THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

APRIL 2017

NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

Photo by Renee Levesque

From the editor:

The sights and sounds of April

April is a month of nature days – Earth Day, Bat Appreciation Day and National Wildlife Week. Each is summarized in this newsletter, with National Wildlife Week accompanied by a two-page photo collage of wildlife in our area, submitted by members and naturalists, and an article on the lives of trees by Fred Pinto. So who better to grace the cover of this month's newsletter than a wildlife woodland observer, the irascible Red Squirrel who seemingly sees all and lets you know it! It certainly let me know I was intruding on its territory when I took its picture that is on the cover!

"The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another. The difference between them is sometimes as great as a month." (Henry Van Dyke) However, despite all the snow still in my neck of the woods, spring seems to have begun in earnest with the arrival of the American Robin and the Red-winged Blackbird in particular. There is no sound signifying spring like the song of the robin, *cheerily cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily cheer-up*, and of the Red-wing, *conk la ree!*, a classic sound of wetlands. (photo bottom of next page)

And with spring comes the opening of the lakes and the eventual arrival of the iconic Common Loon with its haunting call. Participants are needed for the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey

sponsored by Bird Studies Canada. Read about what is involved and who to contact in this issue of the newsletter.

Also in this issue is an article by Norman Dokis who was our guest speaker at March's meeting. Norm spoke of many things – the very early years of Dokis First Nation; the more recent early years when Dokis was a destination for the Chief Commanda, which was also docked there for the winter for a number of years; his great great-grandfather, Michel Dokis, first elected chief (1898 until his death in 1906) of the Dokis First Nation; Chief Dokis's ledger or account book using a unique pictographic system developed by Chief Dokis and the only one of its kind in Canada; timber rights and lumbering; the Okikendawt Hydro project and dam; and rocks, stones, pictographs, reflections and bundles. Featured in this issue is Norm's quest for the lost bundle. It is a beautiful and very personal story that shows an intimate relationship with the natural world and how that world connects Norm to his ancestors. Perhaps for other issues of the newsletter, Norm will write about other aspects of his talk.

Nipissing Naturalists Club has lost another member, Jean-Marc Filion, who died on March 20. A tribute by Angela Martin, a good friend of Jean-Marc's and his wife Lois, will appear in May's newsletter. Our condolences to Lois and family.

I always appreciate receiving articles and information and photos. I may not use them immediately. In fact, it could be a year before I do, but I do save them. This month, I am featuring two sunset photos, one by Marc Buchanan of a sunset over Lake Nipissing, and one by Kaye Edmonds that is especially intriguing and shows the length one can go to get a good photo. Kaye's photo is not only a photo of a sunset, but a photo of a young man who climbed a tree to get a Lake Nipissing sunset photo – no, it isn't Marc! – a sort of photo of a photo of a sunset.

At the next meeting on April 11, Steve Pitt, club member, will be talking about his days in the 1980s when he panned for gold in the Yukon, almost a century after the Yukon Gold Rush. A case of better late than never?

Enjoy your real spring and be sure to let me know what signs of spring you see, particularly on Earth Day, April 22.

- Renee Levesque, editor, levesque1948@gmail.com

Photo by Renee Levesque

Above: Sunset on Lake Nipissing, photo by Marc Buchanan

The eternal allure of a sunset

Below: Man climbs a tree for a better angle on a sunset, photo by Kaye Edmonds

National Wildlife Week: Take a look on the wild side

By Renee Levesque

National Wildlife Week was proclaimed by parliament in 1947 to be held every year the week of April 10, coinciding with the birthday of Jack Miner, one of the founders of Canada's conservation movement. It was proclaimed "so that interested clubs, associations and organizations may, on the day of the week most suitable to them, disseminate information pertinent to wildlife conservation."

Photo by Renee Levesque

Take a look at two excellent videos by Canadian Wildlife: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adimPCv37yc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNR7AH4yKEA

