

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

JUNE 2019

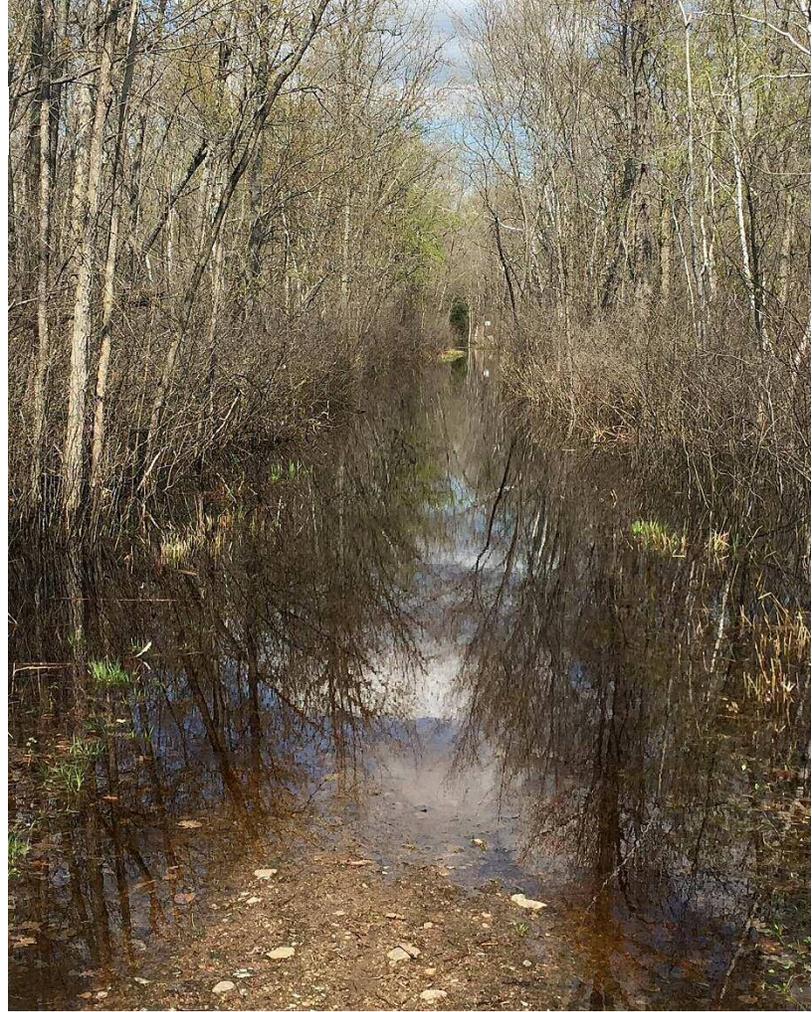


NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

# From the editor:

## The snow melted and the rain fell

First off, I want to extend sympathy to any homeowners and business owners who suffered damage loss this spring from the flooding that has been widespread in our area, raising water levels in Lake Nipissing and other lakes and rivers, and resulting in water in low-lying farmers' fields and wooded areas. Some homeowners lost their docks, their beach fronts and their boat houses. The flooding has affected roads and trails, one being Cranberry Trail, and the other of which I am aware, the Sturgeon Museum trail. Jocko Point and Mattawa seemed to have received the brunt of the flooding.



*Cranberry Trail, Kevan Cowcill*

On a more positive note, the sun will shine, the waters will recede and summer will come. This is the first time I have used a photo of people for the cover. It is the second-place winning photo of people enjoying nature, a photo by Laura Turcotte. I used it because the two people pictured could be anyone taking a walk in the woods on a nice summer's day, something all of us will no doubt do many times during the coming months.

What we won't be doing on a nice summer's day is looking for salamanders in vernal pools. We did that on a cold and wet late April evening. Sarah Wheelan, one of the participants, wrote a short piece on the outing which you will find inside.



*Cache Bay, Renee Levesque*

What we will be doing on a beautiful spring and summer's day is looking at all the lovely plants we find in the woods and along trails. This is when Brent Turcotte's booklet on the vascular plant checklist will come in handy. Read how Brant

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

came about producing this booklet and why he did so. It certainly was a dedicated undertaking. At the end of Brent's article, I provide our Facebook's direct link to Brent's checklist so you can print it.

And, of course, throughout the spring and summer, even on cool and wet days, many of us will be bird watching. For dedicated birders that activity never stops – not in the cold, the heat, the rain or the snow. This issue highlights Dick Tafel's May bird walks in Laurier Woods and the Orchard Oriole found in Gary and Connie's Sturge's and Buddy Myles' backyards. It was not the only unusual find this spring in the world of birds. Flooded fields offered up some great views of other not-so-common shorebirds. You can read all about these birds in this issue under "Odds and Sods", an article that also highlights three good Samaritans, three Nipissing Naturalists Club writers, ice-free Lake Nipissing and a former Club member and director who moved to Azilda.

I would have also included in "Odds and Sods" that Dick Tafel is receiving an honorary doctorate from Nipissing University on June 13, but the page was already set and even one word, never mind a full sentence, can seriously upset the apple cart. Congratulations, Dick!

Recently I have featured Woodland Observer articles from the distant past. This month, however, the featured article is from only two years ago – Carolyn Murray's article on birds that shows some of her bird drawings from her field notebook she carried around while on the May bird walks in 2017. But it is the last paragraph of this article that attests to Carolyn's character. Read it and see what I mean.

And speaking of character, it says a lot that Larry Dyke in his retirement travels over and over again to the far north to explore an area of the Mackenzie River with his friend, Willie Modeste, a Gwich'in who once lived along the lower reaches of that river. One day, Larry and Willie hope to bring alive in book form what life was like for a Gwich'in that area in those days. Larry's presentation at May's meeting can be found in print form following "From the Editor".

By the time this issue was ready to be put together, I had not been informed of any Club field trips or events, although I do know the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival takes place the third Saturday of August at Laurier Woods, **August 18 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

However, a non-club event that I think is a must for every member to see is the current showing at Callander's Alex Dufresne Museum of Morgan Walker's impressive carvings, photographs and paintings of wildlife, the pièce de résistance being the 40 cm or 18 inch detailed and intricate carving of a Ruffed Grouse. When you see it, or even a photo of it, you will understand why it garnered much attention and fanfare. The show **continues to June 22** and on that date, Morgan, a local artist, will be on hand to answer questions and paint a carved pheasant feather. Details inside.

April McCrum's presentation on environmental assessments which was postponed from February because a major winter storm resulted in the cancellation of February's meeting was to have taken place this month. However, April will not be able to speak at June's meeting because this is a busy assessment time for her. And so, Fred Pinto stepped in and will take about environmental education based on his recent trip to Ecuador with his University of Toronto students.

This is the last issue until September. I wish you all a great summer.

