

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

FEBRUARY 2017



NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

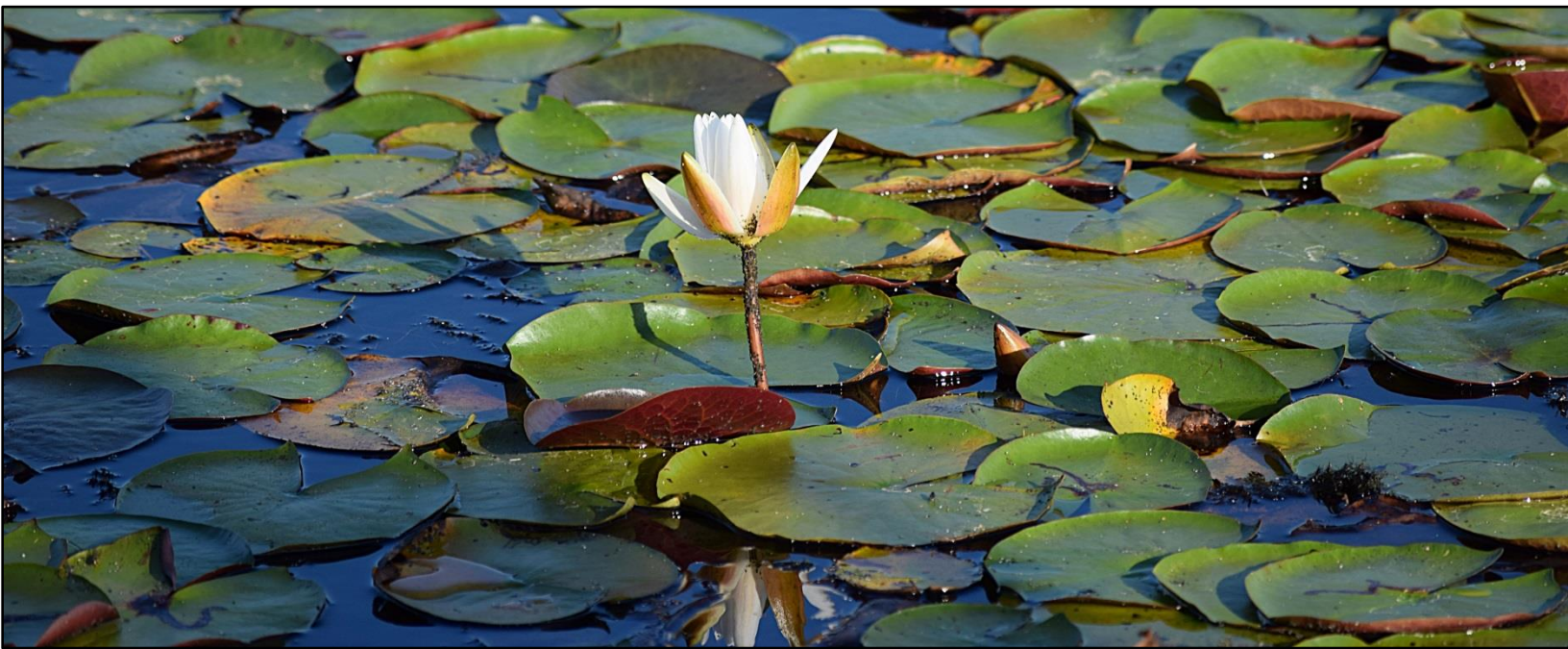
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From the editor:

Wetlands, birds and hearts

February with its 28 days brings with it some special days and a fun outing.

World Wetlands Day falls on February 2. Because marshes, bogs and other wetlands cover about 14% of Canada's land area, it is a day to reflect on the importance of wetlands and the importance of protecting them.



You might also want to consider volunteering in Bird Studies Canada's Marsh Monitoring Programs to help track the health of these ecosystems and the wildlife inhabiting them. If you are interested, contact Kathy Jones, Bird Studies Canada, at volunteer@birdscanada.org. And for more information on this year's World Wetlands Day, see: <http://www.ramsar.org/activity/world-wetlands-day>.

The 20th annual Great Backyard Bird Count takes place from February 17 to 20, over the Family Day weekend. You simply count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more of the count days and report your sightings online. Click on <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/> for further details and be sure to participate in this fun citizen science activity.

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February also marks Valentine's Day, falling this year on the day of our meeting. There is a lot to love in nature including "found hearts", hearts we come upon unexpectedly, sometimes naturally in rocks, stones, flowers, leaves, and even in clouds and spider webs if we are lucky. And sometimes found hearts are made in the sand and snow by people – and in the case of the squirrel, pictured with other "found hearts" on the next page, a heart filled with peanuts! Photos in this collage of hearts are by **Katherine Byers, Kaye Edmonds, Sarah Wheelan and me.**

Our Valentine's Day meeting features Oriana Pokorny talking about a traditional summer camp in Temagami where she is an instructor, and our February outing is a dog sledding event at the same place as last year. See the April 2016 newsletter, pages 4 through 10: <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>. It was such a fun time we had last year, so for those who missed taking part then, consider doing so this year. Details of the meeting presentation and the outing are in the newsletter.