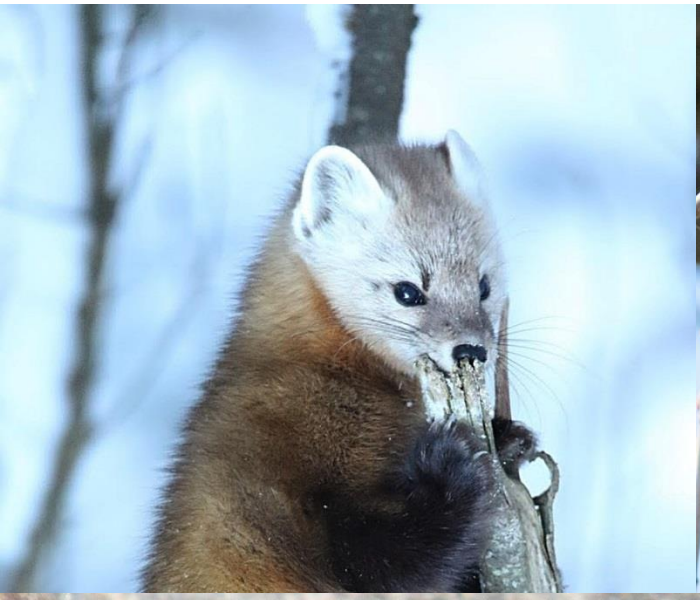
Nipissing Naturalists Club and Bird Wing disseminate wildlife conservation information on a regular basis. And this month, thanks to many photographs received from Nipissing Naturalists, National Wildlife Week will be highlighted in this newsletter by a two-page collage of these photographs entitled, *Take a Look on the Wild Side.* It is also a great time to get outside and see how many animals can be seen.

Following this collage is an article by Fred Pinto on the many lives of trees. Trees are not necessarily considered to be wildlife per se, but woods and forests harbour wildlife and are home to more wildlife than any other landscape. Animals need woods for food and shelter, for resting and nesting, and for hunting and capturing prey.

In the fall of 2017 on CBC's *The Nature of Things*, there will air a program entitled *The Wild Canadian Year*, a five-part series that looks at Canadian wildlife during our four distinct seasons. "From lightning storms and tornadoes whipping across the Canadian prairies to worlds buried beneath metres of snow, this series documents the natural wonders and wildlife that survive and thrive through Canada's four seasons."

Take a look on the wild side

Photos by, in alphabetical order: Kevan Cowcill, Kaye Edmonds, Ernie Frayle, Renee Levesque, VJ Rao and Dawn Sherman



