THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

SEPTEMBER 2018

NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

Renee Levesque

From the editor:

Heat, drought, fires and surveys

After a very slow and cold start to spring, we had a very hot and dry summer, a summer that invited one to take a cool dip in the many lakes of Nipissing. But what about the song birds? They too felt the heat and the drought. In my yard, they had the advantage of two bird baths, a large one for drinking and bathing and a smaller one for drinking. And they certainly took advantage of them, even squabbling over whose turn was next. I had all the regulars bathing and drinking – robins, jays, goldfinch, chickadees, sparrows, but also many warblers, including the very shy Ovenbird, woodpeckers, crows and other black birds. Some are featured following this article.

Forest fires also dominated the news and although there were none in our immediate area, there certainly were many to the north and west of us, and there were some hazy days in our area during which we could smell smoke. It just so happened that Fred Pinto wrote a review on a book about wildfires.

Because of the forest fires, our outing to the Temagami area had to be cancelled. Another time perhaps. But instead, on a hot and sweltering July day, some took a guided walk along Lake Nipissing to check out the small amount of Marram Grass that remains on our shores and to look at an invasive impatiens plant, the Himalayan Balsam. Martha Gould and Fred report on that walk.

Other events included the Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival and a barbeque at the Sturges' property where Jeremy St. Onge, our speaker for September, showed participants where edibles could be found and how to make a tripod for cooking over a fire. We also had a booth at Callander's Canada Day festivities. These events will be highlighted in October's issue.

Brent Turcotte began entering his sightings of plants, animals and insects on iNaturalist a little over a year ago. His article on this citizen science program can be found in this issue. Perhaps once you read it, you might be willing to give it a try.

And finally, this leads to what many of the articles are about in this issue – citizen science surveys in which many Club members took part. You will read about the Great Canadian Birdathon form a newcomer's viewpoint; the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program; SwiftWatch; the Breeding Bird Survey; and a new one this year, the Nightjar Survey. All these surveys took place between May and July. (I did not yet get the results of the bat survey, but perhaps they will be available for October's issue.)

The Nocturnal Owl Survey took place in April and participants' reports are posted on our website at https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/reports-and-bird-counts/ - right after Year-end Reports. The Nocturnal Owl Survey Trophy will be presented to Gary and Connie Sturge, Rachel Sturge and Matt Procunier at our September's Bird Wing meeting. They won the trophy because they saw the most owls – 18!! - and wrote about their adventure in a very entertaining manner.

With all the lakes around us, I think we should be participating in the loon survey. There must be some who live on a lake with loons who would be willing to undertake this survey – not a lot is required. If you are one who would like to do so, please contact me.

Lake Nipissing at Cache Bay graces this month's cover. Cache Bay is an Important Birding Area as many of us can attest. I took the photo during a September day three years ago.

So here we are, back for another autumn. The leaves haven't changed yet, but they soon will.

- *Renee Levesque, editor*
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Renee Levesque


The hot summer of 2018

Twelve-spotted Skimmer, Renee Levesque

iNaturalist: The general nature portal

by Brent Turcotte

What is iNaturalist?
iNaturalist is a citizen science portal that can handle observations one at a time of any type of wildlife – plants, insects, reptiles, mushrooms, etc. (*Editor's Note: With the exception of the heading photo and the photo of Brent himself, all other photos were taken by Brent in the field and submitted to iNaturalist.)*

How did I get into iNaturalist?
About a year ago, I discovered iNaturalist. Initially, I didn't think much of it because the data available for our area was minimal. However, recently I decided to give it another try. The first thing I discovered is it can show you the most common species Ontario-wide, in order from most commonly to the less commonly observed. This is especially useful for flora and fauna groups not well covered by field guides. Liverworts is a good example. The second thing I discovered is that it is great for organizing a collection of nature photos. And as I used it, I discovered even more great features.

Brent checks his field guide, Renee Levesque

How does iNaturalist compare to other portals?

iNaturalist is tops in the number of people signed up to use it – over 630,000 compared to 390,000 using eBird. However, there are half a billion observations listed on eBird compared to eight million on iNaturalist. The difference mainly comes from the fact that eBird is based on checklists which can contain dozens of observations.