You will also find in this newsletter the second-place photos from our photo contest; a summary of club activities in 2016; part 2 of Rebecca Geauvreau's article on the bat monitoring project; the results of the Christmas Bird Count; wonderful photos taken by Grant McKercher of some of the birds of South Africa; and Nicole Richardson's report on participation in a project that took her to the grasslands of Montana.

Welcome new board members – Guy Chartrand, Mary Lord, Rob Rodger and Connie Sturge. Over the next couple of months, I hope to run a profile of each as I did last year on the other board members.

Take care of wetlands. They sustain life.

- Renee Levesque



Valentine's Day is everywhere in nature

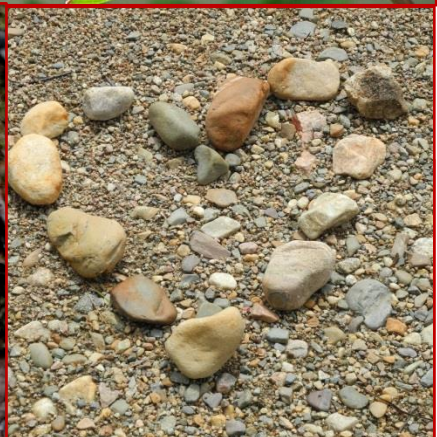


Photo contest: second-place winners

Fauna: Tie between **Rob Rodger** and **Mary Lord**

Rob took the photo of a loon feeding near Callander using a Canon 7d with a 300mm f/4 and a 1.4 tele-converter. He spotted several loons flying overhead and



followed their flight to where they landed. He was fortunate enough to spot one of the loons with a fish in its mouth, “my first picture of a loon feeding and my favourite of the many loon photos I took that day.” And it’s no wonder it is his favourite!

Mary’s photo of the fox was taken at the former landfill site at the end of Marsh Road. She and Rob were off-roading in their jeep when Mary spotted a fox. They followed it and after about ten minutes the fox turned and looked towards them. Mary just started clicking away with her camera, a Sony A57 with a 300mm lens. “It was truly amazing.” And a truly amazing photo!

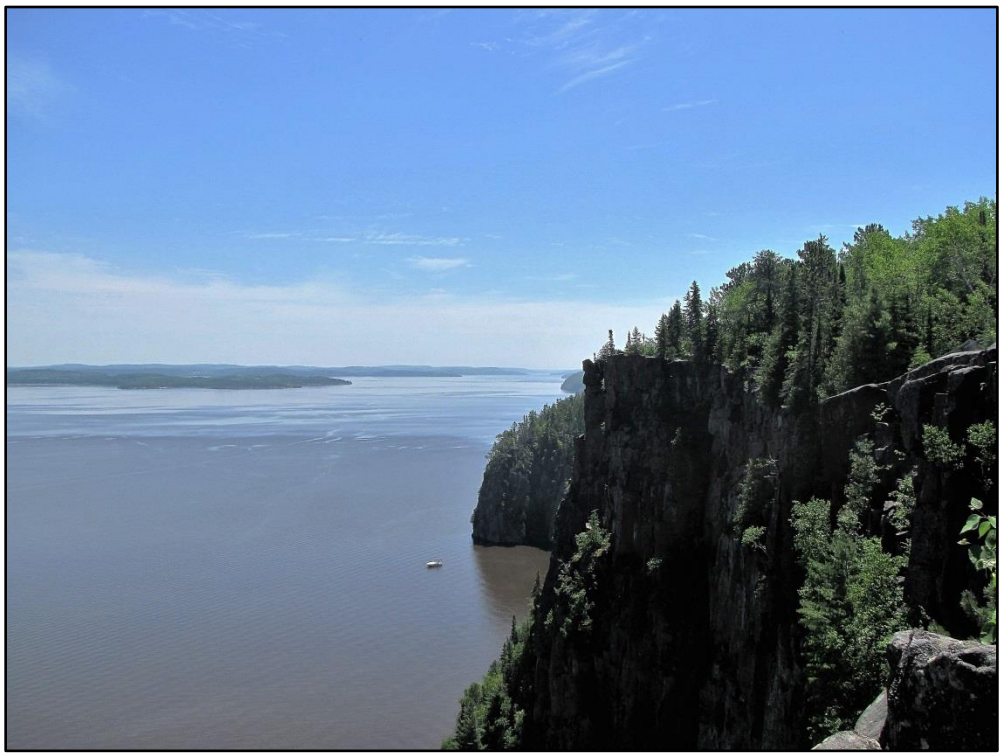




Landscape: Tie between **Oriana Pokorny** and **Fred Pinto**

Oriana took her photo of a winter wonderland at the Nipissing/Canadore pond. She was walking to her car in the early evening and was so struck by the beauty of the evening that she wanted “to capture the moment”. All she had was her tablet, a Samsung Galaxy 5, so she grabbed it and even with a tablet was able to capture a perfect winter’s evening.

On a warm, sunny June day with no wind, **Fred** took this photo of Devil’s Rock, Temiskaming Shores, during a Nipissing Naturalists Club outing. He was able to capture the “texture of the rocks and the smoothness of Lake Temiskaming”, as well as the height of the 300-foot cliff face, thereby contrasting “the vertical lines of the cliff with the flatness of the water far below.” Fred used a GoPro Silver camera, with its fixed wide-angle lens.