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

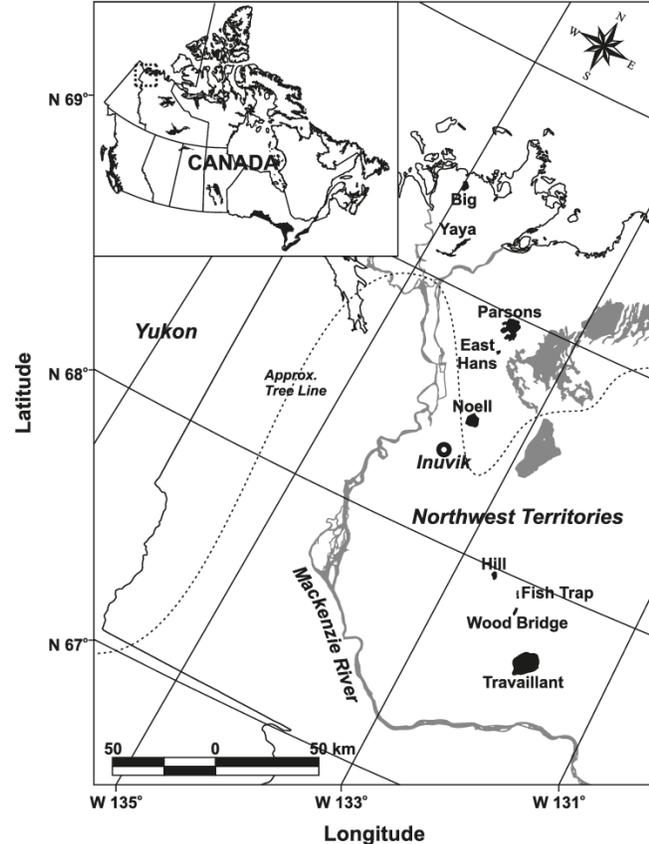
# The land and people of the Mackenzie River

*Text and photos by Larry Dyke*

In the course of several summers of geological field work from a base in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, opportunities arose, mostly inadvertent, to meet native people. One remarkable acquaintance was Johnny Charlie, former chief of Fort McPherson, located on the east bank of the Peel River and the largest Gwich'in settlement in the Northwest Territories.

My helper and I had just arrived at Fort McPherson, bedraggled and soaked, at the Co-op Hotel. We had climbed up the bank of the Peel River, having arrived in a downpour by open boat from Inuvik. I had mentioned something to the clerk at the hotel about having boats on the river bank, when an elderly native man leaned over to say that should we leave the boats there overnight, kids would probably be investigating the contents. He said to take them upstream another 8 miles (13 km) to the Dempster Highway ferry crossing and he would meet us there. Wet as we were, we did so and that began an association that lasted through the summer.

Johnny Charlie kept an eye on us from then on, taking us under his wing in the subtle way that I have come to associate with so many native people. The Gwich'in interpretive centre near the Peel River ferry on the Dempster Highway is named after Johnny Charlie.



*Larry plucking a duck*

Several years later, I returned to this part of the country, although this time I stayed on the Mackenzie. The indigenous people of the area, the Gwich'in, thought of the Mackenzie River as a corridor through their land, a flowing ribbon, like a huge moving lake, a force and a being connecting them and connecting the places they travelled to.

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

My helper and I had been on the river for six weeks and were making our last research stop at the mouth of a tributary called Travaillant River. Finding level camp spots on the Mackenzie can require patience.

Everything about that river is enormous. The shores continuously increase in slope from the shore, reaching an almost vertical face about 30 feet above the summer level. This profile results from ice being pushed along the river shorelines during break-up. About the only level ground for a camp is found in the V of land between the river and a tributary.



I knew that the mouth of Travaillant River had been the site of a trading post, but only from seeing it marked as such on older topographic maps. We found quite a large terrace, made our camp and the next morning busied ourselves with some recent landslides a few kilometres upstream. When we returned to our camp, we saw a boat and a small barge, and then heard a voice I immediately recognized despite the fact I hadn't heard it for about 10 years. It was the voice of Willie Modeste. He had come upriver looking for logs to salvage and was with his late partner, their adopted daughter and a helper. It was to be an encounter that strengthened a friendship that has lasted to this day.

For the rest of our stay, we spent the evenings either in Willie's commodious tent or following him around on what had been the grounds of the trading post. Still visible was a clearing of at least an acre that had been a garden, a depression that had been a root cellar, a few decayed timbers where the trader's house had been and a cast iron stove sitting in a grove of poplars. A family of seven had lived here, and across the Travaillant River, a family of five had lived. The husbands of both homesteads were from southern Canada and had married Gwich'in women. Further back from the Mackenzie, there had been several other homes belonging to native people. When my helper and I left Willie and his companions to head further upstream, the impressions of his tour remained with me. After I returned home, Willie and I discussed the idea of trips back to the area, but it would be another 10 years before we met up again.

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

By then I had retired and so had the time to start making good on some of the trip ideas. The first trip took Willie and me north from Inuvik into the Husky Lakes, really a long inlet of the Beaufort Sea. We took “white man’s grub” on these trips - mostly dried goods - but found all our meat by setting net for fish and shooting ducks, geese and even a caribou.

For the next three summers, Willie and I travelled south from Inuvik by boat, sometimes as far as Fort Good Hope, about 450 km from Inuvik. Willie had by now recognized my interest in the settlement at Travaillant River and this became the focus of the first of our upstream trips.

We wandered extensively over the wide sloping terraces that had been the grounds of the two families, Willie finding more flat spots where houses had been, ditches for draining the vegetable gardens and overgrown trails leading inland, while I followed him around with a tape recorder. Our searches spread to the other side of the river where one of the sons of these families had built a small cabin at the mouth of a creek. A few miles downstream, we found the cabin of a family who had taken a young Willie with them to their fishing grounds from fall until Christmas. We looked for another house, one in which Willie and his family had spent the night while returning home on the Mackenzie’s ice. Likely the house had been bulldozed by the spring break-up, but we did find a heavy cast iron stove.

I have a lasting fascination with the unrecorded presence of families along this stretch of the Mackenzie. The families and their homes are no longer there, and I, like most travellers now, have little idea of the people who lived there. With the consent of people still alive from this era, Willie and I will eventually document an account of his life, a Gwich’in who grew up along the lower reaches of the Mackenzie River.



*William Modeste on the site of the trading post*

## Seeking salamanders by night

*By Sarah Wheelan*

On April 25, donning headlamps and carrying flashlights, Nipissing Naturalists Club members went on a nighttime adventure looking for salamanders, thanks to Kandyd Szuba and Brian Naylor who invited us to their property in Corbeil.



*Sarah Wheelan*

Kandyd and Brian first noted salamanders mating in vernal pools on their property more than 20 years ago. Each spring, salamanders make their way from the forest to these pools to mate and lay their eggs.

Our hope was to find some Yellow-spotted Salamanders and maybe, if we were lucky, some Blue-spotted ones. But expectations were exceeded when we found several Blue-spotted Salamanders – as well as a few Yellow-spotted. Several fast-moving members even managed to catch some!



