

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

APRIL 2021



NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

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From the editor:

Early Spring

It's been a steady trickle of spring bird migrants that started with the arrival of Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds in mid-March, and continuing this week with the arrival of Yellow-rumped Warblers. The warm weather brought an early breakup of ice, and the wind blew the ice into small mountains against the docks, shorelines, and islands like it did last year.



The warm weather rapidly melted the lake ice revealing that lake levels looked extraordinarily low. It was possible to walk—or bike—from Sunset Park down to Park's Creek on wide open sand flats. At the end of Cranberry Trail point you could walk or bike to the far southern shore where the cottages are built on the marsh that lines the channel into Callander Bay (see pictures next page). Hundreds of geese stood on the sand probably a bit confused as to where their usual underwater foraging habitat had gone.

Turkey Vultures were spotted in March, but arrived in real numbers during those two 20° C days we had this past week. Northern Harriers have been spotted at several locations as well.

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This past week, several species have emerged from winter hibernation. Over a dozen Mourning Cloaks (bottom right) were seen between Cranberry Point and the Lookout; some Compton Tortoiseshells (butterfly) were out over a week earlier. When the temperatures rose to 20° C two Blanding's Turtles were found within 50 m of each other, and two Snapping Turtles were seen and photographed as well. Snakes will probably be emerging from their hibernation dens so keep an eye open for them.

As always, [please send us anything](#) you wish to appear in the newsletter. Send a picture, write a poem, tell us about your favourite tree (see Nancy Pearson's artistic submission on the next page), recommend hikes, tell us about changes you've seen in areas you know well.



MY FAVOURITE TREE

A white birch stands at the edge of the forest just a few feet from my deck. She is an older tree in decline, a little crooked and losing branches but she is beautiful to me.



Throughout the year, she protects and nurtures many birds and animals. In the spring, adult birds bring their fledglings and leave them under her care while they get seeds from our feeder. Throughout the summer, grey squirrels are busy making their winter nests and porcupines enjoy a feast of sweet leaves and twigs.



In years when she produces an abundance of seeds, warblers and the occasional ruffed grouse feed throughout the autumn.



Everybody must eat!

Last winter, she provided a safe roost for a barred owl daily from December through March.



Nancy Pearson
Birchhaven

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Meet Your Directors

Editors Note: Each month will feature a short biopic of one of the club directors. This month is club Vice-President, Keith Pearson.



This is a picture from a paperbark forest walk in Agnes Waters, Australia. It was beautiful! The link here is an interesting read about [paperbark trees](#). My wife and I visited Australia in 2018 just before I retired from my 46-year computer programming and information technology management career.

We moved to North Bay from London, Ontario in 1980 and raised two children. Our daughter is an RN at Eastholme, and our son has two children and is a Computer Security Architect at Nipissing University. We are very proud of their accomplishments.

Our passions are snorkeling and exploring the beautiful natural wonders our world has to offer. At home, I enjoy biking, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing and kayaking in our magnificent surroundings. I still dabble in computer programming.

I joined the Nipissing Naturalists club to enjoy and learn about nature and share that experience with other people.

Upcoming Zoom Talks April 13

Talk Description

Blazing Star Environmental is an ecological consulting firm based out of Oshawa who also provides land management services to the public and private sectors. For the past three years, Blazing Star Environmental has partnered with Environment and Climate Change Canada and Trent University to create a volunteer-based, long-term, range-wide monitoring program for the threatened Western Chorus Frog (WCF) in Ontario. The Western Chorus Frog has recently experienced population declines. In response, a long-term monitoring program was created to help understand the distribution of Western Chorus Frog. Data collected from the program will allow the conservation community to detect and respond to WCF range declines over time.

Speaker: Tiera Zukerman

Tiera Zukerman is a Species at Risk Ecologist and who joined Blazing Star Environmental several months ago. She is one of the leads on the Western Chorus Frog Long-Term Monitoring Program. She has a bachelors from McGill University in Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, with a specialization in Wildlife Biology, and a Master's in Environmental Assessment from Concordia University. Before joining Blazing Star Environmental, she worked in several environmental positions with the federal government in Ottawa.

Upcoming Zoom Talks April 20

Editor's Note: Chad gave an engaging and informative talk to the club earlier this year. If you missed it, make sure to catch this one.