**Flora:
Oriana
Pokorny**

With a
Nikon
Coolpix,
Oriana
took this
photo of
Jerusalem
Artichokes,



also known as Sunchoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*), and also often quoted as the only root vegetable native to Canada. “They fill my Mother's front garden every September/October and often arrive on my birthday and always make me smile.” And who wouldn’t smile seeing a mass of such pretty yellow flowers!

People Enjoying Nature: Dorothy deKiewiet

Dorothy’s photo of Lori Anderson and Guy Chartrand climbing over fallen trees was taken last October during an impromptu lichen outing with Brent Turcotte. “While examining a fascinating variety of lichens, we were slowly making our way to a stream at the end of an abandoned road when we came across trees completely blocking the road. The disappointment of not being able to continue our walk quickly turned to laughter when we saw Lori and Guy fighting their way back through the fallen trees, especially as we hadn’t noticed they had gone on ahead despite the obstacles in their way.”



Taken with a Nikon D90 camera with an 80 to 200 mm lens, Dorothy’s photo clearly depicts the fun time that was had on that outing and shows how intrepid two of the participants were.



Christmas Bird Counts

Photo by Renee Levesque

Introduction

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is North America's longest-running Citizen Science project. A count has been made every year since 1900. The information collected by thousands of volunteer participants forms one of the world's largest sets of wildlife survey data. North Bay has proudly completed this survey for 39 years.

“The Christmas Bird Count has evolved to become a hugely important pool of data for researchers studying the ongoing status and ranges of bird populations across the Americas. The only other similar yardstick is the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), run during June in the breeding season. The co-analyses of CBC and BBS have become the combined yardstick by which ornithologists and conservation biologists assess how bird populations are doing –and where they are occurring – across the Americas. It is Audubon's mandate and duty to keep the CBC database as meaningful and statistically significant as possible. It was a many-decade struggle for the scientific community to embrace the CBC and other citizen science databases as statistically meaningful for scientific study; we must not do anything to jeopardize that trust.”
(from audubon.org)

North Bay Christmas Bird Count

By Lori Anderson, compiler

The North Bay CBC was conducted on December 17. Eleven feeder watchers counted birds for 27.5 hours collectively, and seventeen field observers scoured the established 24-km diameter circle for an accumulated 31.75 hours and 510.5 km by car, and 8.25 hours and 18 km by foot. Deeper snow made walking slower and so reduced the distance covered. No kilometres were surveyed by bicycle this year!

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The temperature was -8C and very windy in open areas. It snowed in the early part of the morning, then there was sun until around 2:00 p.m. when the snow started up again, at times quite heavy. Recent cold weather reduced the open water and hence reduced waterfowl species and numbers. The only waterfowl seen were Mallards, American Black Ducks and Common Goldeneye, the latter in Trout Lake.

Overall, species number at 31 was slightly low, explained by the early winter. The number of individual birds, 2,930, was better than most counts, jacked-up by higher than usual totals for American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeak and European Starling.

Blue Jays were noticeably fewer than most years. Absent, although usually seen on count days, were gulls, Purple Finch and Common Redpoll. Ruffed Grouse was not found on the 17th, but was observed in Area 2 on the 15th and 20th and reported as a count week observation.

Once again, feeder watchers made a very significant contribution to the tally, adding 583 individuals and four additional species – Cooper's Hawk (below), Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal and Pine Siskin. The Northern Cardinal and the Red-Bellied Woodpecker at feeders, and the Cooper's Hawk ambushing birds at feeders, were several of the more uncommon species observed. Other uncommon species seen were Northern Shrike, Brown Creeper, Gray Jay and American Robin (above right). A White-throated Sparrow (apparently resisting migration) visiting a feeder on December 15 was recorded as a count week species in Area 2.



Photo by Renee Levesque

On count day, Snow Buntings were observed at the airport by a feeder watcher who lived nearby and so were included in the tally for Area 1.



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

One species high count record for North Bay was broken – that of the Bald Eagle. Sixteen Bald Eagles were counted in Area 5! This tops the former high count by 10.

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Unfortunately, the wintery weather prevented some from attending the potluck and tally following the survey, but those who braved the snow were welcomed with a hard-earned and much-needed hot apple cider at the door of Grant and Shirley McKercher who hosted the potluck and tally. A special thank you to Grant and Shirley.

And thank you to the field observers who braved the winter weather and thank you to all the feeder watchers who watched their feeders on count day. These are the birders responsible for the success of the count.

Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count

By Martin Parker

The 40th Annual Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count was held on Friday, December 16, with temperatures ranging from -28C to -8C. The Burk's Falls count is in the eastern section of the District of Parry Sound, halfway between Huntsville and North Bay on Highway 11.

With 23 field participants and three feeder watchers, a total of 24 species consisting of 2,671 individual birds were recorded. The freezing conditions prior to the count resulted in no gulls and only two species of waterfowl. Lack of spruce and other cones reduced the number of winter finches.



Photo by Renee Levesque

The overall highlight was the presence of a Red-bellied Woodpecker in the Magnetawan area, a new species for this count, bringing the all-time total number of species to 92. This bird was coming to a feeder though was not seen by the party covering the area. The owner of the property reported to the participants that the bird did show up after they left.

