their first flights or migratory pilgrimages.

Peregrine Falcons perch and nest mostly on steep cliffs, but also on skyscrapers, water towers, silos, bridges and other tall structures. In some countries, they nest on the ground and in trees, and in the Canadian Arctic, on steep slopes, river cutbanks and low rocks or mounds. (They tend to be nest faithful.) They are one of the most widely distributed birds in the world and can be seen all over North America and found on every continent except Antarctica.

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In North Bay, we are fortunate to have a structure the Peregrine likes, Pro-Cathedral with its high steeple and cross, and in Mattawa, St. Anne's bell tower. The Peregrine has been spotted this past March by some of us on top of the cross on both these structures, and spotted at Pro-Cathedral by many of us in other months and years.

Peregrine adults are blue-grey above, with barred underparts, a small dark head, a hooked beak and yellow talons. But their most distinguishing feature is a black malar or a cheek stripe below the eyes, giving the bird a helmeted look. The young Peregrines are brown with buffy underparts that are heavily streaked. (The colour of the Peregrine varies somewhat depending on the sub-species and there are 22 sub-species, 3 of which nest in North America.) As with most birds of prey, the female is larger than the male.



*Greg Hume, Wikimedia Commons*

Peregrines are not particular about what species of birds they prey upon – 450 species in North America and as many as 2,000 worldwide. They have been observed killing birds as large as Sandhill Cranes and as small as hummingbirds.

Their prey species depends on their regions and nesting sites, but mostly they prefer shorebirds, ptarmigans, ducks, grebes, gulls and songbirds like jays, thrushes, longspurs, buntings, larks, waxwings and starlings. In cities, pigeons make up about 20% of their diet. They also eat bats and occasionally pirate prey - fish and rodents - from other raptors.

Because Peregrines specialize in direct pursuit of their prey in the open, they favour wide-open spaces, like shores, marshes, lagoons and tundra. But despite their power and speed, Peregrines do have their predators – Gyrfalcons, eagles, Great Horned Owls and other Peregrines.

Peregrines reach sexual maturity at about 2 years. Incubation lasts for about 32 days, with both adults incubating the eggs. The nestlings, generally 1 or 2 out of 3 to 4 eggs, spend 35 to 45 days in the nest and are fed by both parents.

One of the most famous Peregrine Falcons was named Scarlett, “a female that appeared as a yearling in 1937 outside the twentieth floor of the Sun Life headquarters building in Montreal. An aggressive bird, she remained for 16 breeding seasons, had 3 successive mates and reared 21 young. Her breeding record remained unmatched in the annals of bird study until 2003, when a female named Meg in St. Paul, Minnesota, had bred for 16 consecutive years, had 6 different mates, and produced 43 young.” (From *Hinterland Who's Who*.)

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The Peregrine population experienced a crash from 1950 to 1970 because of poisoning from pesticides, mostly DDT. Peregrines are very sensitive to chemicals and our use of pesticides diminished their breeding success and resulted in their being declared an Endangered Species. With the introduction of bans and restrictions on pesticides, the population eventually stabilized and today in Ontario, Peregrines are no longer considered Endangered. However, they are of Special Concern, meaning they could become Threatened or Endangered because of habitat loss and destruction, disturbance and persecution by people, and environmental contaminants. Over 7,000 pairs are now thought to breed in North America, including Mexico.

***Editor's Note:** Bird Wing purchased the DVD, *World's Fastest Animal*, a documentary that aired on PPS last fall. "With jaw dropping blue-chip footage, NOVA follows a family of Peregrine Falcons to discover how and why these kings of the skies have adapted to be the fastest animals on the planet." We will let you know when this documentary will be shown at a Bird Wing meeting, and all who are interested in seeing it are welcome to attend.*



**Bruce Tuck**

*Two of the photos of the Peregrine Falcon were sent to me by Bruce Tuck, an amateur photographer who lives on Vancouver Island. Check out Bruce's website, "Birds ..... In My View" at: <https://www.birdsinmyview.com/>. Bruce does not take photos of only birds - click on Nature for other photos.*

***Sources for article:** All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Bio-aerial Locomotion; Hinterland Who's Who; Peregrine Falcon, Ontario.ca.; Stanford University, How Fast and How High Do Birds Fly.*



Courtesy of Great Lakes Ledger

## Emails to the editor: Green ice and the cold

Eric Mattson, who wrote an article on blue ice in March's *The Woodland Observer*, sent me an email with a link to green icebergs in the Antarctic and a new study by glaciologists on why some icebergs are green and why these green icebergs may be very important to marine life.

We know from Eric's article why some icebergs are blue. But green icebergs (above), seen in the Antarctic by explorers and sailors since the early 1900s, have been a curiosity to scientists for decades. (And certainly to those of us who may have seen green icebergs and wondered why or to those of us who did not even know icebergs could be green.)