Reproductive adaptations of corals and how they affect restoration programs **Speaker: Chad Scott, CEO, Conservation Diver**

For much of the 20th century the prevailing consensus on coral reef conservation was to just stop the problems and let the corals come back on their own. "It's cheaper to protect than it is to restore" was the motto of reef scientists and managers around the globe. And while I whole-heartedly agree with that sentiment, I would argue that it is a luxury that we no longer have. The days of pristine, untouched ecosystems are gone, even at the bottom of the ocean.

Because we cannot just close off an area and protect it from the threats associated with climate change, the slight benefits observed from purely passive protection projects are becoming even less. Researchers and managers today are making the shift from passive restoration measures to active ones. But like all new ventures, there is a learning curve and high propensity for unseen externalities or even negative effects. Which, unfortunately, industries already doing well in terms of receiving funding are slow to address or correct.

One such issue is the lack of attention being paid to genetic diversity in the restoration of hard corals. Today, the predominant main-stream method of increasing coral coverage in areas where it has been lost is through asexual propagation. Because corals are a colonial animal, they can be broken, cut, and divided into daughter colonies that can then grow to become large reef corals. This method is extremely cheap and easy, and a single donor colony can create hundreds or even thousands of corals. This looks great on social media, and sounds good to investors who are not biologists themselves. Through this method, many new corals can be made with little negative effect to the source reef.

What these projects fail to understand is that they have not created a reef that will thrive into the future, they have created a reef that has no future. Every coral is now a genetic clone of the starting coral and just as susceptible to future threats. All we have done is moved healthy corals into an area where the previous corals proved they were unable to survive. Short-term successes may be high, but long term ones will surely not. This reef is now reproductively sterile, as corals cannot self-reproduce. Furthermore, if it survives, it will contribute to reproductive failures associated with inbreeding/outbreeding depressions, genetic bottlenecking, and founder effects.

So why is this still going on? Because it's cheap and easy. However, there are other methods out there that are not much harder, yet yield reefs that might adapt to the changes we are seeing on the planet. The key is genetic diversity. By taking a genetic approach to restoration we can better assist the evolution and adaptation of reefs to a changing world. I hope that you will join us on April 20th, as we outline the issue, explore ways in which it is already being solved, and project out for what the future holds.



Life Finds A Way

In biology, there is only one rule and it is this: All rules have exceptions, including this one. It can probably be summed up as "*Life finds a way*", a line made famous in the movie *Jurassic Park*. In the movie, dinosaurs, which were genetically engineered to be sterile so they didn't reproduce, ended up reproducing anyway because "Life finds a way", often by doing what we think it shouldn't. Nature laughs at the rules humans think it should follow. Nature continuously finds ways of doing things that our rules say it shouldn't do.

Recently, a Northern Cardinal that was half-female, half-male was [photographed in Pennsylvania](#). This is known as bilateral gynandromorphism, which literally translates to "two-sided female-male form".



Photo Credit: Jamie Hill



Photo Credit: Jamie Hill

Other bird species have exhibited this form too, such as [Rose-breasted Grosbeaks](#) (pic below).



Photo Credit: Annie Lindsay

Gynandromorphy is a fairly rare event although it could go undetected in species where male and female look similar. It's found in crustaceans (e.g., lobsters), insects (beetles, butterflies, earwigs), and mammals (e.g., dogs). Many, maybe most, animal species will have this form of gynandromorphism.

A species doesn't necessarily need to split evenly down the middle either. In some cases, different organs or body parts in the same individual could have different sex chromosomes. In other cases, a species will stay the same sex, but take on the appearance and behaviour of the other sex. For

example, [five lionesses grew manes and started acting like males](#).

In another example, forty percent of male [Northern Harriers resemble females](#) in their second year of life, and then stay that way.

And Nature continues to blur the categories. Some kangaroos are classed as intersex where they're male, but have a pouch with mammary glands to feed their young. Up to 16% of kangaroo rats have both male and female plumbing, so to speak. There are also intersex bears who can give birth. And a [female crayfish mutated](#) and is now able to reproduce itself without males (parthenogenesis) *a la* the *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs. Freed from finding a mate to reproduce, it became an invasive species, and now threatens to push out other crayfish species. Two species of minnows in our area did something similar by interbreeding and producing only females, which themselves can now reproduce without males.

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Other species will start out as one sex and later in life revert to another sex. Clownfish start as hermaphrodites, but eventually most become male and live in a school with a dominant female. When the dominant female dies, her [mate takes her place](#) and changes from male to female. So, in the animated movie, *Finding Nemo*, Nemo's dad lost his mate, which means Nemo's dad would have become Nemo's new mom, if Disney were to be biologically accurate (but if they did that, then fish wouldn't talk and it'd be a short movie).



