

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

FEBRUARY 2018



NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

From the editor:

Bird count, AGM and winning photos

This issue contains much about the Christmas Bird Count and the Annual General Meeting. These are two events that involve many Nipissing Naturalists Club members and so deserve to be highlighted. One is an important year-end Citizen Science Project involving birders from our area, as well as birders from all over the Western Hemisphere; and the other starts off the New Year with a wrap-up of a successful previous year for Nipissing Naturalists Club. Enjoy the stories and photos.

We are now into February and have, for those of us who stayed around for the month of January, experienced the ups and downs of the weather – some very



Renee Levesque

cold days, some very mild days, some snowy days and some rainy days. Some of you may have noticed the lengthening of daylight hours, always a welcome and a sign of life to come. The cover photo reflects the light of an overcast February day. The pinkish tone in it also helps to emphasize that February is heart month and Valentine's Day is on February 14. The collage that follows "From the editor" is for Valentine's Day and consists of wildlife photos I took over the years, with one photo from Ernie Frayle. And the collage that follows the AGM article is made up of photos from Karl Dittman, Kaye Edmonds, Fred Pinto and me.

Also featured in this issue are the photos and comments of the first place winners of the four categories in our photo contest. Eric Mattson's winning landscape photo shows just how much contrast and texture there can be in one small area. Kaye Edmonds' touching photo of the deer and her fawn would have fit in nicely with the wildlife Valentine collage, but I didn't want to take away from Kaye's win in the fauna category by placing her photo elsewhere. Eric's win in the flora category shows a lot of imagination in his ability to turn a mushroom into a frozen waterfall! And finally, Grant McKercher's win in the people enjoying nature category shows

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

people quietly reflecting on the autumnal beauty and wonder of nature. Runner-up winners will be featured in March's issue.

Canadian Wildlife's January + February 2018 edition contains an article on how to take good photos, as well as an article on taking ethical wildlife photos. The bottom line in taking your best shot is to get out in the field or your backyard and neighbourhood and take a lot of photos. You have to practise and you have to be patient and, as the article states, know that photographs are not made by the camera, but by the person behind the viewfinder.



Steve Pitt

The bottom line in taking ethical wildlife photos is that at all times you must consider the needs of the animal and understand the environment in which you are taking your photo. This is more important today than ever what with the sheer number of people snapping photos of wildlife with their digital cameras and iPhones, especially in high traffic tourist areas like Banff National Park.

In "Interesting winter finds", I make mention of only one species. There were two rare birds seen in our area during January, but I felt there was enough emphasis on birds in this issue and I will highlight them instead in March's issue.

And in great contrast to all of the above-mentioned articles is a fascinating book review on flat-earthers, people even to this day who believe the Earth is flat. This belief that the Earth is flat is surely the ultimate conspiracy theory, surpassing the many theories that surround the assassination of President Kennedy, the controlled demolition of the World Trade Centre and the fake moon landing.

Towards the end of the issue is an article on the Ontario Nature Conservation Awards. You have **until March 26 to nominate an individual or a group** you think is deserving of one of the 11 awards. Last year, Nipissing Naturalists Club member, Beverley Kingdon, was an award recipient. Perhaps you know of someone else from our club or area who should be nominated.

Be sure to attend Nipissing Naturalist Club's **meeting on February 13** with Shannon Kelly who will talk about the big cats she cared for in South Africa last summer. Who among us does not like to hear about the animals of Africa!

- Renee Levesque, editor, rlevesque1948@gmail.com



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

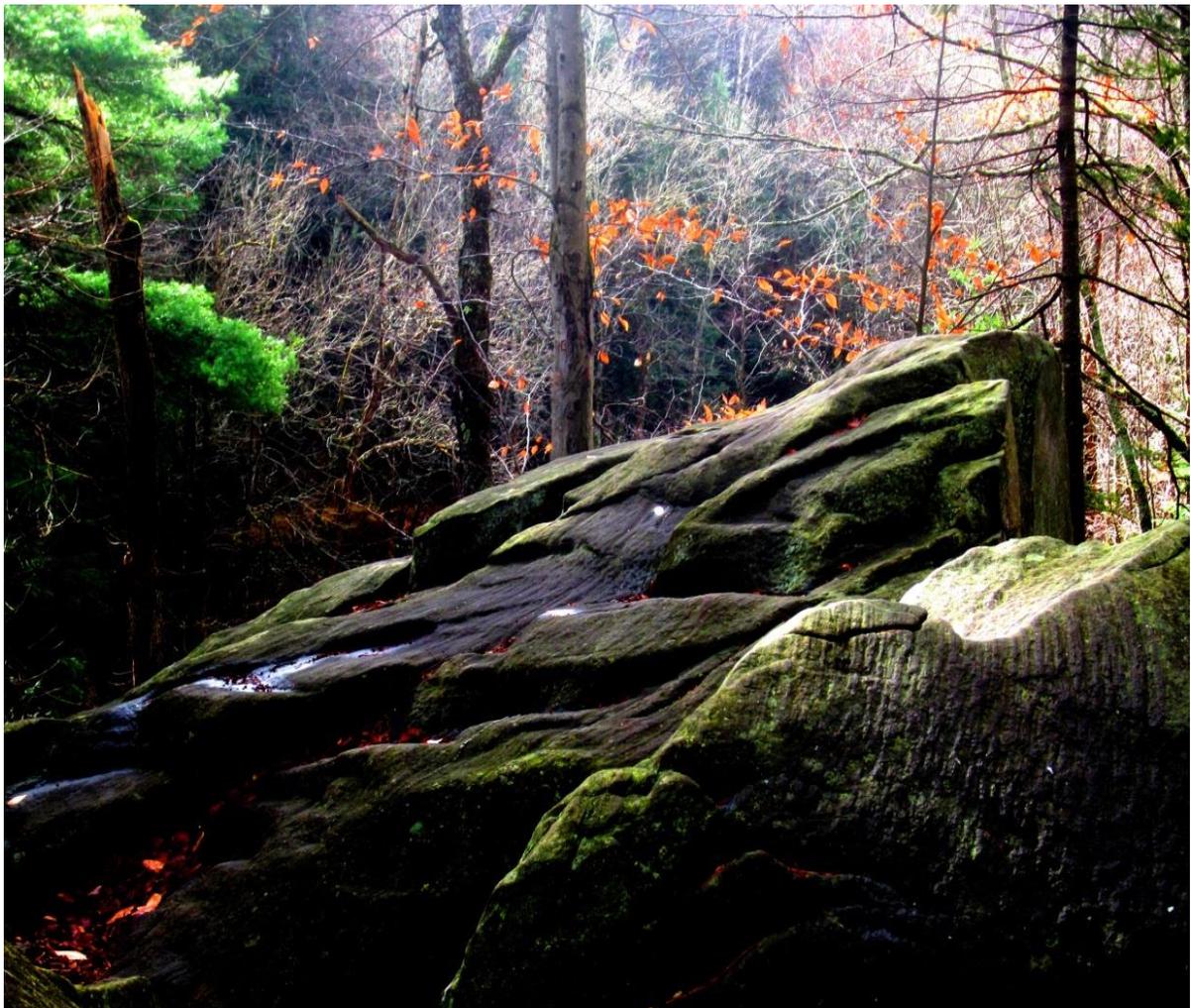
And the photo winners are...

