

The Woodland Observer

Newsletter of the Nipissing Naturalists Club

www.nipnats.com



Renee Levesque

This month's cover photo of the shoreline at Jocko Point was taken by Renee Levesque in April 2019, showing us that the lakes will soon be opening up as the warmer Spring temperatures loosen Winter's hold.

From the Editor

With global spread of the novel corona virus in the last number of months our world has been turned upside down, and the longer-term outcomes are far from clear. Our daily routines and interactions have been changed dramatically and there will definitely be a “new normal” in our future. Despite the turmoil we can still find calm and solace in observing and interacting with nature in all its forms; it will become an even more important component of our lives as we move beyond the current difficulties. Although our Club group activities and face-to-face meetings will need to take a hiatus, I would encourage everyone to continue to take advantage of all individual opportunities to enjoy the beauty of the natural world around us.

In this month’s newsletter Keith Pearson has provided an overview of his presentation on hiking the Ottawa Temiskaming Highland Trail, and Fred Pinto is proposing an on-line virtual presentation about Monarch butterflies in lieu of our regular monthly meeting on April 14th. There is a reminder about the upcoming SwiftWatch project in May and June, coordinated by Allison Bannister. As well, information is provided about two new NipNats initiatives headed up by Paul Smylie, one on creating habitat for barn swallows, and another on surveying turtle habitat in our area wetlands. Both of these initiatives will need volunteers from the Club to help with the set-up and monitoring phases of the projects.



View from Kinsman Beach

Renee Levesque

Recent Meetings and Club Activities

Club Meeting presentation March 10th

**“Ottawa Temiskaming Highland Trail (OTHT)”
by Keith Pearson**



Karl Dittmann

On Aug 18, 2019 Keith Pearson and Karl Dittmann embarked on a 6-day 90 km backpacking trip along the Ottawa Temiskaming Highland Trail from Rabbit Lake Road to Latchford.

At the Club meeting Keith used PowerPoint to give an overview of the trail and led us through the trip preparation and experience. Keith showed the backpacking equipment used on the trip; there was a lot of interest in the equipment planning list and meal plan. We learned about the essential items required for the trip, but the most essential item was Karl. Karl did all the planning and food preparation, and Keith really appreciated that effort.



Karl Dittmann

The OTHT is a 141 km trail from Thorne to Latchford and offers a rugged wilderness trail experience right here in Northern Ontario. According to Leanne Hennessy from Backpackinglight.com (<https://backpackinglight.com/hiking-ottawa-temiskaming-highland-trail/>) it is the most difficult trail in Ontario.

There are some 600-foot up-and-down climbs, and the effort required resulted in a shorter trip than planned. Despite having to exit the trail halfway at the Matabitchuan power station, the backpacking duo spent 6 days on the trail experiencing lovely Northern Ontario hilltop vistas, interesting forest hiking, and refreshing swims in clear Northern Ontario lakes.



Karl Dittmann

The OTHT was created by Murray and Victoria Muir from New Liskeard and they created the Nastawgan Trail organization (www.nastawgan.org) to promote and maintain the trail. With the help of volunteers, they cleared and marked the trail with white blazes on trees and have set up very nice camp sites at a number of locations. Their web site contains maps and GPS files for the trail, and they have a book for sale on their site called Wild Temiskaming that details a number of day trips you can do around Lake Temiskaming.

We also saw an excursion Keith did with his son in 2012 to the top of Rib Mountain known as the Cliff Lake Loop. This is also part of the OTHT. The NipNats are planning a day hike for club members to this location so that others can experience this beautiful trail. Stay tuned for details in the coming months.

This video, shown at the meeting, is the Nastawgan group doing some of the trail Keith and Karl did: <http://www.nastawgantrails.org/video.php>



Karl Dittmann



Keith Pearson

Upcoming Events & Speakers (Calendar of Events)

Unfortunately, due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic precautions, the Nipissing Naturalists Club has had to suspend any in-person activities for the foreseeable future. We will recommence when medical experts and government leaders indicate that it is safe to do so.

Virtual Presentation – April 14th, 7:00 pm – “Monarch Butterflies”

As an alternative to an in-person meeting, Fred Pinto has offered to give a short 30-40-minute virtual presentation on Monarch Butterflies in their winter sanctuary in the mountains of central Mexico.