Many thanks to Andrée Morneault, Daniel Kaminski, and Kandyd and Brian for coordinating and leading our adventure.

*Daniel Kaminski*



# Checklist of vascular plants in North Bay and area

*By Brent Turcotte; photos by Renee Levesque*

In 2003, I started as a naturalist with birds. In 2005, I expanded to dragonflies and butterflies. In 2009, I started looking at plants using a basic guide, *Ontario Wildflowers: 101 Wayside Flowers*. I eventually outgrew this guide and began using *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*. It is a guide I found tough to use at first, but as I got used to it, it got easier. In the following years, I added additional plant books.

In 2018, I got into iNaturalist. I put in over 1400 observations from the last ten years. Then I discovered Global Biodiversity Information Facility or GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org/en/>. GBIF is not a citizen science site like eBird, eButterfly and iNaturalist. Rather it is a compilation of most of the citizen science sites and digitized observations from collections, such as herbaria.

While iNaturalist gives you a good idea of what creatures have been found in your area, GBIF is more comprehensive. Unfortunately, it does not include common names in its data. To make sense of GBIF data, I downloaded and merged the data from iNaturalist with that from GBIF. And then because I went to the trouble of merging this data, I thought it would be a good idea to take the time to create a vascular plant checklist for North Bay and area. So from October 2018 to March 2019, I worked on creating a vascular plant checklist roughly using an 80-km radius circle centred in North Bay.

I list 731 species, including all plants except mosses, liverworts and algae which are non-vascular. You might think that is a lot of species, but the list includes trees, shrubs, herbs, vines, ferns, horsetails, clubmosses, quillworts, spikemosses, grasses, sedges and rushes. It is actually not a huge list. For example, the *Checklist of the Vascular Plants of Algonquin Provincial Park, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, consists of 1049 species, yet Algonquin Provincial Park is only slightly larger than the area I cover in my checklist.

Our region is in fact poorly botanized. About a third of the observations in the checklist are based on iNaturalist observations submitted in 2018. Herbarium data gathered from GBIF and, to a much

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

smaller extent, from Northern Ontario Flora Database, fill in significant gaps. This data comes from experienced botanical collectors over greater time periods than that of iNaturalist. Other data on which the checklist is based is from books with maps of sightings, from the MNRF and from some personal observations of Michael Oldham, botanist, who proofread my draft.

However, there is still more data out there. I need to go back to the MNRF because I am missing their crown land series data. In 2020, I hope to produce an updated checklist with further MNRF data and with the 2019 sightings from iNaturalist and GBIF. I might even include species outside the area because they could be species you could look for in our area, although I will clearly indicate these species as such.

A vascular plant checklist is a lot of work. There was much to consider in making a comprehensive list, such as determining whether a species belongs or doesn't belong in the checklist, how to organize the list and how to lay it out. I also spent much time entering plant names into a name server, a server that hosts most of the known scientific and common names of plants.

In the end, the checklist I decided upon has several innovative features. It is organized in seven major sections; organized alphabetically by the common family name; and organized alphabetically by the scientific name. I added shading on every second species to prevent the mistake of putting a check mark beside the wrong species. I included a special column to show what species are missing from Newcomb's guide and species for which you should consult a tree or shrub book. The alternative common and scientific names are, to a great degree, from Newcomb's guide, and the index includes genus names to make it more useful. I set aside a page at the back of the booklet for additional sightings or other notes. My one dissatisfaction with the checklist is that it doesn't provide space for noting the year and location of your first sighting of a species. To provide that feature would likely require a major redesign of the layout and increase the size of the booklet.

Beyond my making use of this checklist for my year and life lists, I hope it will encourage others to observe and look for plants and submit their observations. With more plant observations, more clues as to where to find less common insects can be determined. I will bring a limited number of copies of the checklist to meetings I

attend or you can print the checklist (18 pages) from Nipissing Naturalists Club's Facebook. Click on the direct link below.

[http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ontariofieldnaturalists.ca%2FMisc%2Fplant\\_checklist.pdf&h=AT3ESJc\\_n4XFV-8aBva4bFfrlH64D\\_hbUL1Cco5zF6ZGxFpR8m76HRtjfrUB3n6TEvWDZLAkSNVjcDfa3Oa7Y6TL8P\\_Kb6I2htH-WHmnYDQZVU7L9VY11uMHINIM1z0mB0Q1kE0JJs1Tv-N8F1XzJ4xwz2F9j7s5zi1ViLppqh13Bg](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ontariofieldnaturalists.ca%2FMisc%2Fplant_checklist.pdf&h=AT3ESJc_n4XFV-8aBva4bFfrlH64D_hbUL1Cco5zF6ZGxFpR8m76HRtjfrUB3n6TEvWDZLAkSNVjcDfa3Oa7Y6TL8P_Kb6I2htH-WHmnYDQZVU7L9VY11uMHINIM1z0mB0Q1kE0JJs1Tv-N8F1XzJ4xwz2F9j7s5zi1ViLppqh13Bg)

## Checklist of the Vascular Plants of North Bay and Area



Compiled by Brent Turcotte, 2019



## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

### Emails to the editor

*Larry Dyke, geologist, responds to the unique rock formation in the photo below taken by Peter Ferris while he was on his canoe trip on the Hart River last summer. It was a photo I used in May's issue to illustrate the landscape in Peter's article, "Hart River: Gem of the Yukon's Peel River Watershed."*

I worked in that region back in the early 70s. The mountain side is made up of Devonian or Ordovician carbonate rocks, rocks that are also spectacularly exposed along the Dempster Highway. The environment at the time of deposition would have been something like the West Indies with coral reefs and lagoons. The array of small buttresses and pillars gives this exposure a castellated appearance. Those "castles" are, in fact, bioherms or fossilized coral reefs. *(Editor: Imagine that!)*