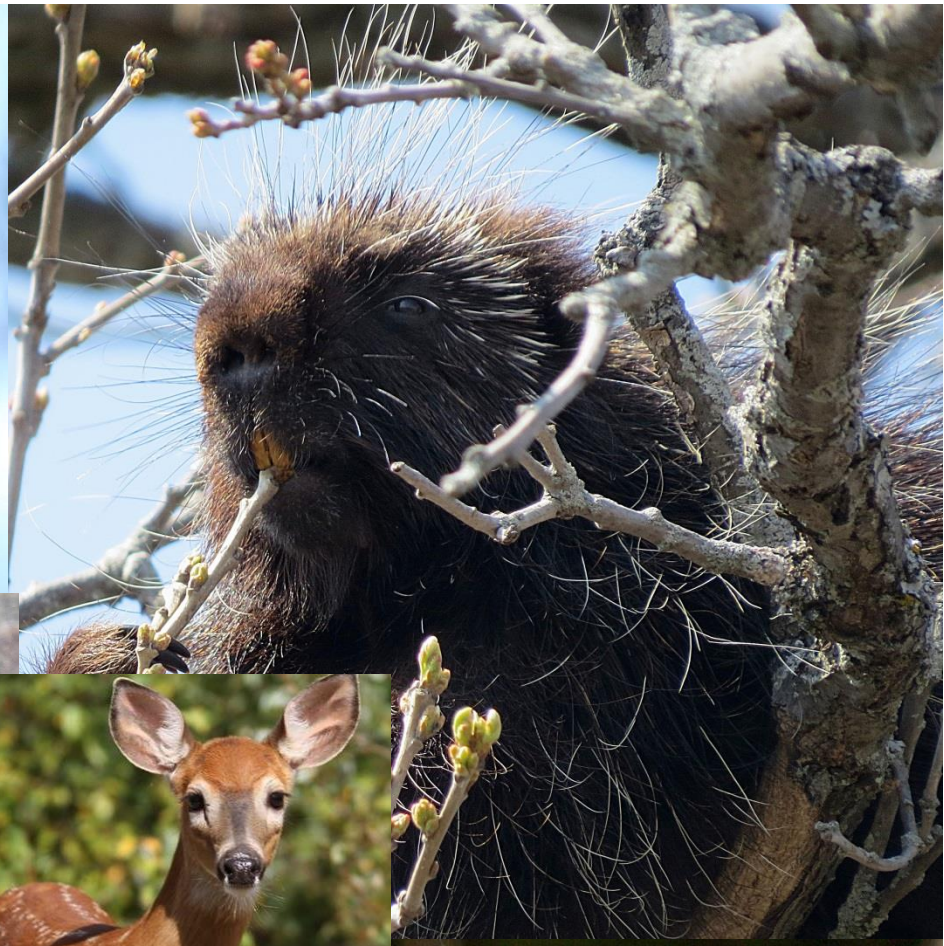


Photo by Renee Levesque

The many lives of trees

By Fred Pinto

Trees clean the air, help water soak into the ground and are home to wildlife. They have an aesthetic value, evoking in people an emotional response, usually a positive one. They have many lives, serving different functions when young, old and even when dead.

As they grow, young trees lock up carbon dioxide with the aid of sunlight and water. Half of a tree's mass is carbon. An actively growing tree will lock up carbon for as long as its wood does not decompose or burn completely.

In a young stand of trees, there are gaps between the trees. The gaps are occupied by a variety of sun-loving plants and animals that prefer this type of condition. A regenerating forest stand tends to be inhabited by a fairly unique group of wildlife species, such as the American Kestrel, Black-Backed Woodpecker and Eastern Bluebird to name a few. It is also an important forest for other species at various times of the year or during parts of an animal's life cycle, animals such as moose, deer and elk who require an abundant supply of browse or forage.

As young trees age, their crowns begin to grow together, blocking the amount of sunlight that reaches the forest floor. When that happens, the abundance of sun-loving plants starts to decrease. The dense stand (below) now provides shelter to small mammals and birds who find safety from predators in the tangle of branches. The trees compete for light and other scarce resources that are needed for them to grow and survive. Some of the trees will start to die and the others will grow into the space created by the dead trees. The characteristics of different tree species – bark texture (below right), size of branches, type and density of foliage – now start to become more pronounced as these trees age. The older stands of different tree species offer habitat for organisms that seek specific

Photo by Fred Pinto

food or shelter found in mature trees of a particular species. For example, Wood Thrushes are found in mature maple stands and Northern Goshawks in conifer stands.

In stands of mature trees, there will be large trees with hollows and cavities**.** These holes and fissures are homes or resting places for birds, mammals, invertebrates and a variety of plants.

As trees start to die or are killed by natural disturbances, they may become infested with wood-boring insects that are the preferred food of other invertebrates and vertebrates, such as Black-Backed Woodpeckers. Living trees with heart-rot provide nesting sites for powerful excavators like our native resident woodpeckers. These trees are also good spots for colonies of carpenter ants, a favourite food of woodpeckers. As trees die,

Photo by Renee Levesque

the bark loosens, providing nest sites for Brown Creepers and roosting sites for Little Brown Bats, while the moist sapwood may be home to wood-boring insects that attract insectivores, again like the Black-Backed Woodpecker (below). When both heartwood and sapwood are well decayed, these trees may become home for weak excavators like the Black-capped Chickadee.

A tree that is no longer living will still harbour life. Dead standing trees provide perches for birds to rest, to display and to scout the area for mates, rivals and prey. As fungi invade the remains of a tree, invertebrates like ants that feed on the fungi or wood move in. The invertebrates are an important food source of many species, such as our Hairy, Downy and Pileated Woodpeckers.

Fallen trees continue to slowly decompose and return the nutrients and energy they sequestered when they were growing. These fallen logs provide homes for fungi, bacteria, invertebrates and vertebrates. The spongy woody mass of the logs holds moisture and is an important refuge for organisms like salamanders that need a moist environment to live. Our most abundant salamander, the Red-backed Salamander, lays its eggs in moist decomposed wood rather than in water.

The moist environment also makes well decomposed logs an important seed germination site for a number of our small seeded trees, like the Eastern White Cedar, Eastern Hemlock and Yellow Birch. About 40% of vertebrates in central Ontario use fallen trees for everything from feeding sites (e.g. black bears) to drumming sites (e.g. grouse), to plucking perches (e.g. Northern Goshawks). The fallen logs provide access to subniven space used by small mammals, such as voles and martens. Subniven spaces are the air-filled pockets found under logs that are covered with snow. Rodents that do not hibernate use these tunnels in the

Photos by Renee Levesque

winter. Their predators, like the marten, also use the snow tunnels to find their prey.