This new study by glaciologists suggests that iron oxides in rock dust from the Antarctic's mainland are turning some icebergs green.

Is this a good thing? Definitely. Iron is a key nutrient for microscopic plants and iron is scarce in many areas of the ocean. So if the glaciologists are correct, it means that green icebergs have the ability to deliver this key nutrient to organisms that support marine life.

"It's like taking a package to the post office. The iceberg can deliver this iron out into the ocean far away, and then melt and deliver it to the phytoplankton that can use it as a nutrient," said Stephen Warren, a glaciologist at the University of Washington and lead author of the new study in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Oceans*, a journal of the American Geophysical Union. "We always thought green icebergs were just an exotic curiosity, but now we think they may actually be important."

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To read more about green icebergs and this new study see: <https://news.agu.org/press-release/mystery-of-green-icebergs-may-soon-be-solved/?fbclid=IwAR1YAJAiaINprezHUxL3-wvx6e6yZu7i3MS3rnHHCssGzX4JWz31ZmYI2zQ>

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Further to Paul Smylie’s article on winter wildlife entitled “Hibernate, migrate or tolerate” in March’s *The Woodland Observer*, Sarah Wheelan sent me an email with a link from Smithsonian.com to an article reprinted from *The Conversation* on wildlife and the cold entitled “Is winter miserable for wildlife?” It is written by Dr. Bridget B. Baker, Clinical Veterinarian and Deputy Director of the Warrior Aquatic, Translational, and Environmental Research (WATER) Lab, Wayne State University.

Dr. Baker, like Paul, lists the various strategies that wildlife have developed to help them deal with the cold – migration, torpor, hibernation and herding or denning, burrowing and roosting.

Then there are physical adaptations, from simply growing thicker fur to different physiological adaptations, like the large-eared Fennec Fox of North Africa and the small-eared Arctic Fox of the Northern Hemisphere. Large ears on an Arctic Fox would definitely not be an asset in cold Arctic regions. (Photo of an Arctic Fox in its white winter fur at right.)

But, as Dr. Baker states, wildlife can still suffer from frostbite and hypothermia. Think of the opossum with its furless tail. During cold snaps in Florida, iguanas can fall from trees and manatees can die from cold stress.

Dr. Baker ends her article with, “As a species, human beings have the ability to acclimate to an extent – some of us more than others – but we’re not particularly cold-adapted. Maybe that’s why it’s hard to look out the window on a frigid day and not feel bad for a squirrel hunkered down as the winter wind whips through its fur. We may never know if animals dread winter – it’s difficult to gauge their subjective experience.”



Jonathon Pie, Iceland, Wikimedia

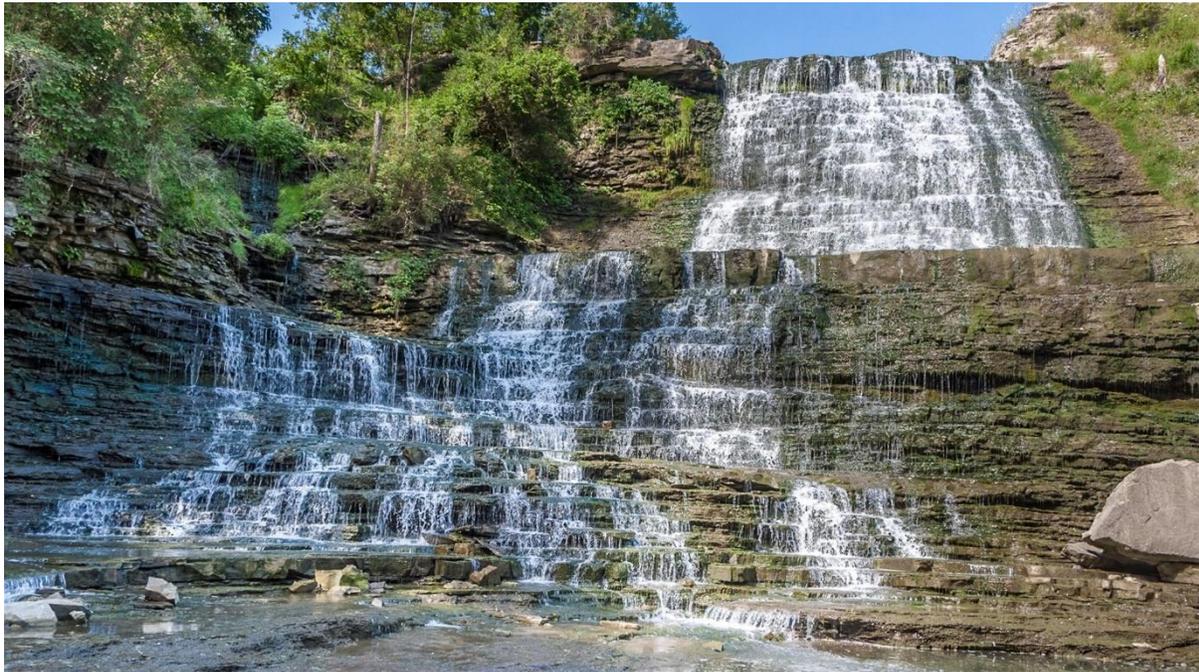
To read the full article see: [https://theconversation.com/is-winter-miserable-for-wildlife-108734?xid=PS\\_smithsonian](https://theconversation.com/is-winter-miserable-for-wildlife-108734?xid=PS_smithsonian).