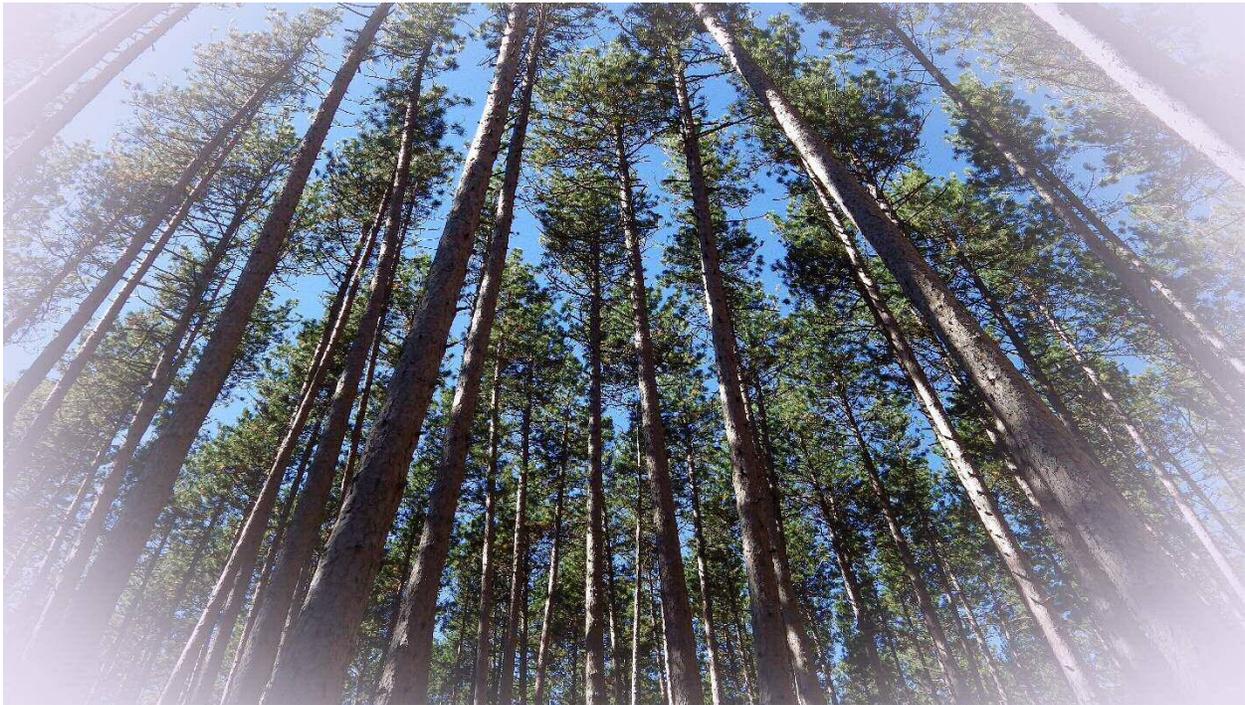
*Andrée Morneault, who works as a silviculture forester for Nipissing Forest Resource Management, updates us on what is happening in terms of forestry in the McConnell Lakes area. This is in response to a reprinted article in May's issue of*

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

*the newsletter about a 2001 forestry field trip to the area. It was written by Ted Price, former president of Nipissing Naturalists Club.*

It was interesting to read about the field trip to McConnell Lakes in 2001. We continue to harvest and renew the forest in that area following our Forest Management Plan and OMNRF guidelines.

We still harvest White and Red Pine stands using the shelterwood system where large White and Red Pine are retained to provide natural seed. We also retain White and Red Pine in the clearcuts. Many harvested areas are planted to Red and White Pine. In fact, we are planting about 680,000 trees this year in the McConnell Lakes area.



*Renee Levesque*

The soils in that area are productive in that we still get large amounts of poplar and red maple competition shading out our young pines. Timely tending treatments are the key to success.

Nipissing Naturalists are welcome to visit anytime, and **we would be glad to host a field trip for a group.** No helicopters though! *(Editor: This refers to the fact that half the group in 2001 took a helicopter there and the other half, a helicopter back.)*



# Bird walks in Laurier Woods

Kaye Edmonds

*By Renee Levesque*

**May 5:** We were rewarded with a warm sunny day for the first May Bird Walk in Laurier Woods. A friendly and enthusiastic group of 26, from babies to seniors, came out to enjoy the morning and saw a total of 27 species – that’s almost a bird per person.

There weren’t many wood warblers. In fact, only one was seen, a Pine Warbler, especially outstanding in its brilliant yellow coat of feathers at a time when no other warblers were present.

However, the bird of the morning was the little Ruby-crowned Kinglet. It was everywhere. I counted a total of 23 and there were probably more. One doesn’t often get such great views of it because it will not stay still, but because there were so many of them, because the leaves weren’t



yet on the trees and because they tended to hop about mainly in the understory, we were rewarded with some excellent views. In the photo at left, you can see why it is called a Ruby-crowned. (The female does not have a ruby crown, only the male. It is his calling card to get a partner.)

The other species in large numbers was the White-throated Sparrow, our trilingual bird, singing *Oh Sweet Canada-Canada-Canada*; *Cache ton cul, Frédéric, Frédéric, Frédéric* in Quebec; and *Old Sam Peabody Peabody* in the United States. I counted at least 13 of this pretty little sparrow with its white throat and yellow lores.

Another sparrow that we saw a couple of times very briefly, but heard call about 7 or 8 times, was the Swamp Sparrow, so called because it likes wetlands, even small wetlands, with tall reeds. And besides the Song Sparrow with its

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

lovely singing voice was the large, handsome Fox Sparrow on its way to the far north. Another sparrow on its way to the remote north was the American Tree Sparrow with a stick-pin in its chest. One Dark-eyed Junco was spotted and heard.



Renee Levesque

The only flycatcher to have arrived was the Eastern Phoebe and one certainly provided a good view, sitting on a branch, wagging its tail.

Not often seen, but also offering us good views, were two Brown Creepers, creeping up the trunks of trees, then flying down and starting up again.

The Ring-necked male duck deserves a mention, as does the Wilson's Snipe.

Red-wing Blackbirds (at left) also deserve a mention because Dick made me sing its song a couple of times, *conk-la-ree*, and because its brilliant red shoulders in the glistening sun elicited many oohs and ahhs.

Woodpeckers seen or heard were the Northern Flicker, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and the Pileated.

Other birds seen were Common Grackles, an American Robin, American Crows, a couple of Common Ravens, a Turkey Vulture, Canada Geese, Black-capped Chickadees, a couple of Blue Jays and a Mallard. Also seen were some

Ring-billed Gulls which Dick told participants in no uncertain terms were NOT to be called seagulls.

At the end of the walk, after marking all the birds seen on the bird chart that is posted at the start of the trail, Dick awarded prizes, *Seasonal Checklist* booklets of the birds of North Bay and area, to Linda Conway for naming two special birds seen, the Fox Sparrow and the Pine Warbler (at right), and to Debbie Charette for naming the Eastern Phoebe.



Kevan Cowcill

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

**May 11:** Twenty participants enjoyed another sunny day and 30 species of birds during the second May Bird Walk.

This time, we were rewarded with a few more warblers migrating through – 4 pretty Nashvilles; at least 7 unfortunately named Yellow-rumped; 4 handsome Cape Mays; 3 ground-loving, misnamed Palms because they don't really prefer palm trees; and, for those in the group fortunate enough to see it, a beautiful Northern Parula, a warbler often difficult to find and see.

There seems to be a lot of Cape Mays this spring. It is a warbler that waxes and wanes with the spruce budworm cycle and, therefore, can be found close to its primary food source, in spruce forests.

The Yellow-rumped (at right), an early spring arrival, has four distinct patches of yellow, one on top of its head, one on each side and, of course, one just above where the tail feathers begin, hence its name.



*Renee Levesque*



*Renee Levesque*

Ruby-crowned Kinglets were not nearly as prolific as the Saturday before. This time, we saw only three.