Monarch butterflies overnight in huge clusters in Oyamel fir trees in the mountains of central Mexico. *Photo by Fred Pinto*



Monarch butterflies seek moisture when it is sufficiently warm to “awaken”.

Fred will send all members an e-mail link to the Zoom video conference. To connect you will have to click on the link and follow the instructions that appear on your computer screen.

The virtual presentation is a test of an optional meeting format. Let’s see how well it works for our club members, and how many are able to connect!

Other Announcements/Information

SwiftWatch 2020 Season

This will be our 8th year participating in this monitoring project in North Bay and area, reporting our observations back to *BirdsCanada*. Allison Bannister is coordinating our local effort and is looking for volunteer observers and anyone else with an interest in these amazing birds.



When:

- May 14 (optional pre-count day), May 20, May 24, May 28, and June 1

Where:

We need experienced monitors for:

- 173 Main Street West (Mayne Travel Services)
- 259 Worthington Street West (North Bay Nugget)
- 269 Main Street West (Royal Theatre Office Suites)
- 291 Main Street East (Rockwell's Pawn Shop)

Newcomers should join us at the main roost:

- 409 Main Street West (Main West Professional Centre)

What to bring:

- Weather appropriate clothing (layers, water resistant)
- Folding chair
- Binoculars, camera
- Tools for counting quickly (pen, paper, etc.)
- Data form – everyone will fill this out

Contact: Allison Bannister, aebannis@lakeheadu.ca

Creating Nesting Habitat for Barn Swallows

The Nipissing Naturalists Club has submitted an application to the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund to allow us to build, erect and monitor alternate habitat for Barn Swallows. The Club will contribute to the project through our labour and knowledge. We will work with landowners to obtain permission to erect the structures on their land, and then participate in constructing and monitoring the nesting structures, and analyzing the data gathered. Paul Smylie is leading this project for the Club.

The Barn Swallow is listed as a Species at Risk, and as such its habitat is protected under Ontario's Endangered Species Act. For this reason, developers and municipalities cannot disturb or destroy their habitat. We hope our project will generate data to determine if the nesting structures are actually used by the birds and may therefore serve as alternative habitat for them. Developers and municipalities will benefit from our study by receiving information that will allow them to minimize the impact of their actions on Barn Swallow habitat.

As Paul has indicated, “the installation of the structures will rely on myself and volunteer labour from members of the Naturalists Club, and any interested members from the community. Once the structures are erected, there will be a monitoring schedule put in place relying on help from NipNats members to help monitor the structures once per week to determine if Barn Swallows, or any other bird species are using the structures. Monitoring is planned to take place weekly for three years throughout the bird breeding season. Anticipated time to monitor all 4 structures once per week is approximately 2 hours. There is some concern that these structures, which are used to offset habitat destruction i.e. bridge replacements; barn teardowns, do not work effectively. By monitoring these structures frequently, we can provide more information on their effectiveness at providing nesting opportunities for Barn Swallows.”

You can contact Paul by e-mail (psmylie1@hotmail.com) for more information on this project.



Photos courtesy of Paul Smylie

Monitoring Blanding's Turtle Populations in Local Wetlands

By Paul Smylie

Many of you will be aware that all eight species of turtle in Ontario have been evaluated to be at some level of risk. This includes the threatened Blanding's turtle, a shy turtle with a bright yellow chin and a friendly smile that can be found in local marshes.

As a lifelong fan of turtles, it has long been one of my goals to put effort into their conservation. I have found a number of Blanding's turtles on the roads, usually while out cycling and I can recall every one I've ever encountered since I was a child. To my dismay, on occasion, some of these poor creatures I have found have been victims of road mortality.

To my knowledge, there have been no targeted surveys in local wetlands to determine population density of Blanding's turtles, or any other turtle species for that matter. A number of these wetlands are directly adjacent to roadways, making turtles in these wetlands very susceptible to

road mortality as they make their springtime forays in search of suitable nesting sites or in search of mating opportunities.

This spring and summer, I would like to initiate a coordinated effort to monitor some of our local wetlands for Blanding's turtles, with the ultimate goal of erecting exclusion fencing to prevent turtles from accessing roadways. I believe the first step in achieving this goal is to determine what the abundance of these threatened turtles is in each wetland of interest. Although the focus will be on Blanding's, other species observed will be documented as well.