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Other highlights: two Trumpeter Swans (heading photo) at Magnetawan; 18 Wild Turkeys (new high), but only two Ruffed Grouse; three Northern Shrike; nine Gray Jays; 115 Bohemian Waxwing (photo above); 34 Pine Grosbeaks; three Purple Finches; 16 White-winged Crossbills; and 658 American Goldfinch (new count high).

Winter finch numbers were low with no Red Crossbills or Pine Siskins, and only four Common Redpolls.

A special thanks to Alex Mills who started this count in 1977 and still attends with a crew from Barrie.

Thanks to all the people who contributed to the potluck supper – a great way to end the day!

Parry Sound Christmas Bird Count

By Steph Romaniuk

This was the first year in Parry Sound that we actually considered cancelling the count! Thanks to all who braved the weather on December 17 and showed up, and thanks to those who were socked in without a snowplow but proceeded to diligently observe their area on foot.

It was a perfect storm with a weather system snowfall warning on top of persistent snow squalls. Someone was looking out for us as the snow stayed mostly away and the mild temperatures and light wind made for a very pleasant and productive bird count! We matched the 30 species count from last year and the number of individuals seen was virtually the same – 965 this year vs. 955 last year. Despite the similarities in results, there were a few differences in species

We had two new species for the count – a Belted Kingfisher heard in the southern end of the circle; and a rare species spotted during count week at the McDougall Landfill site – a lone Horned Lark feeding on the tops of shrubs sticking up through the snow (photo below).



Photo by Stan Fairchild

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Also at the landfill site were 120 Common Ravens and eight Bald Eagles, although the total number of Common Ravens seen was 157, and the total number of Bald Eagles seen was 13.

The count yielded 51 Ring-billed Gulls; 17 Herring Gulls; one Canada Goose; one Double-crested Cormorant; 38 Common Goldeneye; and four Common Mergansers.

Also making the count were 15 Wild Turkeys; nine American Tree Sparrows; two Dark-eyed Juncos; and six White-winged Crossbills.

Fortuitously seen by two participants when they stopped for a train on their way to the coffee shop to meet the other participants to begin the early morning count was the only owl seen during the count, a Barred Owl.

A flock of 80 Bohemian Waxwings were seen during the count week at the library's apple tree, and 15 were seen at the same spot on the count day.

We did not see any Common Redpolls, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeaks or Red Crossbills. However, 45 American Goldfinch were seen, and Evening Grosbeaks (above) were back in stronger numbers than in recent years – 44 this year. **Still, from 1994 to 1997, Evening Grosbeaks regularly peaked above 200, with a high count in 1994 of 680 individuals!**



Photo by Renee Levesque



Photo by John Levesque

2016 another active year for Nipissing Naturalists

Nipissing Naturalists Club objectives:

1. To observe and enjoy nature around us through field trips, meetings and discussions.
2. To stimulate and increase personal and public interest in and understanding of our natural history.
3. To promote the conservation and wise use of our natural resources, including soil, water, woodlands, plants and animal wildlife.
4. To cooperate with other organizations and agencies having the same or similar objectives.

How we fulfilled our objectives:

1. Holding eight monthly meetings with guest speakers:

February - Scott Kaufmann: Bass and Lake Trout.

March - Several students from Nipissing University: The Galapagos Islands.

April - Paul Smylie: Bicycling the Dempster Highway: Whitehorse to Inuvik.

May - Larry Dyke: The Role of Geology in Creating Wetlands.

June - Mike McIntosh: Living with Bears.

September - Paul Smylie: Joys of Canoeing in Northern Ontario.

October - Fred Pinto: Forest Restoration Around the World.



Photo by Paul Smylie

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November - Andrew Healy: Highway Ecology.
December - Rebecca Geauvreau: Bat
Monitoring Project.

2. Organizing the following outings and events:

Dog sledding.
Bird banding at Hilliardton Marsh.
Bird outing to Algonquin Park.
Hike to Devil's Rock.
History tour of Bonfield and Mattawa.
Learning to prepare study skins.

3. Reaching out to the community and other organizations by:

Organizing and holding the third annual Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival with 13 other partners.

Leading the installation of an Ontario provincial historic plaque at Pimisi Bay to recognize naturalist and ornithologist, Louise de Kiriline Lawrence.



Photo by Renee Levesque



Photo courtesy of Ontario Heritage Trust

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Undertaking a bat monitoring program approved by the MNRF, using the North American Bat Monitoring Program.

Holding Bird Wing meetings and outings, as well as promoting citizen science projects, such as Project FeederWatch, Great Backyard Bird Count, Nocturnal Owl Survey, Great Canadian Birdathon, Breeding Bird Survey, Swiftwatch and Christmas Bird Count.

Working with Friends of Laurier Woods and North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority to host monthly guided walks from May to December on different aspects of nature in Laurier Woods Conservation Area. (See photo at bottom of page.)

Taking part in Astorville's *Forest of Reading* celebration.

Helping promote *The Messenger* at the North Bay Film Festival.

Maintaining Nipissing Naturalists Club's website and Facebook page.

Electronically publishing our monthly newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*.