First place Landscape:

Eric Mattson.

Eric's initial intent, for teaching purposes, was to photograph the micro-erosional features of the large boulders in the foreground of his photo below. However, after taking his photo, he saw that the light, the contrast and the texture apparent in the photo made for a dynamic landscape shot.

Eric took his photo with an Olympus Tough TG-5 Waterproof and Shockproof Wi-Fi / GPS 12MP 4x Optical Zoom Digital Camera with a built in 4.5-18 mm lens, what Eric calls his bush camera.



First place Fauna:

Kaye Edmonds.

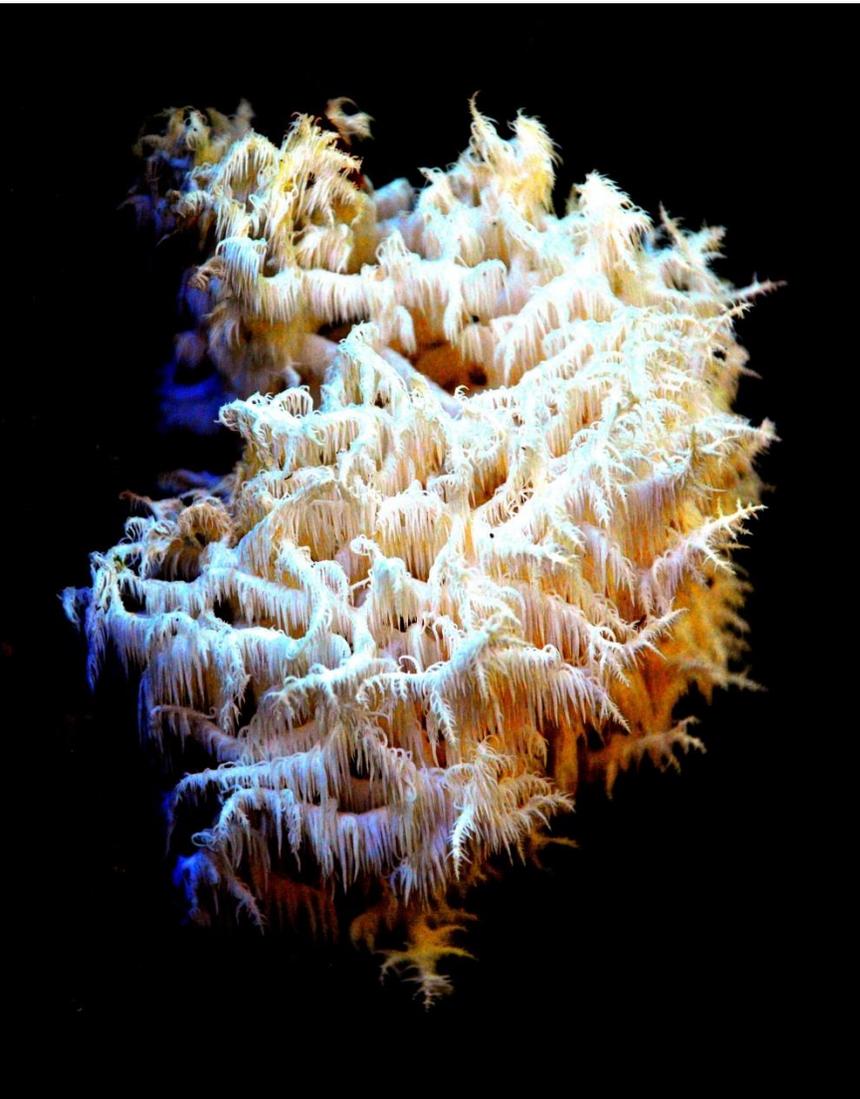
Kaye, using a Sony with a 12x Optical Stabilization Zoom, took this touching photo of a deer and her fawn at a pond near Sturgeon Falls. Kaye had seen the fawn with the mother, but did not realize she had actually taken a photo of it feeding because her focus was on capturing the reflection of the deer in the water. It wasn't until Kaye uploaded her photos that she realized she had a photo of the fawn feeding.



First place Flora:

Eric Mattson.

While hiking at Eau Claire Gorge, Eric, again using the same bush camera, took the photo (left) of a Bear's Head Tooth Mushroom. It was the first time he had seen this mushroom and no doubt because he is a snow and ice hydrologist, he was struck by its resemblance to a frozen waterfall. Eric darkened the background using the contrast setting on his camera to enhance its resemblance to a frozen waterfall.





First place People Enjoying Nature:

Grant McKercher.

After the arduous climb this past autumn to the Three Crosses overlooking the Mattawa and Ottawa Rivers and the town of Mattawa, Grant's photo captures a moment of quiet reflection as hikers enjoy the spectacular panoramic view, the ultimate reward of the climb. "It was if everything and everyone had taken a deep breath and were focused on the moment."

Grant took his photo with a Nikon Coolpix P610 with a Nikkor 60X Wide Optical Zoom (4.3 -258mm).

Editor's Note: Winning photos are the result of members voting on entries shown during the December Nipissing Naturalists Club meeting. Thanks to Sarah Wheelan for organizing and for tallying and announcing the results. Runners-up will be highlighted in March's newsletter.



Renee Levesque

North Bay's 39th Christmas Bird Count

A good count despite the cold

By Lori Anderson, compiler

On Saturday, December 16, a very chilly but sunny day, North Bay conducted its 39th Christmas Bird Count. The high temperature was -17C, but fortunately winds were low and participants hardy.

Thirty-five species for a total of 2450 birds were counted by 18 field observers and 16 feeder watchers - a good count on a cold day after winter's early arrival. Although the total count is down this year, the total number of species remains fairly steady at 35 – quite something considering the absence of some species we usually see.

The big news is that two new species, the Chipping Sparrow and the Golden Eagle, were counted for the very first time – not bad for our 39th count! As well, one all-time high was reached - 17 Bald Eagles, a species which is making a strong recovery.

With open water remaining only in a very small area of Trout Lake, no gulls and few waterfowl were reported – only Mallards and American Black Ducks.

Woodpecker, nuthatch and chickadee numbers were strong. A Red-Bellied Woodpecker, uncommon in our area, but noted at several feeders this winter, was reported again this count. One was also reported in the 2016 count.

Some fine owls and hawks were observed. Two Snowy Owls seen in the downtown and waterfront area this winter were observed on count day. A surprise find by a field observer on the Kate Pace Way was a Barred Owl trying desperately to nap through a mobbing of Pileated

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Woodpeckers. It has been a number of years since a Barred Owl was last seen on count day. Two Red-tailed Hawks and two Rough-legged Hawks were also sighted.