In addition to the American Robin, two other species of thrushes were seen, the Hermit and the Veery (at left). Both sing at dusk and have beautiful songs – the Hermit, a mournful flute-like song, and the Veery, a haunting song that spirals downward.

Other new species seen during the walks were a Red-breasted Nuthatch, a Hairy Woodpecker, Tree and Barn swallows and a couple of American Goldfinch, the male brilliant in his

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER



*Renee Levesque*

Five warblers not seen before were seen this time – the male Common Yellow-throat; the male American Redstart (below); the aptly named Black and White; the brilliant Yellow Warbler (at right); and the secretive Ovenbird, normally heard more than seen. One warbler seen the week before, the Yellow-rumped, made its presence known again this week.



*Kevan Cowcill*

yellow feathered coat. Many years, we see goldfinch all winter in their dull non-breeding plumage and watch them slowly develop into their breeding colours. But this year, we had few, if any, goldfinches, so to see them arrive already in brilliant yellow was a treat.

The prize this Saturday was given to Christine Chatelaine for naming the Cape May (at left). A good choice, not only of the bird, but also of the participant, an outgoing, joyful lady we tend to see only during the May bird walks.

**May 18:** Once again, the sun shone, and thank goodness for that because all three walks were somewhat on the chilly side despite the sun. This week, there were 23 participants who found 36 species!



*Lisa Hackett*

Other birds not seen previously were a singing Purple Finch; a drumming Ruffed Grouse of which Grant McKercher got an excellent video; a Red-eyed Vireo, asking and answering its own questions over and over again; and an American Bittern hiding in the reeds, a well-camouflaged bird seen only by some of us. Often if you don't look closely, you might think it is a dead limb.

The prize again went to Debbie Charette for identifying the American Redstart as one of the more interesting species seen, but because Debbie had previously won, she graciously gave up her prize to Nancy Hughes.

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

**May 25:** I did not go on the walk on May 25. Not only was it raining heavily, but at 1:00 p.m., I was participating in the Great Canadian Birdathon. However, despite the rain and despite the Birdathon in which Dick had a team, he still led a walk, a walk of one. Only Carolyn Murray was willing to walk through the woods in the pouring rain, although Kaye Edmonds did join them for part of the walk. They were rewarded with many sightings, but the two most interesting sightings, two not seen on any other Saturday, were the Scarlet Tanager (at right) and the Canada Warbler (below). Naturally, Carolyn won the prize.



*Renee Levesque*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Some of you may know Carolyn as a former student of Oriana Pokorny and some may recall the article and drawings she did for the September 2017 issue of the newsletter. For those who don't recall or weren't members when it appeared, it is reprinted on the following pages. Worth the read again!

# The rebirth of a birder

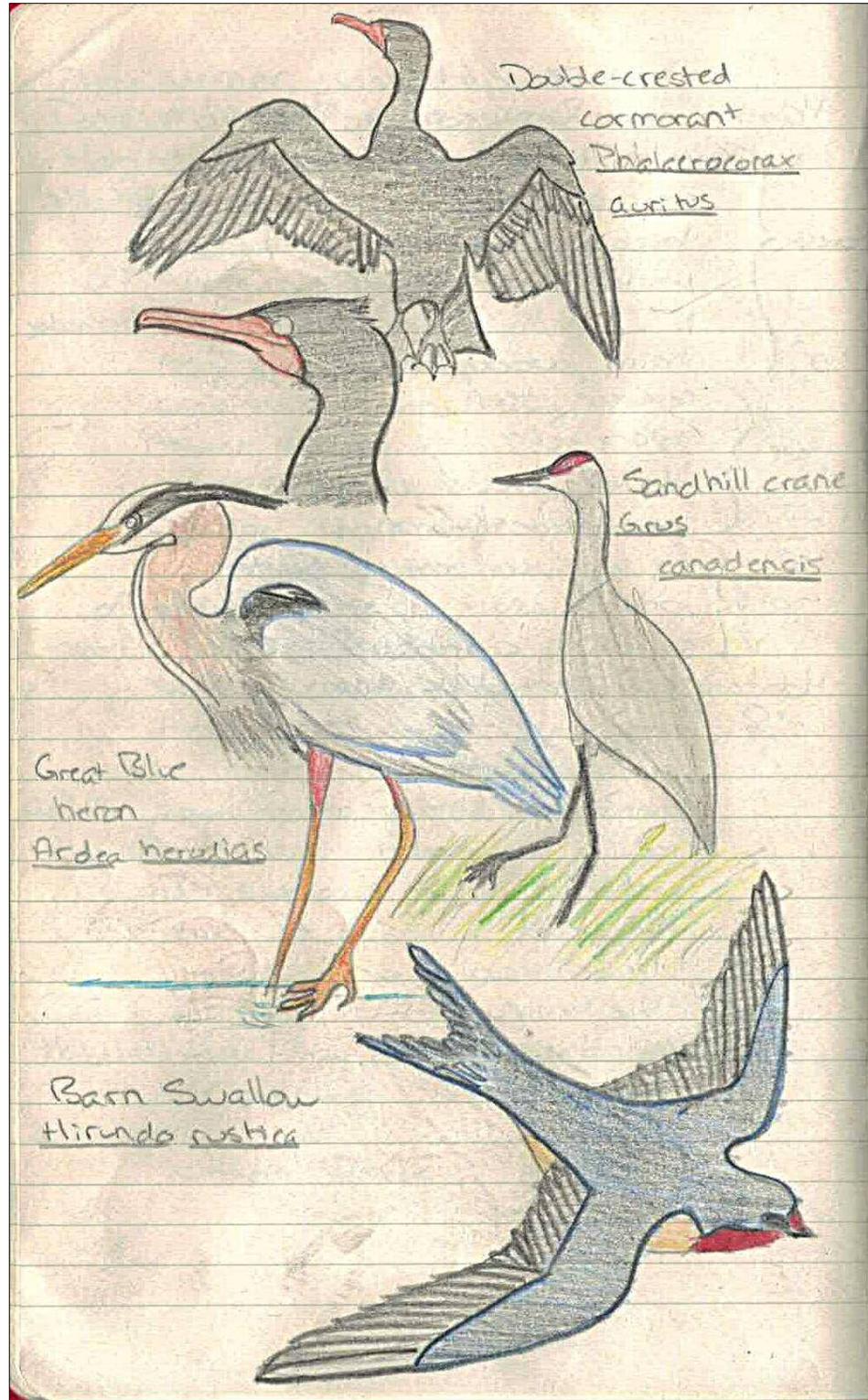
*Text and drawings by Carolyn Murray; photos by Renee Levesque*

*(Editor's note: In her little red book during her field outings, Carolyn meticulously took notes and drew pictures of the birds she saw. Some of these notes and drawings accompany this article.)*

I never considered myself much of a birder. This may be a strange thing to hear from someone writing an article about birding, but it's the truth. Though I have always had a passing interest in our feathered friends, they were just another piece of the background. Honestly, I hadn't even heard of the term "birding" before this past May.