New and current board members:

Nipissing Naturalists Club thanks Joe Boivin, Sonje Bols, Mary Marrs, Steve Mitchell and April Phelps for their work on the board, but unfortunately time commitments prevent them from continuing as board members. The Club welcomes new board members Guy Chartrand, Mary Lord, Rob Rodger and Connie Sturge. They will be joined on the Board by incumbents, Fred Pinto, president; Marc Buchanan, vice-president; Oriana Pokorny, secretary; Sarah Wheelan, website and Facebook maintenance; Irene Kasch, refreshments; and Paul Smylie. Connie will assume the position of treasurer, previously held by April, and Rob and Mary will assume the position of trip coordinators, previously held by Irene and Paul.



Photo by Renee Levesque

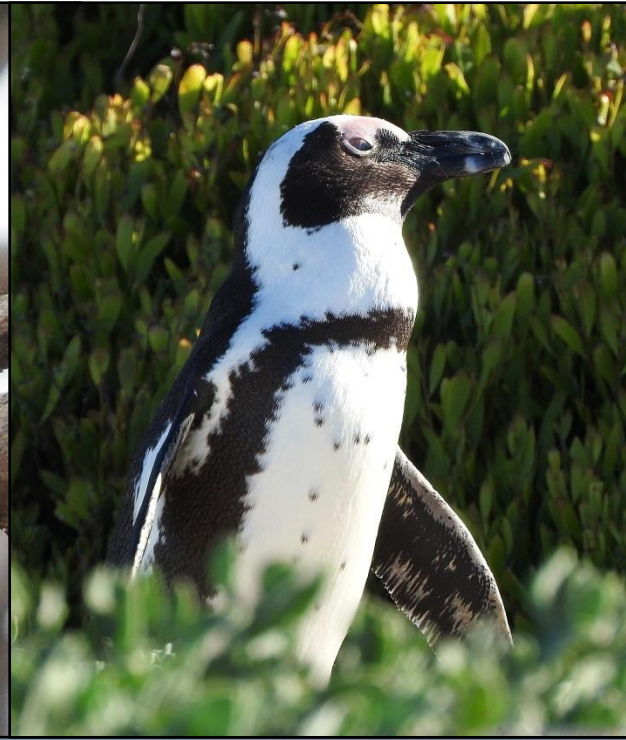
The birds of South Africa

In October, Grant and Shirley McKercher took a trip to South Africa where Grant saw 209 of the 850 species of birds that can be seen there. At November's Bird Wing meeting, Grant gave a talk on some of the birds he saw and showed us some wonderful photos he took. Some of Grant's photos are shown below and on the next page.



Clockwise from top right:

African Wattled Lapwing;
Brown-hooded Kingfisher; Grey
Heron; Red-crested Korhaan; Red-
knobbed Coot; Cape Bunting.



Clockwise from top left:
Lilac-breasted Roller;
African Penguin;
Chestnut-banded Plover;
African Hoopoe;
Southern Yellow-billed
Hornbill; White-throated
Chat; Egyptian Goose.



It all started with a bat house, Part 2



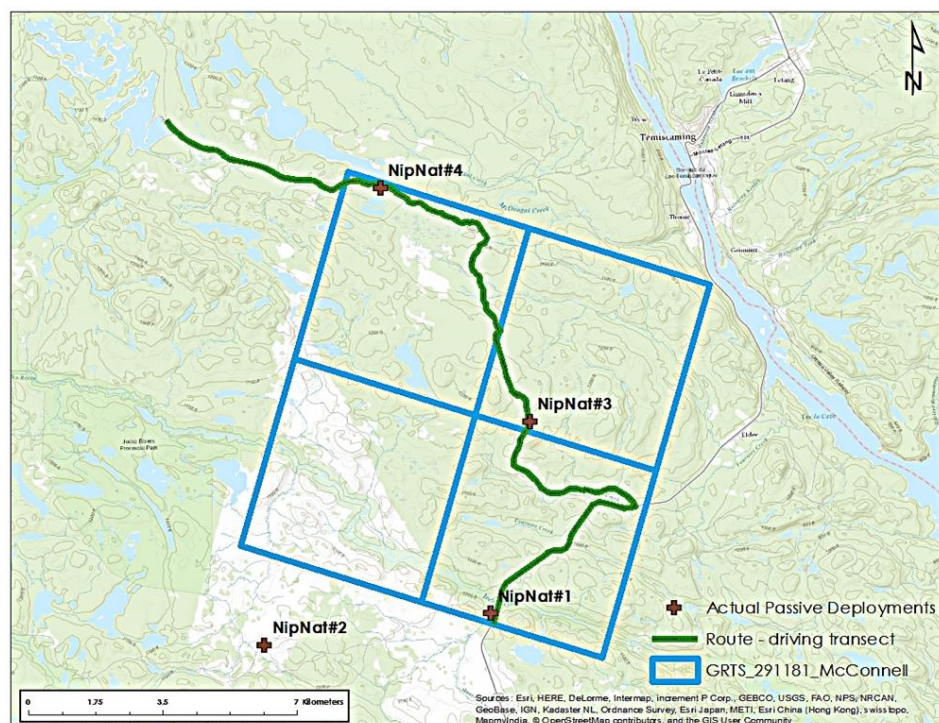
By Rebecca Geauvreau, Biologist, FRi Ecological Services

Where we left off after Part 1:

It is now June 2016 and Nipissing Naturalists Club members are about to embark on their bat monitoring project in the McConnell Lake area with ultrasound recorders and equipment.