One Northern Shrike was found in the Callander Area.

As usual, feeder watchers made an important contribution, but especially this year with the cold when many birds were dependent on feeders to help them get through the day. Dark-eyed Juncos and American Tree Sparrows were seen in strong numbers by feeder watchers. Also reported at feeders were a Chipping Sparrow, a new species for count day and a very unusual one to be seen in our area at this time of the year; a White-throated Sparrow; a Brown Creeper; and three Gray Jays – as well as good numbers of more common species. Feeder watchers helped add to the number of species and to the total number of birds seen.

Missing from our day was a Peregrine Falcon observed downtown on Friday and Sunday, the day before and the day after the count, and two Common Loons that had been on Trout Lake as late as Friday, the day before the count.

Evening Grosbeaks were not found. Common Redpolls were not common, with just one reported. Purple Finches were scarce, although American Goldfinch numbers were strong. One large flock of Pine Grosbeaks was discovered.

The day was completed by Tally and Potluck (a delicious reward) in the warm home of Grant and Shirley McKercher. Thank you for hosting!

And a big thank you to all who participated, undaunted by winter, in another successful Christmas Bird Count.

Results can be viewed in detail on our website at: <https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/reports-and-bird-counts/>. Scroll down until you get to Christmas Bird Counts.



Field Observer Report

By Renee Levesque, with Lori Anderson, Marc Buchanan, Grant McKercher, Paul Smylie, Gary Sturge and Brent Turcotte

It would be an understatement to say it was a cold day this year for our 39th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on December 17. Bodies of water were frozen, even most of Trout Lake, so no waterfowl to be seen there except some Mallards. This was my 6th year participating in the CBC and the first time I saw no ducks at all on Trout Lake, and the first time the lake was frozen in the area Dick Tafel and I observe.

I asked the field observers to highlight an observation or two during their count. All responded and their responses show there can be humour in the absence of birds; generosity when birds are most needed; determination in the face of adversity; appreciation of the common; lots of fun in spite of weather obstacles and fewer birds than normal; and that when you least expect it, something wonderful can happen.

Our compiler, Lori Anderson, who observed area 3 with Ken Gowing:

Towards the end of count day, Ken and I decided to try Memorial Drive again to look for the Snowy Owl, an owl we did not see when we looked earlier in the day - and to also look for the Peregrine Falcon that Fred Pinto had seen downtown the day before. We were so involved in looking for the elusive owl and falcon from our parked car that Ken's foot went numb in the extreme cold. He had left it on the brake pedal for the full half hour we sat in the car as we scanned the darkening sky for the owl and the falcon, resulting in our car battery dying!! But although we did not see the falcon, we did see not one, but two, Snowy Owls – so worth the car trouble, although we would not ever want it to happen again. We almost missed the tally and pot luck event, not something for which a compiler should aim!





Grant McKercher

Grant McKercher who observed area 4 with Shirley McKercher: As I walked along the Kate Pace Way between Decaire Road and Lakeshore Drive, I could hear the occasional chickadee, then heard and saw a Pileated Woodpecker call noisily as it flew off southwards. I was looking for an elusive nuthatch off the main path when I saw another Pileated sounding

an alarm call fly in. Then two more Pileated Woodpeckers flew in from the north, calling as they passed close by. I had never seen so many Pileateds in such close proximity at the same time. My lucky day near the end of the Christmas Bird Count got even luckier. As I walked back along the Kate Pace Way, I stopped to listen for birds and happened to turn my head towards the deeper woods and saw the distinct silhouette of an owl, a Barred Owl, about 30 m away, just in the area where the woodpeckers had been active a few minutes before. I suppose they were making their noisy sorties to let others know of the unwelcome guest in the area – unwelcome for them, but very welcome for me – another species for our CBC!

Paul Smylie who observed area 7 with Luke Stephenson and Riley Cormier: While driving along North Shore Road, we stopped for a moment and rolled down the windows to listen for any little chirps or twitters because we weren't seeing much on our drive-by birding. As luck would have it, Riley Cormier, with his youthful eyes and observation skills, peered through an opening in the trees onto Four Mile Bay and noticed a few birds 'hopping around. We got out of the truck and had a better look with the aid of



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

our binoculars. There was a flutter of activity as a number of ravens wisely gave room to an immature Bald Eagle descending from the air to join a mature baldy. The activity surrounded what appeared to be a carcass of some unfortunate animal, the species of which we could not determine because of its distance from us. We can only assume that it was a White-tailed Deer that may have miscalculated the ability of the ice to support its weight – there were still some, but few, open areas on Trout Lake. We made a quick count of the ravens and eagles and went on our way to the end of North Shore Road.

Driving back along North Shore, Luke Stephenson with his sharp eyes noticed a large white bird flying overhead in the direction of the kill on the frozen ice. On the way by, we stopped for another look to see if perhaps a Snowy Owl was making its way in for a cold snack. Well, no Snowy Owl was to be seen, or any other white bird for that matter; however, we were able to get a final tally of 21 Common Ravens and one mature and two immature Bald Eagles gathered together for a not so harmonious Christmas feast.

Gary Sturge who observed area 5 with Connie and Rachel Sturge and Rachel's friend, Nanda

Cortes: Nanda desperately wanted to take part in the CBC. She had participated in North Bay's and Burk's Falls' count last year and loved it. However, this year she missed the Burk's Falls' count because she went to Mexico to spend Christmas with her family. (Her family went through the powerful September earthquake unscathed, but very unfortunately Nanda's sister's boyfriend lost his mother in it.)



Nanda and Rachel, photo by Rachel Sturge

Nanda was able to do the North Bay count, although she couldn't leave Ithaca where she works until about 2:30 p.m. the day before the count. She drove through

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

a never-ending snow storm in upstate New York to finally arrive at Rachel's in Scarborough at 10:30 that night – an eight-hour drive which is normally a five-hour one. She and Rachel left Scarborough at 6:30 a.m. on count day, but got stuck behind snow ploughs and did not arrive until 10:30 to begin their half of our count area. But their efforts paid off because they saw a Northern Shrike, the only one seen for the count!

Connie and I saw the best bird of all, the Northern Sun Bird, also known as the Sun Dog. For over an hour there was an iconic view of this apparition. Most of the time it was visible, we were struggling through bush and trees and could not



Gary Sturge

get a really good view unless we departed from our assigned mission. Eventually, we broke out at elevation and were able to get a couple of photos. This was the best I had ever seen one - such brilliant and awesome rainbow hues – and an omen for lots of birds! We saw close to 500 birds, about 100 less than last year, but quite good for the type of weather we had.



Renee Levesque

Brent Turcotte who observed area 2 with Laura Turcotte: This was a new area for Brent and Laura. In the past few years, it was the area Lori and Ken covered, but both parties made a switch. Not sure if it was a good thing, however, because Brent reports, “Excitement was limited in area 2. In the afternoon, however, one stop netted three new species for the day - Pileated Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch and

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

American Goldfinch.” That may not seem exciting to many, but when it is extremely cold and species seen are few, it is a big deal to see three new species at one stop!