In general, eBird is recommended for bird observations while iNaturalist is best for everything else. This does not mean, however, that iNaturalist renders other portals, such as eButterfly, obsolete. iNaturalist shares its data with other portals through the coordinators of various scientific projects. And because iNaturalist can handle only one observation at a time, individuals with checklists containing many sightings may wish to use a portal like eButterfly instead.

Narrow-headed Sunfly, North Bay, June 2012

Describe the process of entering observations.

An observation on iNaturalist consists of a single identification, indicating a date, a location, a photo (or sound file) and some attributes. After you upload your observation or set of observations, others will have a chance to agree or disagree with your observation or improve on your observation with a more precise identification or by entering in attributes.

If an observation has two agreeing identifications (more if disagreements occur) to species level, along with a date, a location and evidence in the form of a photo or sound file, then it is deemed “Research Grade”. An observation is “Needs ID” if it is not identified to species level and/or does not have enough agreeing identifications. If an observation is

Henry's Elfin, Cranberry Trail, June 2009

missing a date, location, evidence or is flagged as "Captive/Cultivated", then the observation is classed as "Casual".

Advantage: iNaturalist improves your identification skills.

The two main activities on iNaturalist are submitting observations and identifying the observations of others. Some don't bother submitting many of their own observations, but instead help to identify the observations of others. iNaturalist provides you with hordes of photos on which to try your identification skills. Some people help identify hundreds of photos. Some of the diehards identify thousands or even tens of thousands of photos. Applying yourself to identification by using your personal field guides, the iNaturalist's database and internet resources, such as bugguide.net, all help. Not every photo can be identified. Poor pictures and identifying features that are too small or hidden inside the body of the creature can prevent identification to species level.

Indian Cucumber Root, Samuel de Champlain Park, September 2017

Advantage: Submit to science.

Scientists mine the data on iNaturalist and your contributions help. However, not all the data on iNaturalist is available to the general public. Location information for sensitive species is obscured. The precise location information can be released to specific "Projects" at your discretion. Projects I'm signed up for are NHIC (Natural Heritage Information Centre) Rare Species of Ontario; Dragonflies and Damselflies of Ontario; Moths of Ontario; and Ontario Butterfly Atlas. Some projects are bioblitzes, some just document the species of a region and some are extensions of other portals.

Sparganothis Violaceana, Laurier Woods, May 2018

Open questions on what to contribute.
Do you contribute all your sightings or just what you think is identifiable?
Your choice. If you contribute photos that don't get identified to species level, you can always revisit the location where you took the photo to get better photos. Nice photos are not necessary.

Do you balance the number of contributions to the number of identifications of submissions of others?
Your choice. Most people veer to one side or the other. Either service is just as valuable. Some bioblitzes will encourage a balance of submissions and identifications in the spirit of fairness.

What other contributions can you make?
1. Add attributes to observations, such as specifying if an organism is a larva.
2. Start a project. You can start a bioblitz. If you have a research project, a project on

Ebony Boghaunter, Laurier Woods, May 2018

iNaturalist can be a component.

3. Curation. This is for the diehards who are up-to-date with the taxonomy of an area. As a curator, you can determine the names and organizations of a piece of the taxonomic tree. The taxonomic tree is always changing and people are required to keep up with it on iNaturalist. A curator also determines the common names of species. Only one name is permitted per taxa, so conflicts have to be resolved. It can be a surprise to find out what various taxa are called nowadays. For example, what we call Spring Azure is now called Lucia Azure and Spring Azure is used for another species occurring further south.

4. Start a guide. A guide is a field guide inside iNaturalist. This feature is limited and not being worked on, but still exists.

5. Add a place. You can set the boundaries of a specific place in the world. I set up a place called "Blue Sky". If you are looking for what species occur in close proximity to North Bay you can select "Blue Sky" to limit the geographic area.

Statistics as of April 15, 2018.

	World	Canada	Ontario	Blue Sky
Observations	8479961	396429	218736	1708
Species	154047	14251	8475	871
Identifiers	643136	5551	3816	343
Observers		10310	4276	97

Ladder Lichen, outwash area near Songis Road, October 2014

Also of note is the predictable stat for the USA. About ¾ of the observations are from the USA, although it includes only 1/3 of the species noted for the world.