Dig into the soil and you will find the remnants of trees and other plants that have long ago decomposed into a dark coloured organic mass that helps soil retain moisture and mediate other chemical and life processes.

Forest operations in Ontario require that all functions of trees and ecosystem processes continue into the future. That is why careful consideration is given during forest operations to ensure forest stands of different ages and species composition are maintained now and into the future.

There must be plans for all forests on public lands that take into consideration what ages and tree species will occupy these forests over the next hundred years. Forest operations are also controlled to ensure standing trees and fallen logs are retained for ecological purposes.

Photo by Renee Levesque

Editor's Note: The above article was first published in the Forestry Chronicle and reprinted here with permission. It has been edited for The Woodland Observer readership.

A quest for the lost bundle

The Manitou's Greeting Rock

By Norm Dokis, photos courtesy of the author

Recently an elder from our community told me that there is a hidden bundle around Cradle Rapids which is below the Chaudière Falls at Dokis First Nation. He told me about this after I showed him pictures of the rock paintings and rock reflections which are a spiritual guidance for our people. (A bundle is a collection of medicines, tools, musical instruments, etc. used in ceremony.)

Nana-Boozhoo, better known as Nanibush, has left his mark throughout our lands and has also left us stories, many of which have deep and profound meanings. Nanibush was part Manitou and part man and is our best known Manitou because he much resembled us and carried our same flaws. We connect best with him.

Nanibush taught us how to dance, tell stories and brought much peace to our peoples, unlike his brothers who would rather bash heads and wage war. Nanibush is long gone, but his hope is that we can continue his stories. This is why when we greet each other, we often say "Boozhoo", meaning, "Did you see him?" in honour of Nanibush.

Adjacent to the Miidewiin Rock at Cradle Rapids are two small narrow elongated caves which used to house two round stones. The caves are on top of a cliff that was used as a lookout and

Miidewiin Rock

the stones were clapped together to sound a warning to the local families, warning them of approaching visitors to the area. At the base of the caves is also a flat rock which when stepped on rings a loud bass tone that sounds like thunder and can be heard for miles. There is undoubtedly an abundance of history in this small geographical area of a square mile, including the ancient village and a rather large historic graveyard. (Miidewiin means Grand Medicine Society, a secret religion of some aboriginal groups.)

Medicine bundle

I'm about to embark on a quest to find the lost bundle. However, I feel torn between two worlds. In one world, I feel that I am able to find it and bring it back to the community, and in the other world, I feel that it needs to remain hidden until I'm ready for the journey that it will take me on. This journey will result in my truly identifying with and committing to following a traditional path. I want to travel this path, but taking the first step is difficult for me. Instead, I walk in two worlds.

I have powerful dreams in which my ancestors and spirits call to me and help guide me. I know they appreciate my work because of the gifts they lay at my feet at almost every turn. The spirits also call on me to tell their stories and preserve our ways and when these teachings flow from my conscience, a single hawk feather drops to me in appreciation and a whistle is blown in my honour.

Okikendawt Island is where we live. It means land of the pots. These pots were created by historic water flows which work in conjunction with whirlpools and spinning rocks to carve out a rock pot in the granite.

Rock pot

The rock pots vary in size, but the ones at the Chaudière portage are consistently round, two inches in diameter. Offerings are placed into the pots as a prayer for a safe journey. To the aboriginal people of the area, the pots are like pipe bowls with tobacco in them. I am told by elders that there are pots out there with much more than tobacco in them and so maybe the bundle is within one.

The Dodems are signatures of the clans. I am of the eagle clan and many of my relatives are of the muskrat clan. I have not seen or heard that these rock pots are a signature of our people, but rather, a shared resource much like our view of lands in general – we do not own them.

‘For us, our identity as a people is being resurrected.’

The acidity associated with granite and pine needles, a feature of the French River area, will melt most artifacts with ease. Birch bark and chert generally remain resistant and so artifacts of these materials could easily endure.

Another question remains pertinent to the lost bundle and that is: Who would have hidden it and why?

There is some question about who the people were who lived near Dokis prior to the late 1800s. For the most part, they were the Nipissings. The Nipissings and Algonquins embraced the fur trade and guarded the Chaudière portage from rival Iroquois tribes in such times as the Beaver Wars. Prior to the European advancement into these lands and without subdividing archaic Indian groups, we assume it was mostly the Nipissings who inhabited the area. Perhaps the bundle was hidden from Jesuits or rival tribes.