Marc Buchanan who observed area 1 with Fred Pinto and April McCrum:

We birded mostly by car because of the frigid temperature. The birds we saw in our area were few. I tried to create some excitement by pointing out an owl on the turret of the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority building. I even swore it moved. But April and Fred remained unimpressed.

I observed area 6 with Dick Tafel: We were an hour and a half into our count without seeing a single bird, not a chickadee, not a raven and usually we see a fair number of ravens as we travel along the many roads off Highway 17 East before hitting Centennial Crescent. Dick was getting very discouraged - I can't underscore that

enough – and even I was starting to get discouraged, anxious to get to areas in which there were some bird feeders.

We were some way along Centennial and still no birds until we finally saw a few feeders in someone's side yard that were bird active! As we were checking out

the feeders from the road, the

homeowner came out and told us we could use his driveway for better viewing.

He said he was thinking it must be around the time for the CBC and he was watching out for us! I had not met him before and if Dick had, he did not remember him, although we were both previously aware he had a yard with feeders. His generosity could not have come at a better time. Finally some birds –



Renee Levesque

a Pileated and a Hairy Woodpecker, some Black-capped Chickadees and Blue Jays, and the Red and White-breasted Nuthatches. Not a lot of birds and fairly common species, but when we had nothing up to that point, what we saw felt like a bonanza!

As I do every Christmas Bird Count, I brought along a couple of ornaments to hang on a tree in an area where we trespass as a sign of our appreciation.

We didn't get to that area this year because we use it only to get a good view of possible ducks in Trout Lake and with the lake frozen, we would have walked a long way through deep snow to no avail. We therefore hung our ornaments elsewhere. One can be seen in the above photo behind Dick.

On our way to our count area, Dick and I stopped to observe the brilliant Sun Dog mentioned by Gary. What a wonder on our 39th Christmas Bird Count!



Photos this page by Renee Levesque

Tally and pot luck – the “wow” factor

By Renee Levesque

When it is cold and there is a biting wind that makes us wonder why we would even think of observing birds from dawn to dusk during the Christmas Bird Count, one of the things that sustains us, besides seeing new birds for the count, is knowing we will be going to someone’s warm and cosy home for a pot luck dinner and a tallying of our results.

As last year, Grant and Shirley McKercher were the welcoming hosts and the dinner, supplied by us all, was fantastic. Amazing how pot lucks always seem to work out with enough variety and courses to meet all our hungry needs. One of the deserts brought by Rachel Sturge and made by the mother of one of her students was a large sugar cookie with a Blue Jay on it, as seen at right.

After eating and before the tally began, Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing presented me with a pen set with my name carved on the box and on the individual pen and pencil, a way of making sure that after five years of scribing, I would continue to do so. How could I not after such a thoughtful gift? I was touched.

Led by Lori Anderson, the tally is always a lot of fun as we find out what birds and numbers were seen by each of the teams. There was a wow when Gary and Connie Sturge reported seeing 162 Common Ravens and 11 Bald Eagles, bringing the total count of Bald Eagles to 17, beating the previous record of 16 set in 2016. They were also the only team to see Pine Grosbeaks (left) – 24 of them, not a bad number, but much lower than the 138 seen in 2012.

With all of us aware of the frozen lakes and thus a lack of waterfowl, a wow went out to Brent and Laura Turcotte with their count of 72 Mallards seen, one group at a residence and the other in an outflow from a culvert opposite the Ministry of Transportation. There was a wow to Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing for seeing two Snowy Owls along our waterfront, tying the



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

1991 record, and for seeing a Red-bellied Woodpecker, tying the number seen in 2016.

Another wow went out to Grant McKercher for seeing the only other owl, a Barred Owl, the first one seen in ten years! And because no other field observers saw any more than one Ruffed Grouse (right), a wow to Dick Tafel and me for seeing eight of them. A single wow went out to Rachel and Nanda Cortes for seeing the only Northern Shrike, and although that number is fairly par for the course, better one than none.

Luke Stephenson was not in attendance, but we learned after the fact that he spotted a Golden Eagle, the first time we have had one on our count. However, his sighting needs to be verified and to that end, because he did not get a photo of it, he must complete a CBC Rare Bird

Documentation Form that Lori will submit to Bird Studies Canada before Luke's sighting can be officially counted. (This form is also to be submitted for the sighting of the Red-bellied Woodpecker that Lori and Ken saw.)

Noticeable misses included Evening and Bohemian Waxwings. And only one Common Redpoll and two Purple Finches were spotted, both in Paul Smylie's area.

With the wows over and the stories told, the group humoured me by singing all twelve verses of the *Twelve Days of Christmas* adaptation I had written for the occasion, although Marc Buchanan hurried us through the last few verses, later claiming that the second half of the song should be sung faster. I won't write out the whole adaptation, except these three lines:

*On the fifth day of Christmas
My bird count gave to me,
Five goldfinch!*

And with that, we all made our way home for the holidays.



Renee Levesque



Composite photo by Renee and John Levesque

Feeder watcher report

By Renee Levesque

It is thanks to all 16 feeder watchers that we were able to add to the total number of birds and the number of species seen for our 39th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The cold weather – which was to get much colder as the month wore on and the New Year was welcomed in – meant a lot of birds were using feeders and not all feeders can be seen from the road.

One of the species added as a result of feeder watching was the Chipping Sparrow (right), seen by John Levesque, and the first time this sparrow has been seen on our count day, although it was once seen during count week, the three days before and the three days after count day. (Although species not seen on count day are noted during count week, they are not counted in the CBC tally.)

The Chipping Sparrow, although common in our area in the spring and summer, is considered an unusual and rare species for our area at this time of the year. John reports it has been coming to his feeders since early December, and although he wished it had migrated with the rest of its species to avoid the cold, he was pleased that if it had to stay, it made an appearance on count day. Because it is a rare species for our area at this time of the year, a photo of it on count day was emailed to Lori Anderson to send to Bird Studies Canada for verification.

A species also added as a result of feeder watching was another sparrow, a White-throated Sparrow (left), seen by Luanne and Gary Chowns. Gary reports the White-throat, a species infrequently seen in our area during the winter, has been coming to his feeders since December 5. One has often been seen during recent Christmas Bird Counts, and in 2014, five were spotted.

(As of the reviewing of this article on January 27, the Chipping and White-throated Sparrows are still



Renee Levesque



Gary Chowns

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

coming to the feeders, making it through the extreme cold days we have had since December 26.)

Another little species seen only by a feeder watcher was the Brown Creeper (right), seen by Mary Young. One has often been seen during recent Christmas Bird Counts, but sometimes there have been more – four in 2016 and seven in 2011.

And what is a Christmas Bird Count without seeing the bird that almost became our national bird and may still some day, the Gray Jay. Three were seen by Jim Hasler at his feeders. This is one more than last year, but in recent years, the number is basically par for the course. Jim can always be relied upon to see Gray Jays and he did not disappoint this year.