As a child, though, I spent many mornings staring at the newest arrival at our cluster of feeders, my half-eaten bowl of Cheerios long forgotten and soggy. In hopes of encouraging my interest, but more likely in exasperation at my torrent of questions, my parents dug up their old bird guide, a small, blue, soft-covered volume of feeder birds often seen in Southwestern Ontario. I loved it. Any time a new bird appeared, the first thing I did was reach for the book and try frantically to match the bird to the pictures before it flew off. I'd like to say that I was mostly correct in my guesses, but let's be realistic here. Weekends were spent refilling birdfeeders and trying to rake the seemingly infinite mounds of it off our lawn.

But as can happen over the years, my birding book was picked up less and less. I had little time to spend watching for birds from the window as school and commitments piled up. The book



# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

was finally moved from its honorary position on the counter and relegated to a corner of a bookshelf by the time I started high school.

I arrived in North Bay from London three years ago to enter university. I knew nothing about the town except that the winters were long, the summers hot and that at some point there would be a near biblical infestation of shadflies, whatever they were. Every new discovery about the town made me fall in love a little bit more. I got used to the winter, found all the best places to beat the heat in the summer, and made many wonderful friends while doing it – although the shadflies lived up to everything I had imagined when I first heard of them.

This past March, as I was exploring options for post-graduation, I heard there would be an Ornithology course offered at Nipissing University over the spring semester. Because I needed the credits and because I would be in the city over the summer, I enrolled in the course. It was a small class – only ten students from many programs and with differing end goals.

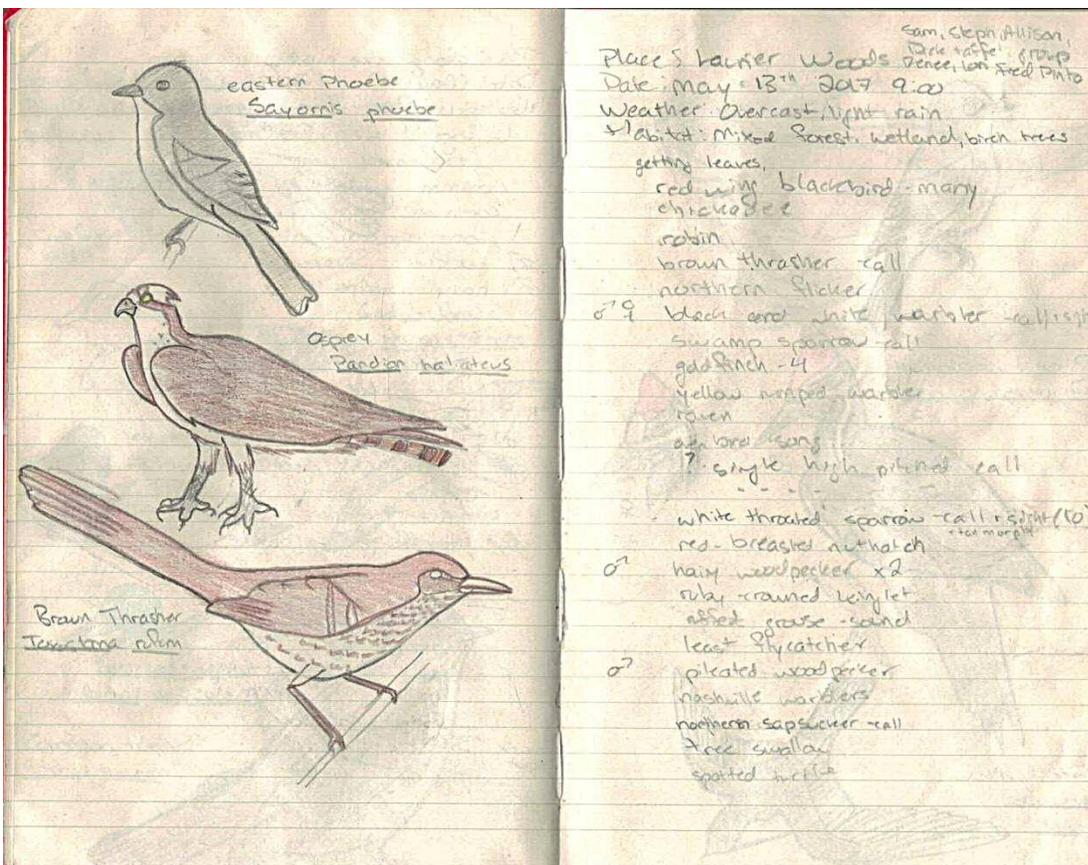
At the helm of our ragtag crew was Oriana Pokorny, an experienced biologist, an avid outdoors enthusiast and, without a doubt, one of the most loved instructors in the biology department.



Carolyn in the middle with university friends during May Laurier Woods walk

She skillfully integrated detail-loaded lectures with practical excursions to as many habitats as possible.

Birding outings were spent with guests like Fred Pinto and Lisa Hackett who brought local knowledge and a quick eye for bird identification. Murph (Bruce Murphy) and the crew from the Hilliardton Marsh welcomed us to join in on their bird banding, teaching us the



## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

importance of the work they do and testing us on our local birds. Kevan Cowcill brought his experience in career birding to teach us that all you need to succeed in ornithology is passion and a good pair of binoculars.

Learning didn't stop outside of class time. North Bay is blessed to have such a large, well-maintained green space within the heart of the city. During the first week of classes, Oriana recommended the weekend birding walks led by Dick Tafel. Curious, a group of us decided to take advantage of the extra practice. Armed with pairs of loaned university binoculars past their prime, birding journals and cameras, we met up on Saturday May mornings, eager to stretch our birding muscles. What we expected was to see some new species of warblers; what we found was a group of dedicated individuals who were only too eager to share their vast stores of knowledge and passion with a group of newbies. They patiently answered our questions and identified birds that to them were probably mundane, but were exciting and new to us.

We were kindly invited to participate in additional excursions that, while not pertaining directly to birding, were fascinating. Brent Turcotte taught us about the many versions of club mosses and lichen found in the area. Lori Beckerton taught a large group the medicinal uses of many common plants found within Laurier Woods. Although these additional expeditions focused on numerous environmental topics besides birds, there was still much bird identifying. Just goes to show you can take a birder away from birding, but you can't take birding out of the birder!

I walked into this course expecting to learn about the theory of birds – and I did, don't get me wrong. But I also learned so much more than avian flight adaptations, evolution, reproduction and life cycles. I learned about a passionate community lurking in the heart of our city, a community that takes great pride in maintaining one of their most prized green spaces and sharing their passions with the public. I met some wonderful people who taught me a lot about the world around us and, in so doing, about myself and what I wanted in the future. Mostly, what I found was a new passion and a group of incredible people with whom to share it!



*From left: Kaye Edmonds, Carolyn Murray, Brent Turcotte and Sarah Wheelan*

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Interesting spring find:

‘I’ll be with you in apple blossom time...’