Finding Nemo (2003) Walt Disney Pictures

Many species of [parrotfish](#) and other reef fish will switch the other way, from female to male. Some fish can switch multiple times in their lives, and then just to be confusing there are fish that have four separate genders.

And Nature is just getting warmed up—fungi have over [36,000 different sexes](#), with just one species alone having [23,000 different sexes](#).

And Nature continues to get stranger. Some species can live without their head; some species can regrow their heads when they lose them; and at least two sea slug species take this head trick to a new level—they can [remove their own head](#), and regrow their body (please don't try this on yourself at home). It probably does this when its original body has too many parasites draining nutrients from the body; a rather drastic parasite solution. It can survive long enough to regrow its own body because it has the rare ability to photosynthesize its food from sunlight and oxygen just as plants do. It seems to have developed this ability by eating certain types of algae and incorporating the photosynthetic components into its own body, thus blurring the line between plants and animals even further.



Photo Credit: Sayaka Mitoh

Then there are the insects. They make many human-imposed rules look like suggested guidelines, including our rules regarding the difference between life and death.

And speaking of life, even that is an area of intense debate. It has been said there are over a 100 definitions of life and all of them are wrong. Use one of the definitions to define life, and there'll be something in Nature that contradicts that definition.

That is what makes Nature so fascinating though. It doesn't always follow the rules humans imposed upon it. It seems to do things the way it wants, when it wants, and how it wants with little regard for what we think it should do. Life does indeed find a way. And we wouldn't want it any other way.



Happy-looking parrotfish probably taking delight in breaking our expectations.

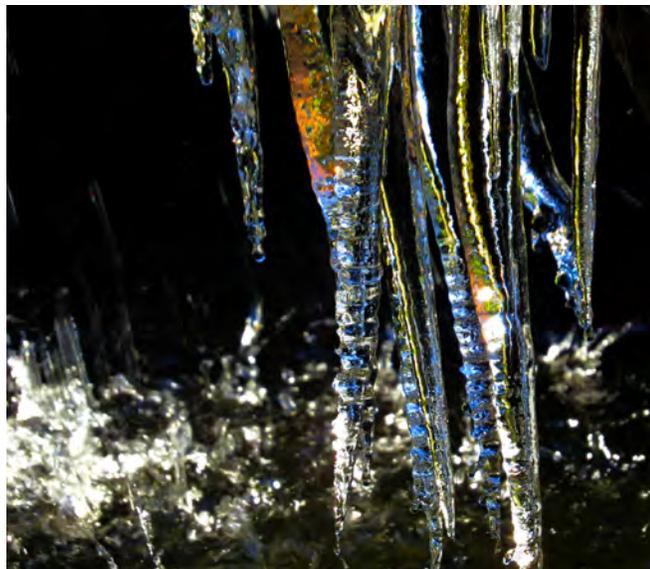
Photo credit: The Blue Planet



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Photos

The winter photo contest is accepting submissions from members until April 30th. Send your entries to nipnatsphotos@gmail.com. See Winter Photo Contest details in this newsletter.



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Latow Photography Weekend

The Latow Photography Club sent us the following announcement regarding their seminar and workshops in April. It'll be a virtual meeting so you can attend from anywhere.

As the Latow Photography Weekend will now be on line, it may be of interest to the photographers in the Nipissing Naturalist Club.

This weekend was always held in the Burlington Cultural Center. I have been to a number of the weekends in the past. They were always fun, interesting and featured a well-known photographer.

<https://latowseminar.wpengine.com>

Dorothy de Kiewiet



Latow Photography Seminar & Workshops
Four Mornings April 10-11 and 17-18, 2021

41st Annual This Year Online Join Us From Anywhere!

Landscape Photography and the Meaning of Life
featuring **Kas Stone**
www.kasstone.ca

Seminar

Saturday April 10 from 9am - 12:15pm

- Inspiration, motivation & meaning:**
Why am I making this photograph?
- Craftsmanship & creativity:**
How do I make this photograph?

Sunday April 11 from 9am - 12:15pm

- Ethical & environmental concerns:**
How *should* I make this photograph?
- Personal projects:**
What can I *do* with this photograph?