Linda Stoner

Other notables seen by feeder watchers were Dark-eyed Juncos (left), American Goldfinch and Downy Woodpeckers.

Two juncos were seen by field observers, but 17 by feeder watchers, bringing the total seen to 19, quite a good number compared to other recent years when the total seen ranged anywhere from 0 to 11.

Feeder watchers doubled the number of American Goldfinch seen by field observers, bringing the total seen to 213, down significantly from last year's 419, but certainly a lot more than the 35 seen in 2015 and the 10 seen in 2014.

And as for the little Downy Woodpecker, feeder watchers helped raise its number from 7 to 18, up somewhat from the last 9 years.

On the subject of woodpeckers, one feeder watcher who had three woodpecker species come to her feeders was Nona Schorse. Nona reports that her suet ball attracted all three of our common woodpeckers, “the little Downy, the Hairy and the beautiful, huge Pileated” (right) were present on count day and almost every day since.”

The bird not present on count day and one we were hoping would be present was Kaye Edmonds' female Red-bellied Woodpecker. Kaye reports it came the



Kaye Edmonds



Renee Levesque

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

day before and the day after, but decided it did not want to participate in the count, even though Kaye made sure it had enough good food to put in an appearance! Still, we were able to add a Red-bellied to the total species seen because Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing saw a male during their field observations in Pinewood Park subdivision.

The only feeder watchers to get Mourning Doves (right) were Colin and Noreen Vezina who had two, although as the weather got colder, three or four came and dined three times daily on crushed corn. They report, “One big dove just plunks down on the feeder and even the squirrels can’t make it move!” Now that’s quite a feat, impressive to all of us who encounter squirrels making too good use of our feeders!



Gary Chowns

Not feeder watching, but a downtown sighting was Fred Pinto’s spotting of a Peregrine Falcon on the cross of the Pro-Cathedral on the day before count day. Most field observer teams went searching for it on count day, but to no avail. Then the day after while Grant and Shirley McKercher were at Twigg’s in downtown North Bay, didn’t Shirley see it while Grant was in Twigg’s getting coffee – and consequently missed seeing it! However, it does count as a count week bird, but not as part of the CBC tally.

Another no-show report came from Mary Marrs. “The most notable thing about my feeder watch count day was that not a single bird came and I watched at two time slots. Birds came the day before and the day after.” Not even a Black-capped Chickadee, Mary? As with Kaye’s Red-bellied Woodpecker and Fred’s and Shirley’s Peregrine Falcon, isn’t that just like the birds!

A big thank you to all feeder watchers: Mike Arthurs; Doreen Bryer-Dittman; Gary and Luanne Chowns; Kaye Edmonds; Lisa Hacket; Pam Handley; Jim Hasler; Connie Hergott; Mary Ann and Ted Kenrick; John Levesque; Mary Marrs; Elsa Tafel; Brent Turcotte; Nona Schorse; Colin and Noreen Vezina; and Mary Young.

Editor’s Note: I am referring only from the year 2008 in this article when I compare numbers and species seen in recent years.



Renee Levesque

Burk's Falls CBC

By *Martin Parker, compiler*

Gary, Connie and Rachel Sturge also took part in the 41st Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count on December 20. They were part of a five-member team that covered the north end of the count, the Lake Bernard area.

For the entire count area, there were 19 participants and 3 feeder watchers who observed a total of 40 species of birds, above the 10-year average of 38, and 3,563 individuals, above the 10-year average of 2,506.

Highlights were as follows:

New species: Ring-necked Duck and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (see photo below).

New Highs: 479 Red-breasted Nuthatch (previous was 269 in 1997) and 917 American Goldfinch (previous was 658 in 2016).

Other Notables: one Great Blue Heron (fourth tie on count)
one Golden Eagle (second time on count)
one Red-bellied Woodpecker (second time on count)

Winter Finches: 51 Purple Finch; one Common Redpoll; 339 Pine Siskins; and 817 American Goldfinch



Common Redpoll, Stephen O'Donnell



Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Stephen O'Donnell

Missing: No Red or White-winged Crossbills, although a White-winged was seen during count week; no Pine Grosbeaks; and no Evening Grosbeaks.

The cold temperatures prior to the count resulted in a reduced variety of waterfowl and no gulls. In addition to the one Ring-necked Duck, the waterfowl seen consisted of 30 Mallards, 2 American Black Ducks and one Common Merganser.

Editor's Note: *Some other interesting sightings included an American Robin, a Black-backed Woodpecker, 12 Wild Turkeys, a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Barred Owl. (It would have been extra special had 41 species been seen for the 41st count!) Please email me if you wish to see Martin's Excel spread sheet listing all species seen and providing some statistics.*

Book Review

By Chris Connors

Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea
Christine Garwood
Pan Macmillan (2008)

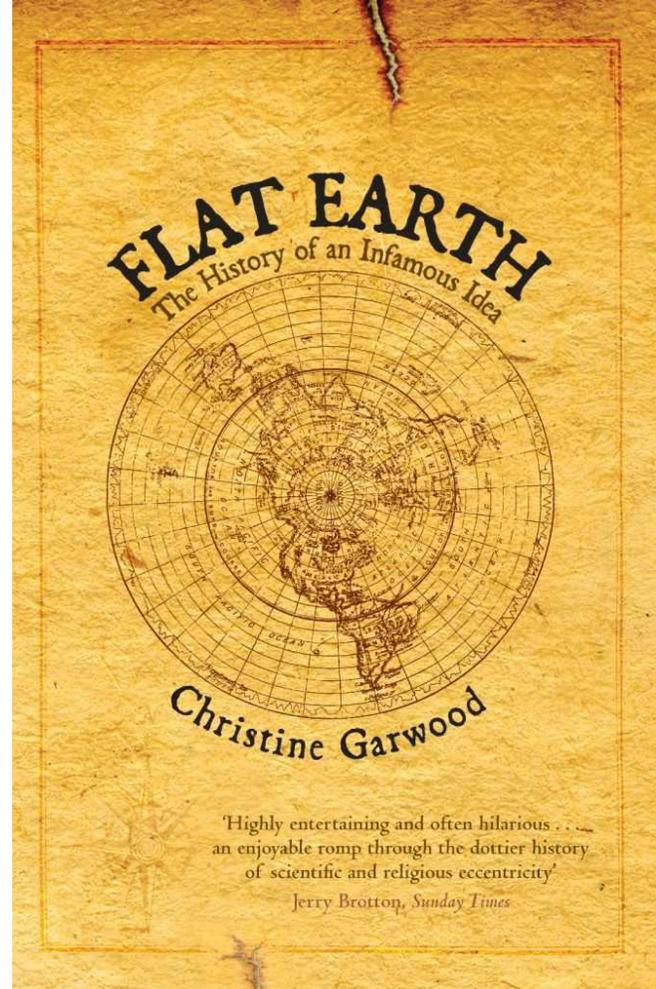
Nearly everyone at some point in their lives has heard the myth that Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue to prove the earth was round. That myth gained credence thanks to people like Washington Irving, known for *Rip Van Winkle* and *Sleepy Hollow*. He wished to have a more serious reputation, so he wrote a biography called *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. Yet his creative imagination couldn't be held back. He fabricated whole conversations and scenes, including Columbus's appearance and heated, tense debate before the King and Queen of Spain's royal commission:

“[The council] was composed of professors of astronomy, geography, mathematics, and other branches of science, together with various dignitaries of the church, and learned friars. Before this erudite assembly, Columbus presented himself to propound and defend his conclusions. He had been scoffed at as a visionary by the vulgar and the ignorant; but he was convinced that he only required a body of enlightened men to listen dispassionately to his reasonings.”