I can only speculate that since the Miidewiin hand-washed red ochre near their symbol at Cradle Rapids, and thus signifying a special area, that they were hiding it from the white man. Not too many people are aware of this, but the Miidewiin have successfully preserved much of our teachings, customs and rites. For us, our identity as a people is being resurrected.

Chert found near Cradle Rapids at Dokis

Photo by Randall Ranger

Earth Day 2017 encourages outdoor play

By Renee Levesque

Earth Day Canada's vision is not only to connect people to nature on Earth Day held every year on **April 22**, but to connect people with nature every day.

This year, Earth Day Canada's campaign is dedicated to outdoor play and activities by children, encouraging them to connect with nature and their environment and, thereby, to grow up with the motivation to protect the planet.

Earth Day began as an idea in 1969 with an oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, and April 22, 1970, became the first official Earth Day. On that date, more than 20 million Americans demonstrated in support of a healthy, sustainable environment. In 1990, Earth Day "went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries and lifting environmental issues onto the world stage. Earth Day 1990 gave a huge boost to recycling efforts worldwide and helped pave the way for the 1992 United

Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. **Now Earth Day is the largest secular observance in the world, celebrated by more than a billion people every year."**

EcoKids and EarthPlay are two of the programs offered by Earth Day Canada, programs that are focused on education, action, recognition and financial support. For more information on these programs and Earth Day visit: https://earthday.ca/# .

This year April 22 falls on a Saturday, a good day to get outdoors with your kids or grandkids for play or an outdoor activity. And if there are no kids or grandkids, a good time to get outdoors anyway and look for signs of spring. **You can send me any interesting signs you find.**

During the annual Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival sponsored by Nipissing Naturalist Club, North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority and Friends of Laurier Woods Inc. held at Laurier Woods every August, there are many activities for children. Children can also come along on the many Saturday walks that take place in Laurier Woods from May to December, with a walk children should particularly like, a scavenger hunt, with Valerie Vaillancourt, Biologist, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, on **Saturday, June 3**, **from 9 to 11 a.m.** More information will be available on this walk in May's newsletter.

Photo by Kaye Edmonds

Photo by Fred Pinto

Bats and Nipissing Naturalists Club were featured in an article in the *Nugget* on March 20, "Club on hunt for bats", highlighting our ongoing bat monitoring project under the direction of club member Rebecca Gauvreau, Biologist, Fri Ecological Services.

If you haven't already read the *Nugget* article, check it out at: http://www.nugget.ca/2017/03/20/club-on-hunt-for-bats.

With **April 17 being Bat Appreciation Day**, we can take the time to appreciate the variety of bats we now know are in our area, thanks to our bat monitoring project - Little Brown, Northern, Eastern-small Footed, Tri-colored (officially spelled without a u), Big Brown, Eastern Red, Hoary and Silver-haired.

To learn more about our bat monitoring project, you can read Rebecca's articles in the January and February 2017 issues of *The Woodland Observer*: https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/.

If you would like to make use of the bat monitoring equipment to determine what bats may be visiting your place, you can contact club member Megan Finlay at mjefinlay@gmail.com to have your name put on the list.

Photo by Rob Rodger

Canadian Lakes Loon Survey

There is nothing like the call of a Common Loon on our northern lakes on a still summer's night. So haunting, so much a part of our northern consciousness.

But our beloved loon, this ancient predator, may someday be unable to sustain its current population level. Over the last 30 years, there has been a decline in Common Loon reproduction.

Since 1981, through Bird Studies Canada, Canadian Lakes Loon Survey participants have tracked Common Loon reproductive success by monitoring chick hatch and survival.

More participants are needed to help with this survey. Not a lot of time over the summer is required. All you have to do is dedicate a minimum of three dates to visit a lake in which there is a loon pair – once in June to see if the loon pair is on territory; once in July to see if chicks hatch; and once in August to see if the chicks survive long enough to fledge.

So many of our members live on a lake or they regularly fish or boat on a lake in which there may be a loon pair or pairs, so this would not involve a major time commitment.

Participants in the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey also work as stewards, sharing knowledge of better boating, fishing and shoreline practices that help protect loons and other aquatic species.

If interested, please contact Kathy Jones, Ontario Volunteer Coordinator, Bird Studies Canada, either by email at volunteer@birdscanada.org or by phone at 1-888-448-2473, ext. 124.