The GRTS – 291181

The Club selected and established a bat monitoring square, GRTS 291181, in the McConnell Lake area northeast of the City of North Bay. (GRTS stands for Generalized Random Tessellation Stratification, a method of sampling that combines probability sampling with approximate spatially balanced sampling.) This square was chosen because of its contiguous forest cover, but with suitable access roads for driving transects. The monitoring program requires that a 25 km stretch of road within the GRTS square be surveyed at a speed of precisely 32 km per hour!



In May 2016, with a grant received from the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, the Club purchased five ultrasonic recorders and associated equipment from Wildlife Acoustics. Four of these recorders were deployed in each of the quadrats of GRTS

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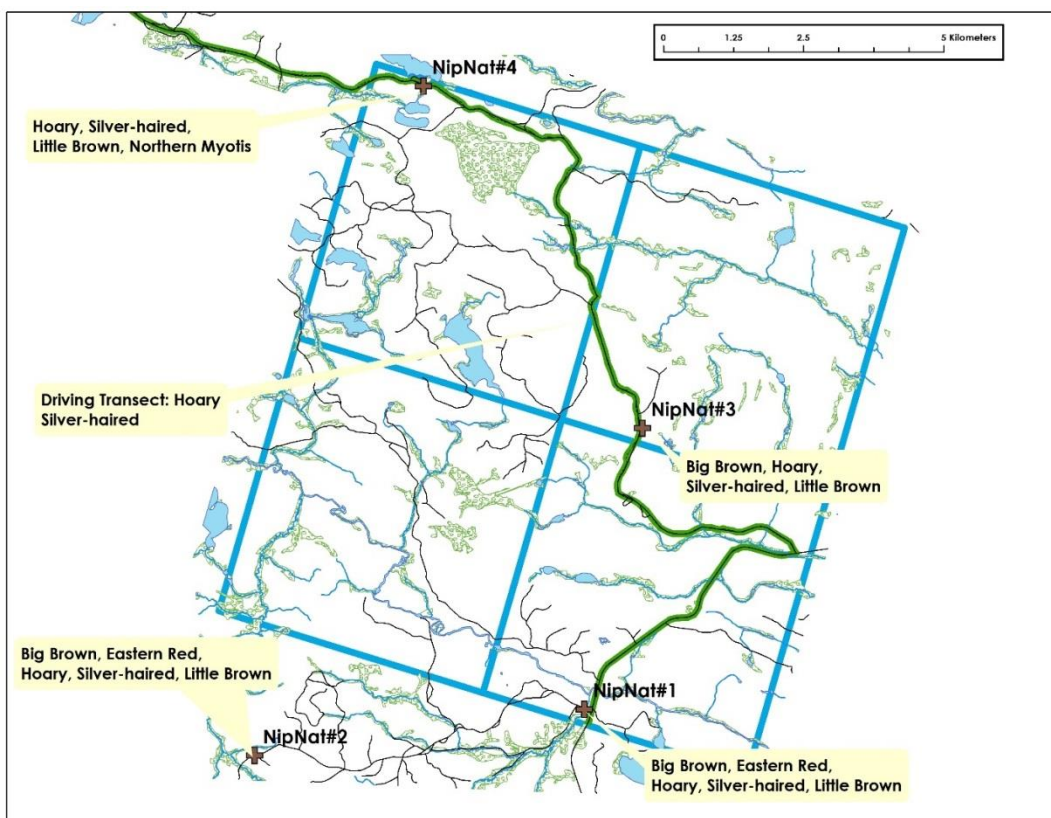
291181 for stationary point counts, while the fifth was used for mobile transect surveys.

On June 2, 2016, five intrepid Club members headed out into the blackfly-choked landscape and deployed the four acoustic recorders which served as the stationary monitoring locations for the square.

Recorders were placed in open locations near roads, trails, wetlands and other corridors to maximize the chance of detecting bats. On June 3, 8 and 9, another two intrepid Club members conducted the driving mobile acoustic surveys for the 25 km stretch along the McConnell Lake Road and a portion of Highway 63.



Fred Pinto and Marc Buchanan, photo by Sarah Wheelan



Who's there?

The map at left shows the location of the stationary acoustic recorders, the driving transect route and the species detected at each station.

Thousands of acoustic recordings or bat passes were collected.

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These have been analyzed using a proprietary software from Wildlife Acoustics and a sub-sample verified by an experienced biologist. The analyzed data will be packaged and submitted to the North American Bat Monitoring Program. With the dedicated support of volunteers, it is our hope to continue to monitor this square at the same locations each summer.

Exit counts at the maternity roost

Over the fall and winter of 2015, the ownership maternity roost exchanged hands. Unfortunately for Club members and bats, the new owner was not interested in granting permission to conduct exit counts. Admittedly, it takes a special person to resolve to live with bats, especially 200+ bats!

If you find a bat

Bats are common year-round visitors in our neighbourhoods and sometimes homes. Bats can squeeze through an opening just a half-inch wide. So even if your attic, eaves and walls are sealed tight, you probably have bats foraging near your home.