According to Irving, the learned men argued for a flat earth and Columbus felt he was in danger of being tried as a religious heretic. He began to fear for his life, yet stood strong with great moral courage to argue his case.

Irving's biography sold out almost immediately, and the Columbus myth became common knowledge. The school book, *The Boys' and Girls' Reader*, (1919) informed children ages 9-12, “When Columbus lived, people thought the earth was flat...Columbus had to fight these foolish beliefs in order to get men to sail with him”. Versions of this myth were taught in some classrooms here in North Bay in the 1970s (if not much later). Even Bugs Bunny spread the myth in the popular cartoon adventure with Columbus as they set sail to prove the earth was round. Yet despite the vivid imagination of Irving and others, the “flat-earth belief has a chronology far stranger than all the inventions”.

As Garwood carefully documents, the global earth was accepted not just by scientific and philosophical circles since at least the 4th century BC, but also by mariners from any seafaring country. Her entertaining read follows this strange chronology from the Babylonians to modern day. We meet scholars from ancient Greece through to the 19th century who demonstrated the global nature of the earth; we meet the people who took it upon themselves to debunk the flat-



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

earth idea, such as famed naturalist and independent co-discoverer of the theory of evolution by natural selection, Alfred Russell Wallace, who won a bet against a flat-earth, but lost more than he gained.

And we meet those who insisted the earth was flat and how they teamed up in the 1800s to successfully promote and spread their belief. Thanks to their efforts, the idea that the earth is flat took strong hold in the more “rational” 19th century, and is experiencing a recent resurgence thanks to some high profile artists using their social media platforms to proclaim the earth is flat.

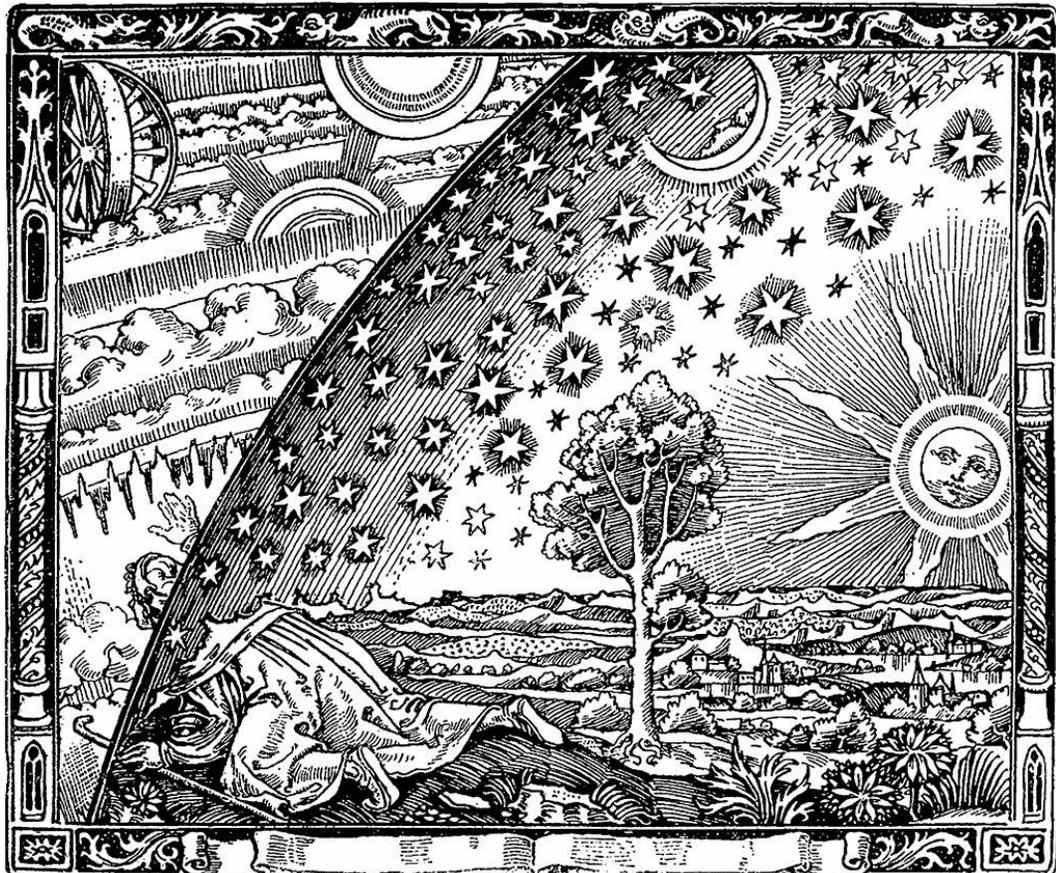
Throughout the book, Garwood presents compelling sympathetic stories of flat-earthers, their backgrounds, their lives and families without ridiculing them. Indeed, she even dedicates her book to two of the more prominent flat-earthers: the 1800s charming rogue, Parallax, who was also responsible for the modern public revival of flat-earth, and the last pioneering flat-earth, Robert J. Schadewald, who died in 2000.

This book is a page-turner. It is meticulously researched and referenced, yet isn't a dry or tedious read. It has intriguing anecdotes about some of the big names in science from the last 400 years. We learn about some of the eccentrics with perhaps more wealth than sense. We obtain an awareness of the furor and passion the topic aroused in Victorian England as Garwood describes the tension at public meetings with quotes from newspaper articles and ads, popular writings, and diaries and letters.

The central issues, arguments, philosophical and religious arguments used in the 1800s are the same ones we hear today when people argue against other widely accepted scientific findings they think impinges upon their personal ideologies.

Simply a fascinating book filled with insights into the human condition while providing a historical read that instantly became one of my top five favourite non-fiction books.

Editor's Note: Chris Connors is the pen name of one of our Nipissing Naturalists Club members, like Eric Arthur Blair who used the pen name George Orwell.



The Flammarion engraving (1888) depicting a traveller who arrives at the edge of the earth and sticks his head through the firmament

Interesting winter find

By Renee Levesque

Snow fleas: Almost without fail on a warm winter's day, we are bound to see swarming little black dots in the snow. And if we look carefully, we will even see some hopping or jumping. These are snow fleas, tiny arthropods, no bigger than the period at the end of this sentence. They are not really fleas. They don't bite or feed on animals or humans. They are Dark Blue Springtails.