*Orchard Oriole, Buddy Myles*

*By Renee Levesque*

**Orchard Oriole:** It has been a spring of many interesting bird finds, one being the Orchard Oriole, seen by Nipissing Naturalists Club members, Gary and Connie Sturge in Powassan, and Buddy Myles in Verner.

On Saturday, May 11, I first received an email from Gary informing me there was a male Orchard Oriole in his backyard. He discovered it at 6:00 a.m. while letting out his dog. It stayed the day, feeding on oranges Gary put out for it, but primarily making use of the hummingbird feeder.

Then I got an email from Buddy informing me he had a male Orchard Oriole in his backyard during the late afternoon of Friday, May 10, the day before Gary saw his. Buddy had put out some oranges and half a grapefruit in hopes of attracting the Baltimore Oriole, often seen in the Verner area each year at the Veuve River bridge.

## THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Checking eBird, I saw no mention of an Orchard Oriole ever being in our area, although that doesn't mean there hasn't been one here, but it does mean it is a rare visitor. So did Buddy's oriole fly from his place on Friday and arrive at Gary's early Saturday morning? Naturally, I don't know for sure, but I think it highly unlikely.

The Orchard Oriole is a common bird in eastern, mid-western and parts of southern United States, and is one that is being seen more and more frequently in Southern Ontario.

The smallest of the North American Orioles, 18 cm or 7 to 7 ¼ inches, the Orchard male, after its second year, sports a distinctive deep russet colour as seen the photo on the previous page instead of the brilliant orange we see on the male Baltimore Oriole at right. During hatch year and second year, the males are yellow greenish with a black bib. Females are also yellow, but lack the black bib.



*Baltimore Oriole, Renee Levesque*

Orioles are colourful and vocal members of the blackbird family. In addition to the Baltimore and the Orchard Orioles, there are Hooded, Bullock's, Audubon's, Scott's, Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Orioles. Only the Baltimore nests in our area – and this year I have had many reports of sightings, more than I usually get.

The Orchard's favourite habitat is open woodlands along river edges, shade trees and, as its name implies, orchards. It is not an aggressive bird, and in suitable habitat will nest with other Orchards, even within the same tree. It will also nest in close quarters with other orioles and even other birds, like the Eastern Kingbird, the American Robin and the Chipping Sparrow. Because kingbirds tend to be aggressive, they help ward off predators and cowbirds who like to lay eggs in an Orchard's nest. In less suitable habitat, the Orchard tends to be solitary, nesting alone.

The Orchard is monogamous within its breeding season, meaning it will find a new mate every year.

Its diet in summer consists of insects – caterpillars, beetles, grasshoppers and spiders. In the fall and winter and in spring before the insects appear, it will eat berries and small ripe fruit, and will make great use of hummingbird feeders.

The Orchard spends less time on its breeding grounds than other orioles, just the few weeks it takes to find a mate, nest and fledge its young. It usually arrives on its breeding grounds in late May and departs by mid-July to its wintering grounds in Mexico and South America.

**Sources:** *Audubon Field Guide; All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology; and Birds of North America.*

# Odds and sods and bits and bobs

*By Renee Levesque*

**Good Samaritans:** At different times and places in recent days, Dick Tafel, Gary Sturge and John Levesque rescued Snapping Turtles (below) as they slowly made their way across roads.



**Gary Sturge**

**Magazine articles:** Not often three members of Nipissing Naturalists Club have articles, one after the other, in a magazine, but in the summer edition of the East Ferris magazine, Beverly Kingdon writes about Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration; Dick Tafel writes about the wood warblers of East Ferris – although these warblers are not exclusive to East Ferris; and Gary Sturge writes about the Christmas Bird Count and the species and numbers found at the East Ferris landfill site and elsewhere in East Ferris.

(Gary's article previously appeared in *The Woodland Observer* and it was credited as such in the East Ferris magazine. The East Ferris article also makes mention of the Nipissing Naturalists Club and provides a link to our website.)

There are many other articles of interest for naturalists in this excellent community magazine. You can pick up a copy at the East Ferris Library, East Ferris Community Centre and at the Municipal Office.

**Motus hits:** Connie and Gary Sturge reported five birds and three species showed up on our Motus tracking system between May 10 and May 20 – three Yellow-rumped Warblers, a White-throated Sparrow and a Northern Waterthrush (at left).



**Stephen O'Donnell**

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

**Lake Nipissing:** The ice officially came off Lake Nipissing on May 8, about a week earlier than in 2018 when it wasn't ice-free until May 14. Although it seems as I write this as if a warm spring will never come this year, we had a cool spring last year too. The earliest date Lake Nipissing was ice-free was April 3 in 1945, followed by April 4 in 1946. The latest date was May 19 in 1926, followed by May 16 in 1972. For all dates see: <https://www.nugget.ca/news/local-news/lake-nipissing-officially-ice-free>.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

**Other interesting spring finds:** Although I featured the Orchard Oriole as an interesting spring find, there were certainly other not-common-to-our-area birds seen in May. Most of them were shorebirds seen by some of us in a large flooded field at the end of Veuve River Road – a Red Knot, a Hudsonian Godwit, many Ruddy Turnstones (photo of some in flight above), over 200 or more Black-bellied Plovers, a few American Golden Plovers and some Dunlins, all in their breeding plumage. It was quite exciting, especially when three of us witnessed at least 300 shorebirds in flight, the black of the Black-bellied prominent in the sky.

**Former member and director:** Sonje Bols (below right), former director and member of Nipissing Naturalists Club, now lives in Azilda. She and her husband moved there when both were offered full-time jobs in the Sudbury area. Says, Sonje, “It's a bit of a change from our nice little place on the lake, but here we're only a 2-minute walk to Whitewater Lake.”

Sonje continues to work for Ontario Parks, but out of the downtown Sudbury zone office. She is in charge of coordinating the education programs for the smaller parks – Fushimi, Ivanhoe and Windy Lake, to name three. These are parks that don't have a lot of education staff on-site. “It's been great so far. I get to travel to parks all over Northeastern Ontario, so I'm excited about that and excited about the busy summer season.”