Fred, Kevan Cowcill Marc and Paul Smylie, photo by Sarah Wheelan

Bats have an amazing ability to use echolocation to detect and distinguish prey and to navigate. They hunt insects exclusively at night and will do so in alternating bouts of feeding and resting. Resting places at night are temporary and are used to

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rest, digest and inevitably poop. Night roosts, as they are known, are quite common in porches, breezeways, open garages and any other structure that offers cover overhead and suitable heights for bats characteristic *drop and fly*. (For meaning, see **Uninjured bats** later in this article.)

To determine if your home hosts night roosting bats, have a look for small droppings that sparkle on your porch or underneath a covered outdoor structure. I am not kidding – insect exoskeletons are sparkly and bat droppings are too compared to dull rodent droppings. If you're quite adventurous, you can attempt the crush test on any droppings you find: rodent droppings will be tough to break apart, whereas bat droppings will readily break into their exoskeleton bits. See **Safety first** that follows.

Safety first

Like any wild animal, bats, especially an injured bat, can bite. Bats should never be handled unless absolutely necessary.

If you suspect bats in your attic during the summer months, contact a community bat program or a bat-friendly pest control company for advice. If you suspect bats in your attic during the winter, take heart, there is probably not more than one or two. However, eviction should wait until the summer months when the bat(s) will leave your attic hibernacula. After the bat(s) leave, plug any holes before September rolls around.

While bat droppings are known to carry bacteria that can make people sick, especially immunocompromised persons, there is no immediate cause for alarm provided the droppings are separate from living or working spaces. The same bacteria is found in soil and other mammal droppings, so general common sense about hand washing and breathing in small or confined spaces is paramount. Always treat droppings with care and follow clean-up procedures provided by your local health unit or other health authority.

Bats, like other mammals, including dogs and cats, can carry rabies. A bite from a bat, suspected or confirmed, should not be ignored. If you suspect that you or someone you know has been bitten by a bat, seek medical attention immediately.

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There are very effective measures to prevent the transmission of rabies if medical attention is sought right away.

Injured bats

If you find an injured bat, contact a wildlife rehabilitation centre authorized to care for rabies vector species (e.g. raccoons, skunks, bats). Your local Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry office administers licensing of these centres and will provide a list of centres you can call. It may be a good idea to do this in advance of finding a bat.

Uninjured bats

If the bat is in your home and it is able to fly, open doors and windows and allow it to fly out on its own. Young bats learning to fly or youngsters who have chosen an unsuitable day roost sometimes end up on the ground. Most of Ontario's bats cannot launch themselves into flight from the ground; rather they use the *drop and fly* approach, meaning they must free-fall from a height to begin flying. If they are on the ground, they are basically stranded and vulnerable to predation. To rescue these bats, follow this simple four-step solution:

1. Tack a pillowcase to a tree or wall well off the ground.
2. Put on leather gloves or other bite-proof hand protection.
3. Gently pick up the bat and place it in the pillowcase.
4. If the bat is not injured, it will crawl up and out of the pillowcase and fly away.

Resources and interesting things to look at

Bat Conservation International: <http://www.batcon.org/>

- loads of useful information about Ontario's bats and bats found around the world
- authority for bat conservation efforts in North America

BC's Bats: <http://bcbats.ca/index.php>

- excellent community-based program and resources
- *Got Bats?* resource handout adapted from this website





Living with the grassland birds of Montana

Text and photos by Nicole Richardson

In a recent assessment of global bird populations, grassland birds are considered to be among the fastest declining in the world, second only to seabirds.

So in early 2015, the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies began to expand a currently existing project on wintering grassland birds to include their breeding grounds. An experimental study site was established in the prairie of western North Dakota, examining the lives of four very special grassland birds: Chestnut-collared Longspur, Sprague's Pipit, Grasshopper Sparrow and Baird's Sparrow. Once protocols were written, a study design drawn and goals set, a second site was then established on the lovely prairie of northeastern Montana.

I journeyed west the second week of May to meet with the four other members of the crew to begin the project at this new site. We were stationed in a renovated farmhouse in the middle of rural "big sky country" and set to the task of choosing our study sites, refining protocols and familiarizing ourselves with the birds and grasses. We began the season with standardized vegetation surveys to better our understanding of the habitat; gathered data to later compare to factors such as breeding success; and began to refine methods for organizing data and efficiently managing the plethora of tasks ahead of us. Soon enough we had our routine together and found ourselves enthralled by the lives of these special birds.

While I could try to describe a typical day of work for us, it would be in vain. Each and every day was unique as our schedule changed, sometimes drastically, depending on anything and everything from weather to car troubles!

Early in the season one of our main priorities was to capture as many of our two main focus species, Baird's and Grasshopper Sparrows, as possible and fit them with radio transmitters and colour bands so that we could monitor them and their movements as they began to settle into territories, pair up and nest. We set out on our study site laden with banding equipment (see photo next page), senses alert for the distinct and musical trill of a Baird's Sparrow or the insect-like buzz of a Grasshopper Sparrow.



Once we had found a target – a singing male that after some observation seemed to be laying claim to a particular area – we crept into position, set up a couple of nets and switched on a song recording to trick the bird into believing another male was encroaching on his newly-claimed territory. Lucky for us, our birds were particularly aggressive and usually defended their territory with vigour, placing them very quickly in our nets. At the moment of capture, one of us ran for the net to untangle and extract the bird and returned to our makeshift station to process the bird as quickly and safely as possible. Our banding areas were often nothing more than a flat, grassy space to set our equipment on as you will see from the photo at right.