Most springtails are not active in winter, but the Dark Blue Springtails produce a sort of antifreeze that enables them to be active. They are a common species living in damp areas of soil or under leaf litter where they feed on fungi, algae and decaying organic matter. (They prefer a rich organic soil, so if you see some in your yard, it is a good sign. They rarely cause plant damage.) There are thousands to millions in a cubic metre of soil! We don't see them until it gets mild in the winter and their dark bodies are contrasted against the white snow. (I first saw some at my place over the very mild weekend of January 20 and 21 as pictured at the bottom of the page. Magnification of snow fleas is at the top of the page.)

The thawing snow forms channels from the soil to the snow surface. Some may find their way back to the soil, but most will die. It is not known why they come to the snow's surface – maybe it's triggered by overcrowding under the snow or maybe it's just a response to warm weather.

Springtails don't use their legs to jump the way fleas and grasshoppers do; nor do they have wings that allow them to fly. Instead, they use a special little appendage called a furcula, a fork-like structure at their hind end that folds under their body. It is like a spring that causes the springtail (hence its name) to jump over 100 times its body length.

Like insects, springtails have six legs, but they are not true insects because they have many non-insect features. They have their own classification, Entognatha Hexapoda, and are ancient organisms – fossils 400 million years old have been found!

Take a look at the You Tube video on *Nature Walk with Mark Fraser*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjLKzogOj8Q>. Look for the springtail's furcula.

Sources: Ask an Entomologist, Snow Fleas, Gwen Pearson; Nebraska Extension: Community Environment, University of Nebraska, Keith Jarvi; Wikipedia.



Courtesy of CIC Land and Sea



52 years on and still going strong



Fred Pinto

Nipissing Naturalists Club's Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held

on January 9 at the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority. Following a delicious pot luck dinner, Fred Pinto, President, provided the report for 2017; Connie Sturge, Treasurer, provided the Financial Report for 2017 which had been emailed to members prior to the AGM; and Dick Tafel, Chair of Bird Wing, provided the Bird Wing report for 2017.

History:

This year marks 52 years of education and enjoyment of nature through Nipissing Naturalists Club. The Club got started in 1966, making it the oldest environmental group in North Bay. It began as the Nipissing Field Naturalist Club, and became incorporated in 1992 as the Nipissing Naturalists Club Inc. It is run by a volunteer Board of Directors composed of no more than 12 individuals, supported by many members who take on additional tasks.

Some notable achievements of Nipissing Naturalists Club are:

Initiated the protection of 240 acres of woodland within the City of North Bay known as Laurier Woods Conservation Area.

Recognized Louise de Kiriline Lawrence with a historic Ontario Heritage plaque at Pimisi Bay, 2016 (left).

Published *Species at Risk in the Lake Nipissing Watershed*, 2008.

The only known club in North America to monitor bats.

During Bat Week in 2015, helped set a world record for the number of bat houses built.



Renee Levesque

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Board of Directors:

The Board of Directors for 2017 were Fred Pinto, President and Speaker Coordinator; Marc Buchanan, Vice President; Connie Sturge, Treasurer; Oriana Pokorny, Secretary; Sarah Wheelan, Website and Facebook; Irene Kasch, Refreshment Coordinator; Paul Smylie, Trip Coordinator; Riley Cormier; and Louise Simpson. They will continue as Directors for 2018 and will be joined on the Board by Julie Falsetti and Gary Sturge

The Board and members wish to thank outgoing Directors Guy Chartrand, Peter Ferris, Mary Lord, Damien McSean and Rob Rodger for their services on the Board and to the Club in 2017.

Club Volunteers:

In addition to the Board of Directors, members frequently step forward to offer assistance in the operation of the Club. In 2017, these members were Lori Anderson, compiler of the Christmas Bird Count; Kaye Edmonds, nature and science festivals; Rebecca Geauvreau, lead in the bat monitoring project; Renee Levesque, editor of *The Woodland Observer* and all those who submitted articles and photos; April McCrum and Grant McKercher, SwiftWatch; Jan Phillips, refreshments; Rachel and Gary Sturge, nature festival; Gary Sturge, Motus Wildlife Tracking System; and Dick Tafel, Chair of Bird Wing. In addition, many members contributed refreshments for our socials following our monthly meetings and many helped with bringing the Motus Wildlife Tracking System to North Bay.

Club Objectives:

To observe and enjoy nature through field trips, meetings and discussions.

To stimulate and increase personal and public interest in and understanding of our natural history.

To promote conservation and wise use of our natural resources including soil, water, woodlands, plants and wildlife.

To cooperate with other organizations and agencies having the same or similar objectives.

How objectives were met:

1. Eight monthly meetings with guest speakers:

February: Oriana Pokorny, Traditional Style Canoe Tripping in Temagami (photo at right)



Oriana Pokorny

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

March: Norm Dokis, Eagles of the River, How the Dokis Indians Saved their Timber

April: Steve Pitt, Panning for Gold in the Yukon

May: Peter Ferris, Canoeing the Historic Hayes River

June: Paul Chivers: Rediscovering the Nastawagan

September: Fred Pinto, The Ice Age of Planet earth

October: Franco Mariotti, Natural History of Antarctica

November: Eric Mattson, the State of the Cryosphere

December: Chris McVeety, Forest Insects and Diseases



Renee Levesque

2. Events and Outings:

Dog sledding in Calvin Township.

Baking over an outdoor open fire.

Tour of Dokis First Nation (photo above).

Picnic at the Sturge property.

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Two hikes to the Three Crosses overlooking the Mattawa and Ottawa Rivers and the town of Mattawa.

3. Involvement with the Community and other Organizations:

Fourth Annual Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival at Laurier Woods Conservation Area.

Bat monitoring program using the North American Bat Monitoring Protocol and supplying data to researchers.

Participation in North Bay's Science Festival, November 2017, raising awareness of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System.

Guided walks in Laurier Woods Conservation Area from May to December in conjunction with Friends of Laurier Woods Inc. and North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Area.

Nipissing Naturalists Club's website and Facebook.

Nipissing Naturalists Club's Newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*.

Bird Wing: meetings from January to April and September to November and outings from May to August; Bird Bashes monthly; Bird Wing, Bird Bash, Christmas Bird Count, Nocturnal Owl Survey and Year-end Bird Count Reports, all posted on our website; promotion of Citizen Science projects, such as Christmas Bird Count, Great Canadian Birdathon, Project FeederWatch, Nocturnal Owl Survey, Great Backyard Bird Count, SwiftWatch, Breeding Bird Survey, Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program, Canadian Lakes Loon Survey and Singing Woodcock Ground Survey.



Renee Levesque



2017 in review



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Sold to the highest bidder

By Renee Levesque; photos by Kaye Edmonds and Renee Levesque

A silent auction followed the Annual General Meeting. Many of us came away with some great items and Nipissing Naturalists Club made \$165.00 - not a lot of money, but every little bit helps add to the coffers.