There is a standard protocol published by the MNRF that can be used to survey the wetlands for turtles, which will involve covering the entire wetland a minimum of five times, typically along a number of transects. Since wetlands are typically a mix of vegetation and water, surveys will be conducted by canoe and wading in chest waders. Ideally, mark and recapture studies would be used to get an approximate determination of population size in each wetland, however this would require special permits from the MNRF as we are dealing with a species at risk. An animal care protocol would have to be approved as well through the MNRF to be able to mark the turtles with a unique identifying mark.

Capturing turtles by hand in a marsh can be tricky as they typically don't wait around for you to pick them up. They are wary creatures and will leave their basking log or tussock with a notable plop, as they seek safer refuge. Although capture by hand can be productive, another method of capturing turtles is by use of a trap of which there are a variety of designs. One common design is a hoop net trap consisting of three to five hoops similar in size to a hula hoop with net stretched around, and a funnel entrance at one end, similar to the popular minnow trap.

As well as inventory surveys, identification of nesting areas will be important as well. This will inform us of the availability of nest sites, and the likelihood of the turtles using roadsides as nest sites. Gravel used on road shoulders makes an attractive substrate for turtle nesting, although it is a risky place to have your turtle kids for obvious reasons. Surveys for road mortality will also be conducted on visits to each wetland. All of this information will be valuable in justifying the installation of exclusion fencing in efforts to reduce road mortality, one of the greatest threats to turtle populations.

The best time to conduct turtle surveys is as soon after ice-off as possible, on warm sunny spring days. Turtle basking activity is highest when the differential is greatest between air temperature and water temperature. Turtles will select basking locations that have their own micro-climate with temperatures that are greater than ambient air temperature.

I currently have three wetlands in mind that I feel would be valuable to assess as they are all adjacent to roadways, and they all fall within blocks of the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas where opportunistic observations of Blanding's turtles have been submitted. If anyone knows of any other wetlands where they feel the turtles are at imminent risk of road mortality, I'd be interested to hear about them. This study will take some people-power and people-hours, however spending time in a wetland for the nature-minded is always time well spent. **If you'd like to get involved, please contact me, Paul Smylie at psmylie1@hotmail.com. Let's save the turtles!**

For more information on the Blanding's turtle, see the following links:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/blandings-turtle>

<https://ontarionature.org/programs/citizen-science/reptile-amphibian-atlas/blandings-turtle/>
Shows map of records in Ontario



Signs of Spring!

Many of us have been waiting the onset of spring-like weather with anticipation. Signs from nature offer the promise that warmer days are on the way. Early migrants are returning to the north – Connie and Gary Sturge have had red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, and robins at their feeders for the past few weeks; Kaye Edmonds spotted this majestic bald eagle carrying a white pine branch for nesting material; and Paul Smylie heard woodcocks calling the other evening down near the Waterfront. At our place the chipmunks have come out of hibernation and are scavenging through the seeds that have fallen from the winter bird feeders. The sap is flowing and my neighbours are tapping the maple trees.

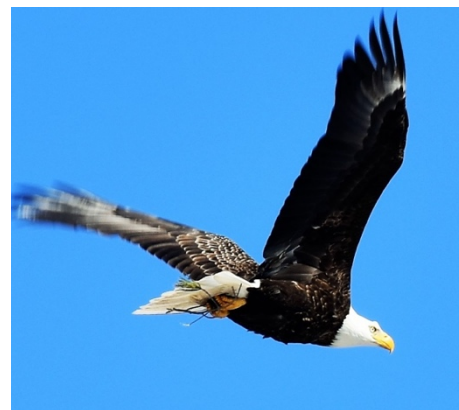
What signs of the changing season have you noticed?



Grant McKercher

*"Spring is sprung,
The grass is riz,
I wonder where dem boidies is?"*

Anonymous



Kaye Edmonds



Board of Directors 2020

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Monthly Bird Wing and Bird Bash reports are sent to members by e-mail and posted on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website: <https://www.nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-wing-meetings-outings/>, and <https://nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-bash-reports/>.

The Woodland Observer

The Club's newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*, is published electronically September to June, and sent to members by e-mail and posted in date order on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website: <https://nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

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Contributors to this issue: Kaye Edmonds, Renee Levesque, Fred Pinto, Keith Pearson, Paul Smylie

Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalist 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 each month in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library from 6:30 - 9:00 p.m. **This membership fee is paid directly to treasurer of the Bird Wing.**

Nipissing Naturalists Club is a member Ontario Nature:
<http://www.ontarionature.org/>.