We applied a standard aluminum USGS band engraved with a unique nine-digit number to one leg and a plastic coloured band to the other; took measurements; determined the age and sex of the bird; and fitted it with a radio transmitter device. (See photo below of a Grasshopper Sparrow that has been banded and fitted with a radio transmitter.) In seven minutes or less, the bird was released and back on his perch, singing to his heart's content with a set of bands and devices that would lend him an identity and allow us to track his movements throughout the season. Once we had fitted a set number of individuals with transmitters, we were tasked with keeping track of



those birds – trekking out into the field, telemetry equipment in hand, to track them down to determine their location and status. Soon enough, we knew our birds well, even



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assigning cheesy nicknames to a few special favourites.

Alongside this, however, an important goal was to locate and monitor as many nests as possible of all four of our focus species. We used a method called *rope-dragging*. One person held each end of a 25-foot rope lined with noisy pop cans filled with pebbles, and walked parallel along a study plot. The rope and cans dragged gently over the grass, briefly flushing any birds from their nests to reveal their location to enable us to document where they nested. We worked quickly so the birds could return to their young. We also documented any nests discovered incidentally while carrying out other tasks, and this, as it turned out, was how we discovered more than half of the nests that we monitored over the course of the season!



Sprague's Pipits often build a complete dome over their nest, creating a little grassy cave in which to raise their young. And fluffy the young they were as you will see from the above photo!

We monitored the nests by checking on them every three days to gauge the age and health of the young. When the nests no longer contained the young, we determined whether the nests were successful (fledging young) or failed (often predated upon).

For our two species of special focus, the Baird's and Grasshopper Sparrows, we banded and fitted specialized radio transmitters to two of the clutch a few days prior to potential fledging so that we could monitor their dispersal and survival once they had fledged. While the survival rate for the helpless little scurrying sparrows was sadly quite low, it was heartwarming to watch our survivors beat the odds and survive to adulthood! In the photo below I am holding a fledging Baird's Sparrow, about ten days old.



The first full season of this project at this site proved to be an exceptional learning experience as we developed protocols, procedures and discovered for ourselves the answers to many of the questions we had about these secretive birds. Although I certainly missed trees while living among that vast expanse of grass, it was astounding to me just how full of life such a simple landscape can be!

Editor's Note: On February 5, Nicole leaves for six months to work on a project in Hawaii concerning the vulnerable endemic Hawaiian bird, the Hawaii Elepaio.



Get the sled out: Club event goes to the dogs

On **Saturday, February 4**, there will be a dog sled outing. If you missed last year's, be sure to consider taking part in this year's. It was a fun time last year with great food and a gracious host who saw to our every need.

There is a cost of \$40.00 each which also includes a chili lunch and perhaps some chaga tea.

There is a limit of 12 people and this will be determined on a first come, first served basis. Those interested, please let Rob Rodger or Mary Lord know at rob.waterfalls20@gmail.com.

Meet at the former **Visitors' Centre** at **9:30 a.m.** for carpooling to the location of the event, 1655 Peddler's Drive, Calvin Township. Two members got lost last year and hopefully they will take part this year and not get lost!

Don't forget to dress warmly!



Photos by Renee Levesque

Upcoming speakers at monthly meetings

As you will see below, a couple of very interesting topics will be presented by two club members in February and March.

Meetings take place the second Tuesday of every month starting at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium of Casselholme.

On **Tuesday, February 14**, Valentine's Day, Board Member **Oriana Pokorny** will talk about **Traditional Style Canoe Tripping in Temagami**

Oriana, an instructor in Environmental Sciences at Nipissing University and a Club Board Member, is also an instructor during the summer months at Camp Temagami, a camp for youth ages 10 to 18. Oriana will share her experiences at Camp Temagami, focusing on traditional-style canoe tripping youth camps that have been operating on Lake Temagami since 1903; the versatility of wood canvas canoes; and the use of the Ojibway-style wanigan, a wooden chest or, if you like, a wooden backpack.

On **Tuesday, March 14**, Club Member **Steve Pitt** will talk about **Panning for Gold in the Yukon.**

There are strange things done under the midnight sun, but one the strangest in the early 1980s was when lifelong city boy Steve Pitt joined his Yukon-born brother-in-law to stake a Klondike gold claim. Enduring two weeks of black flies, high heat, bachelor cooking and the occasional nosy bear, Steve and his brother-in-law crossed the same stream 42 times within half a kilometre as they staked their claim in a remote Yukon valley.



Photo courtesy of Oriana Pokorny



Photo by Steve Pitt

They never found much gold, but nearly 35 years later Steve turned the experience into a young-adult Hardy Boys-style novel called *The Wail of the Wendigo*, featuring two young boys, Yukon native Pierre Berton and city-born Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Steve sent a copy to our current Prime Minister, Pierre's son, and received a letter back from the PM letting Steve know he enjoyed the book.

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER



Board of Directors, 2017

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Bird Wing

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Gary Sturge, Treasurer

Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe.

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

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

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Special thanks to: Ontario Heritage Trust and Fort Wayne's Children Zoo for use of their photos.

Membership Fees

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

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



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