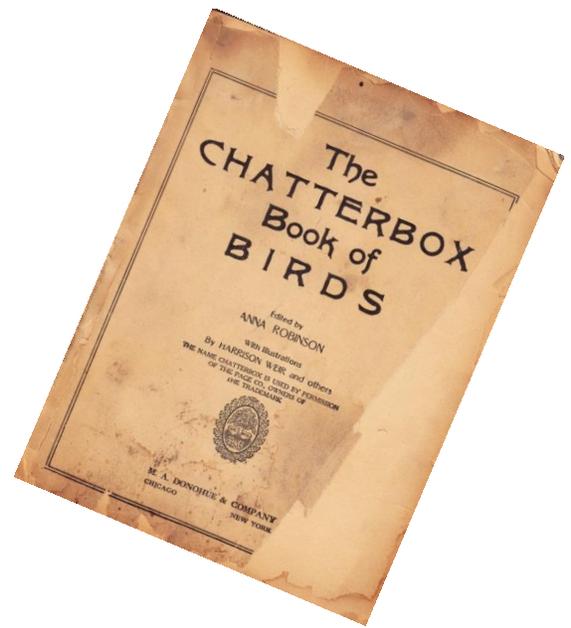


I came away with a book donated by Oriana Pokorny, a 1909 book, *The Chatterbox Book of Birds*, that belonged to her grandmother. It actually turns out to be a rather disturbing little book about birds, eagles in particular. It deserves an article in and of itself and I may write one at some point.

Oriana also donated fabrics, aprons and tablecloths that also belonged to her grandmother. I got a Christmas tablecloth – not that I needed any more tablecloths, having quite a collection myself – and, for that matter, not that I needed any more books - but an auction for a good cause is an auction for a good cause.

As is often the case, Kaye Edmonds donated a few beautifully handcrafted items – an owl rock, a couple of fairy doors and a bird house. I know Bill Marsh outbid Gary Sturge on the Snowy Owl rock by \$1.00! And I believe Bill also got the birdhouse.

Many books were donated, along with sundry other items.



Irene Kasch was responsible for obtaining gift certificates from three businesses and a restaurant: a \$50.00 gift certificate from Ask Geek Computer Services; a \$45.00 gift certificate from Allmakes Auto Service Plus; a \$72.97 gift certificate from Gateway Home Hardware; and a \$20.00 gift certificate from East Side Mario's which also donated a bottle of one of their famous dressings. Thank you to all these businesses.



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Ontario Nature conservation award nominations

Ontario Nature recognizes excellence by honouring individuals, groups, government agencies and corporations who have worked towards protecting nature in Ontario. Eleven awards are presented to recognize this excellence. Click on the link below to see what these awards are. If someone you know in our area is deserving of a nomination, please nominate.

https://www.ontarionature.org/act/conservation_award/PDFs/AGMCONAWARDS2018.pdf.

On this site, you can also read the rules on who can nominate whom, but basically it is: Non-Ontario Nature members or groups must be nominated by two current Ontario Nature members or one Ontario Nature member group; and Ontario Nature members must be nominated by two people who can be either members or non-members, or they can be nominated by one member group. A group which is a member of Ontario Nature can nominate itself.

An individual or an organization can be nominated for more than one award, but each nomination must be submitted on a separate official form which can be found at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdM5x-V_FhXXok6xrnoje0WdtYqpcF7Cjag8pnI0D5FjTeilw/viewform.

Please make sure you read the rules carefully. If you have any questions or need help, you can email Jaklynn Nimec, Executive Assistant, Ontario Nature, at jaklynn@ontarionature.org.

Nomination deadline is March 26, 2018; winners are notified on May 4, 2018; awards ceremony is on June 2, 2018; and awards are published in ON Nature in the Autumn 2018 issue.

Last year, Beverley Kingdon, a member of Nipissing Naturalists Club, was the recipient of the 2016 J.R. Dymond Public Service Award for her work in reintroducing the Trumpeter Swan to Ontario. Bev is pictured at right with former Nipissing Naturalists Club president, Angela Martin. See the September 2017 issue of *The Woodland Observer* for more details:

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



Upcoming speakers at monthly meetings

Meetings take place the **second Tuesday of every month in the auditorium of Cassellholme**, starting at 7:00 .p.m. They are held from February to June and from September to December.

On **Tuesday, February 13**, our first speaker of the New Year is **Shannon Kelly**, a third year Honours Specialization Biology student at Nipissing University, who will talk about **Big Cats and Elephants**.

Shannon spent the month of August in South Africa where she volunteered at a sanctuary called Glen Afric, near Pretoria, caring for and improving the living conditions of these big animals.

On **Tuesday, March 13**, **Daniel Pike**, an independent wildlife consultant based in North Bay will talk about **Counting Whales in the North Atlantic and Other Places**.

Whales are difficult to count. They spend much of their time underwater, not visible to observers. Even when they do come to the surface, they can be difficult to detect and identify. They are distributed over huge areas of the world's oceans, often far from land, and many species migrate long distances from tropical to temperate waters every year. Moreover their distribution can change from year to year, necessitating surveys that cover immense areas. So how are they counted with any accuracy? Daniel will let us know.



Cheetah, courtesy of Shannon Kelly



Fin Whales, courtesy of Daniel Pike

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Board of Directors, 2018

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

Marc Buchanan, Vice-president

Louise Simpson

Connie Sturge, Treasurer

Paul Smylie

Oriana Pokorny, Secretary

Julie Falsetti

Sarah Wheelan, Website and Facebook

Riley Cormier

Irene Kasch, Refreshments

Gary Sturge

Past Presidents

Dick Tafel

Ted Price

Steph Romaniuk

Angela Martin

Greg Boxwell

Jeremy St. Onge

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Bird Wing

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

Gary Sturge, Treasurer

Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe. Monthly Bird Wing reports are sent to members by email and posted on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website, <https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/>. Here you will find in date order monthly Bird Wing reports; monthly Bird Bash reports; Year-end reports; and Christmas Bird Count reports.

The Woodland Observer is published electronically each month from September to June and sent to members by email and posted in date order on Nipissing Naturalists Club website, <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

Editor: Renee Levesque: rlevesque1948@gmail.com

Contributors this issue: Lori Anderson, Marc Buchanan, Gary Chowns, Chris Connor, Kaye Edmonds, Ernie Frayle, Shannon Kelly, John Levesque, Renee Levesque, Eric Matteson, Grant McKercher, Stephen O'Donnell, Martin Parker, Oriana Pokorny, Fred Pinto, Steve Pitt, Paul Smylie, Linda Stoner, Gary Sturge, Rachel Sturge and Brent Turcotte.

Special thanks to all the feeder watchers, in particular to Kaye Edmonds, Mary Marrs, Nona Schorse, and Colin and Noreen Vezina for providing me with a "story"; Noah Cole, Ontario Nature, for his photo of Bev Kingdon and Angela Martin; and CJC Land and Sea Photo for the photo of the magnification of the snow fleas.

Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fees are: single \$20.00; family \$30.00.

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



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