Workshops

Saturday April 17 from 9am - noon
How to craft a landscape photograph
Mindful camera and digital darkroom techniques

Sunday April 18 from 9am - noon
How to look at images
The technical, emotional and storytelling power of images

Participants receive PDF summary notes, two-week video access for every session, and the chance to win an hour of one-on-one photo help from Kas.

LATOW INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL FESTIVAL 2021
A CELEBRATION OF PHOTOGRAPHY

latowseminar.com

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Banff Mountain Film Festival

Lefebvre's Source for Adventure Presents the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival in the comfort of your home. [Click to view: Proceeds go to Nipissing Naturalists and The Canadian Ecology Centre.](#)

A reminder of some Virtual Viewing basics:

- Individual programs: \$15 USD (3-day rental period)
- Bundle (2 programs): \$28 USD (14-day rental period)
- The rental period begins immediately upon viewing (as soon as the customer presses play).
- Films can be re-watched within their rental period.
- On the website, customers will need to have an internet or Wi-Fi connection to view the films, and they are available only through online streaming (not download).
- **Films are online until October 24, 2021**

Winter Photo Contest

Just a reminder the Nipissing Naturalists Club is currently running a photo contest and will be accepting entries from members until April 30, 2021.

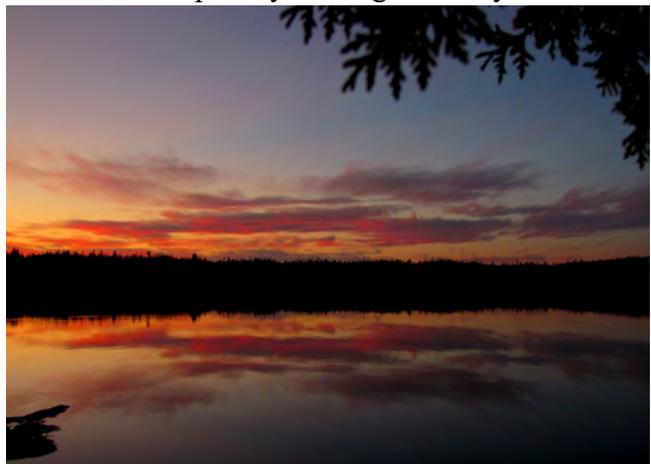
Voting, using an emailed Google Form, will be open during the first week of May. The winners will be announced at the May meeting and the winning photos will be published in the May 2021 Woodland Observer.

You may submit one photo per category for each member, including each member of family memberships. Please identify who took the photo and in which category to enter the photo. There is no age limit. If you take a better photo later, submit that to replace your original entry. You may send substitutions as often as you like.

Send your entries to nipnatsphotos@gmail.com

Here are the categories:

- **Wildlife**
- **Scenery**
- **People Enjoying Nature**
- **Photographers Nature Choice**



We cannot wait to see your photos!

Check out the winners from our last photo contest in the October newsletter:

[2020 Spring Photo Contest Winners](#)

Keith Pearson - Director

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Speaker Coordinator

Fred Pinto fredpinto1@gmail.com

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Board of Directors

Rick Tripp – President

Fred Pinto

Louise Simpson

Keith Pearson – Vice-President

Allison Bannister

Paul Smylie

Connie Sturge – Treasurer

Alexander Gomm

K. A. Cowcill

Rachel Sturge

Past Presidents

Fred Pinto

Ted Price Greg

Steph Romaniuk

Dick Tafel

Boxwell

Jeremy St. Onge

Angela Martin

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Membership Renewal Notice

If you have not already paid your 2021 Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fee, it is time to renew your membership in this great club dedicated to nature and its enjoyment.

- **One Year Single membership \$ 20**
- **One Year Family membership \$ 30**

Renewal for **Bird Wing** can also be included with your **Nipissing Naturalists Club** renewal. One Year Single **Bird Wing** \$ 5

An e-mail transfer can be sent to sturge@sympatico.ca or a cheque can be sent to our Club Treasurer, Connie Sturge, at 537 Hwy 534, Powassan POH 1Z0.

If you send a cheque, please make the cheque payable to “**Nipissing Naturalists Club Inc.**”.

If you are also paying for Bird Wing by cheque, please send a **separate cheque** for that payable to “**Bird Wing**”.

Keith Pearson, Membership Director

Contributors this issue: Fred Pinto, Victoria Reimer, Renee Levesque, Keith Pearson, Grant McKercher

Bird Wing

Dick Tafel, Chairman: 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/>.

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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/>.



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