# Ontario Nature's 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Gathering

## Be the Change: Inspiration for the Future

Ontario Nature's 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Gathering will take place in **Hamilton at Mohawk College from May 31 to June 2.**

It promises to be a weekend of change-inspiring workshops and a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Hamilton Naturalists' Club, one of Ontario Nature's seven founding member groups. There will be inspiring guest speakers, workshops and a guided field trip – Albion Falls, a 62-foot waterfall that flows down the Niagara Escarpment pictured below, and Cootes Paradise, a significant wetland in the City, to name a couple of field trip areas. Unless you have spent time in Hamilton, you may not be aware of the many beautiful nature trails there are in the immediate area and nearby, including the Bruce Trail.



*Conrad Kuiper, CC BY-NC-SA2.0*

The Annual Gathering is also a time to celebrate shared conservation successes, to discuss the vision for the year ahead and, at the Conservation Awards Ceremony, to recognize the achievements of conservation heroes.

See <https://ontarionature.org/events/annual-gathering/> for all the important event details. For any questions, contact Anna Dipple at [annad@ontarionature.org](mailto:annad@ontarionature.org) or 1-800-440-2366 ext. 271.

The deadline to register is **May 1, 2019**. You can register using the above Ontario Nature link.

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

# Possible April outing: Salamander mating rituals in a woodland pool

**Nature of outing:** To view salamanders mate and lay their eggs in a woodland pool. We may see a few Yellow-spotted Salamanders and possibly some Blue-spotted Salamanders.

**Leaders:** Andrée Morneault and Dan Kaminski

**When:** When there is a warm rain and most of the snow has melted. Therefore, expect to receive very short notice of the outing. If it does go ahead, it will occur at night in April, beginning about an hour after sunset. **If conditions are not right, the outing will not take place.**

If suitable conditions occur, an email will be sent informing members of the date.



*Camazine, Wikipedia*



*GRMule, Wikimedia Commons*

**Where:** 180 Quae Quae Road, Corbeil, at Brian Naylor's and Kandyd Szuba's property. Because parking is limited, we will carpool by meeting at Northgate Mall in the parking lot across from the former Sears.

**What to bring and wear:** Warm clothes that will keep you dry. It may be raining and the shrubs will be wet. Also rubber boots. We will be walking through the forest and the ground will be uneven, wet and slippery. A flashlight or a headlamp because this is a night outing.

# April speaker will discuss Mackenzie River Valley

Club meetings are held the **second Tuesday of every month**, from September to December and from February to June, **starting at 7:00 p.m., at 176 Lakeshore Drive**, the former Tweedsmuir Public School. (January is the AGM.)



Our speaker for April 9 is Larry Dyke, yet another avid adventurer. You may recall Larry's excellent presentation to us in May 2016 on *The Role of Geology in Creating Wetlands, Havens for Animals*, focusing on the Okavango Delta of Botswana and the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Canada. **This time Larry will talk about his travels in the lower Mackenzie River Valley, focusing on glimpses of the subsistence economy.**



The photo above, shows the ancient flint quarry on the Mackenzie River, 250 km upstream from Inuvik, and the photo at left shows a man checking his net on the Mackenzie Delta.

Larry is a retired geologist who spent most of his career with the Geological Survey of Canada and the Geology Department of Queen's University.

Larry's researches have taken him to most parts of the Canadian Arctic. During these travels, he got to meet and know several First Nations people, and since his retirement he has had the opportunity to go on extended wilderness trips with some of the people he met.

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER



## Board of Directors, 2018

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Monthly Bird Wing and Bird Bash reports are sent to members by email and posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club's website: <https://www.nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-wing-meetings-outings/>, and <https://www.nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-bash-reports/>.

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

**Contributors this issue:** Ken and Mike Burrell, Larry Dyke, Peter Ferris, Renee Levesque, Eric Mattson, Grant McKercher, Fred Pinto, Bill Sikora, Jeremy St. Onge, Dick Tafel, Katlynd Treiber-Vajda, Rick Tripp, Bruce Tuck and Sarah Wheelan.

Special thanks to Great Lakes Ledger for permission to use the photo of the green iceberg.

## Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fees are: single \$20.00 and 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 membership fee is paid directly to Bird Wing.**

**Please note:** While the library is undergoing renovations this year, Bird Wing meetings from February through to April will be held at Laporte's Nursery, 1054 Lakeshore Drive, North Bay.



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