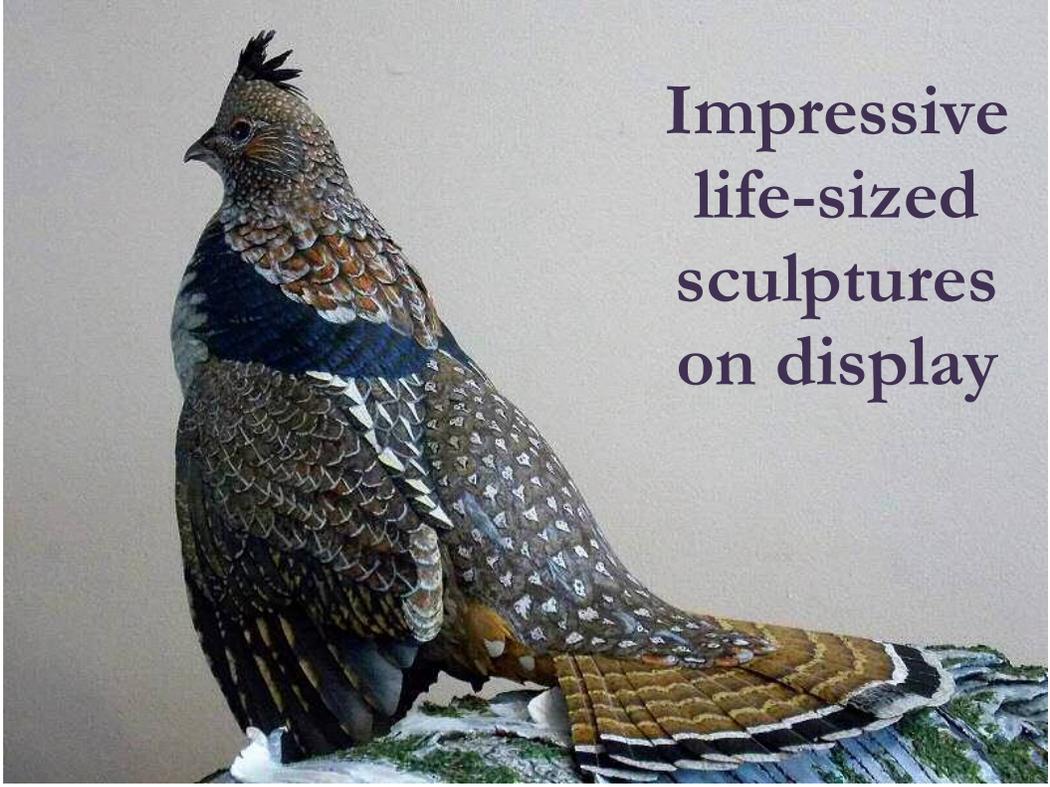


*Courtesy of Sonje Bols*

# Impressive life-sized sculptures on display

*Text by Natasha Wiatr;  
photos by Morgan  
Walker*

Callander's Alex Dufresne Gallery, located at 107 Lansdowne Street East, is currently presenting *Creativity from the Right Hemisphere... Apparently*, a collection of highly-defined bird sculptures, accompanied by equally impressive paintings and photographs by local artist, Morgan Walker. The sculptures, which have won 12 national and international awards at carving competitions, are life-sized and anatomically and chromatically correct.



The focus piece of the exhibition is a 16 inch (40.6 cm) Ruffed Grouse carving that recently won three awards at the 49th Annual Ward World Wildfowl Carving Competition in Ocean City, Maryland. It also won awards at the 2019 Canadian National Wildfowl Carving Championship.

Morgan spent over 1500 hours crafting this *King of Game Birds* sculpture. The intricate amount of detail in this carving garnered much attention and fanfare.

Morgan attributes his talents to an early sense of wonder at the variety of animals and birds found in his rural Ontario surroundings in Simcoe County, but it was his move to the North Bay area that increased the diversity of the wildlife and landscape aspects of his art.

Morgan says he prefers to do his work “*en plein air*, even if it is just a quick sketch of something that piques my interest, or an idea I have for a piece. Working onsite can reveal details that a photograph just can't provide.”

Although the exhibition began on May 11, with an opening reception at which guests could meet Morgan, not to despair, the show will remain on display until **June 22. On that date, from noon to 3:00 p.m., Morgan will be on hand** to talk about his work. During that time, he will also paint a pheasant tail feather he carved. The grouse

will be out of the display case and on a pedestal in the room to allow for a better viewing experience.

**Editor's Note:** Spring/summer hours of the gallery are Tuesday to Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, contact Natasha Wiatr, Museum Curator, at 705-752-2282, or at [museum@callander.ca](mailto:museum@callander.ca).



**CREATIVITY FROM THE  
RIGHT HEMISPHERE...  
APPARENTLY**

Works by Morgan Walker

**Alex Dufresne Gallery**  
On display until June 22

107 Lansdowne St. E.  
in Callander  
705-752-2282  
museum@callander.ca  
mycallander.ca/gallery

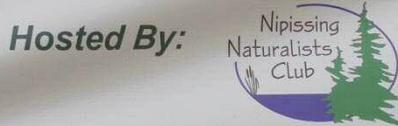


Featuring a life-sized  
ruffed grouse sculpture  
that won Best of Show  
at the World Carving  
Championships!

Join us annually every 3rd Saturday in August for the

# Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival

in the heart of the city at  
Laurier Woods Conservation Area



Photos by Renee Levesque



The 5<sup>th</sup> annual Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival will be held in Laurier Woods on **Saturday, August 18 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** Photos above from the 2018 festival.

Speaker for May:

## Environmental education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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 Coworking 176**, the former Tweedsmuir Public School, **176 Lakeshore Drive**. (January is the AGM.)

Our speaker for **June 11** is **Fred Pinto**, an adjunct professor at the University of Toronto. Fred has led several educational field trips to various countries for students who are studying forestry. Fred is also president of Nipissing Naturalists Club. (He wears many other caps, but these two will suffice for now.)



*Fred Pinto*

Fred's presentation will describe some of the global trends in society that challenge how environmental education is taught. He will use examples from a recent field trip to Ecuador to illustrate the challenges faced in getting others to recognize that balancing environmental and social needs is a paradox in which there are limits and tradeoffs.

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER



## Board of Directors, 2019

Fred Pinto, President: [fredpinto1@gmail.com](mailto:fredpinto1@gmail.com) 705-476-9006

Marc Buchanan, Vice-president

Louise Simpson

Connie Sturge, Treasurer

Paul Smylie, Trip Coordinator

Oriana Pokorny, Secretary

Rick Tripp

Sarah Wheelan, Website and Facebook

Katie Tripp

Gary Sturge

Matt Procnier, Refreshment Coordinator

Allison Bannister

## Past Presidents

Dick Tafel

Ted Price

Steph Romaniuk

Angela Martin

Greg Boxwell

Jeremy St. Onge

# THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

## Bird Wing

Dick Tafel, Chairman: [rtafel@sympatico.ca](mailto:rtafel@sympatico.ca). 705-472-7907

Gary Sturge, Treasurer

Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe

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/>.

*The Woodland Observer* is published electronically September to June and sent to members by email and posted in date order on Nipissing Naturalists Club's website:

<https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

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

**Contributors this issue:** Sonje Bols, Kevan Cowcill, Larry Dyke, Kaye Edmonds, Peter Ferris, Lisa Hackett, Daniel Kaminiski, Renee Levesque, Andrée Morneault, Carolyn Murray, Buddy Myles, Stephen O'Donnell, Fred Pinto, Gary Sturge, Brent Turcotte, Laura Turcotte, Morgan Walker, Sarah Wheelan and Natasha Wiatr.

## 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.**



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