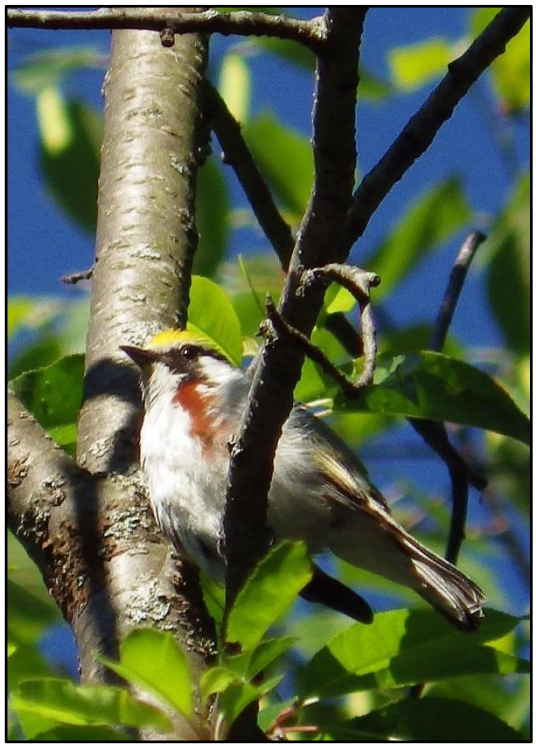
Guided walks in Laurier Woods

Hard to believe May is but a month away and time again for the annual May bird walks in Laurier Woods with Dick Tafel. **These walks take place every Saturday morning in May from 9 to 11 a.m.,** so be sure to mark **May 6, 13, 20 and 27** on your calendars.

May is prime time to see wood warblers and you are bound to see plenty of them in Laurier Woods. Warblers are colourful, active birds, smaller than sparrows, with thin needle-pointed bills. Most have some yellow in their plumage, like the distinctive male Chestnut-sided Warbler in the photo below on the right with his bright yellow crown, his black mustache and a long narrow chestnut streak on his side. But some warblers don't have yellow in their plumage, like the male American Redstart in the photo below on the left with his dramatic orange patches that contrast with his coal-black coat.

Warblers aren't the only birds to be seen. If you are especially fortunate, you might also see the exotic male Scarlet Tanager (below middle) with his blood-red body and jet-black wings. It is a bird not always easy to see because it likes to stay high in the forest canopy.

Bring your binoculars and if you don't have any, you can still enjoy the walk, see some of the birds and hear them sing. *(Photo above is by Renee Levesque. Photos below, left to right, are by Kevan Cowcill, Lisa Hackett and Renee Levesque.)*



Upcoming speakers at monthly meetings

On **Tuesday, April 11**, 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.

Steve's brother-in-law, 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.

On **Tuesday, May 9**, Club member **Peter Ferris** will talk about **Canoeing the Historic Hayes River.** Peter's canoe trip on the Hayes River was a 640-km trip that began in August 2016 near Norway House, Manitoba, and ended 29 days later at York Factory on Hudson Bay. Peter's presentation will focus on the historical and cultural significance of the Hayes River in relation to the exploration and founding of Canada; its status as a Canadian Heritage River; the geological and whitewater characteristics of the river; trip preparation; observed wildlife; and interesting experiences during his adventurous journey.

Canoe at evening camp on Hayes River, photo by Peter Ferris

Nipissing Naturalists Club

Board of Directors, 2017

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

Marc Buchanan, Vice-president Guy Chartrand

Connie Sturge, Treasurer Paul Smylie

Oriana Pokorny, Secretary

Sarah Wheelan, Website and Facebook

Irene Kasch, Refreshments

Rob Rodger and Mary Lord, Trip Coordinators

Past Presidents

Dick Tafel	Ted Price	Steph Romaniuk
Angela Martin	Greg Boxwell	Jeremy St. Onge

Bird Wing

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

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 are the monthly Bird Bash and Year-end results by Dick Tafel, and the Christmas Bird Count results 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".

Editor: Renee Levesque: rlevesque1948@gmail.com

Contributors this issue: Marc Buchanan, Kevan Cowcill, Norm Dokis, Kaye Edmonds, Peter Ferris, Ernie Frayle, Lisa Hackett, Renee Levesque, Fred Pinto, Steve Pitt, Randall Ranger, VJ Rao, Rob Rodger and Dawn Sherman, Algonquin Park.

Special thanks to: www.NationalDayCalendar.com for use of its logo photo and to *Forestry Chronicle* for permission to reprint The Many Lives of Trees.

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/.