In the Blue Sky area, my observations comprise about half of the total observations. Even with my added observations, our area is still covered rather sparsely.

Editor's Note: *If you would like to add your observations now that your interest has been piqued by Brent's article, see: https://www.inaturalist.org/.*

Brent is one of the few persons living in our area who is entering sightings. The other I know about is Sonje Bols, former Nip Nat board member.

Speed dating for birds!

By Jackie Manella

The Great Canadian Birdathon. How to describe such an event?
As a fairly new birding enthusiast, catalyzed by an ornithology class last summer taught by Oriana Pokorny and by my being a brand new Bird Winger, I entered into a whole different level of birding by taking part in this year's Great Canadian Birdathon.

A slow pace is often the way of the birder, taking your time and observing the species as you meander along. But this was quite the opposite: a race over 24 hours to see which team might spot (and hear) the most species of our feathered friends.

I knew it would be quick birding, but I didn't realize it would be as fast as it was! We would slow down on a back road, binoculars at the ready, to get a glimpse of an Eastern Bluebird (photo below), or pull into a barn yard to spot a House Sparrow, only to speed off to the next destination. It was like speed dating for birds! You get a minute to spot the bird, then you move along. My team had a route planned and a schedule to keep. Meandering was certainly not in their dictionary for this event!

Renee Levesque

The Birdathon was exhilarating, and I often found myself in awe of the level of knowledge I was surrounded by. My fellow team members – Dick Tafel, Lori Anderson and Renee Levesque – have a deep well of information. I am feeling more confident sorting out the flycatchers and

learning the difference between the Common and the Caspian Terns because of their field pointers.

I was very excited to see a few species for the first time! My most exciting sightings were the Wood Duck (photo below), the Eastern Meadowlark and the Northern Harrier. It was also exciting seeing a number of what are known as hotspots, reminding me that in some cases some species live right in our backyards. Despite some competitive banter, even the excitement for the other team – Fred Pinto, Kaye Edmonds, Sarah Wheelan and Louise Simpson – spotting the baby Barred Owl was a good part of the experience.

Renee Levesque

Overall, I truly enjoyed the experience, the comradery, and yes, even the rivalry. I learned so much from my team and I look forward to taking part again next May and birding for many years to come.

Editor's Note: *Jackie was part of the winning team and as such, she gets to share the trophy that will be presented at September's Bird Wing meeting to be held at LaPorte's Nursery on Lakeshore Drive on Tuesday, September 25, starting at 6:30. Each team member gets to keep the trophy in a place of honour in their home for three months, starting with Jackie.*

From Saturday, May 26 starting at 1:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m., Dick's team saw 94 species and heard 6, for a total of 100 species. Fred's team saw 74 species and heard 11, for a total of 85 species. Not bad numbers, although less than the year before. In 2017, Dick's team saw/heard a total of 110 species, and Marc Buchanan's team, a total of 96 species. So each team saw/heard 10 or 11 species less than they had the previous year.

It is not too late to make a Great Canadian Birdathon donation to Bird Studies Canada through Dick Tafel, with the money going to bird preservation and conservation. Please donate online at: https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/bird-studies-canada/p2p/birdathon/team/tafelot/captain/richard-tafel/.

Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program

The frogs and marsh birds of Laurier Woods

Renee Levesque

By Paul Smylie

The Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program is a citizen science program that was established in 1995. It is a collaborative program with Birds Studies Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The focus of the Marsh Monitoring Program is on the Great Lakes Basin as many areas around the Great Lakes are in urgent need of rehabilitation. However, any marsh in Ontario can be monitored as part of the program. Anyone from an amateur naturalist to a professional biologist can participate, although there are a few skills necessary to be able to conduct surveys. The Marsh Monitoring Program focuses on both birds and amphibians, although participants can choose to do only birds or only amphibians or do both birds and amphibians.

Amphibian surveys are reasonably simple, requiring less skill than bird surveys as there are only 13 species of frogs and toads in the Great Lakes Basin, and even fewer than that in Nipissing District. Learning the frog calls is relatively easy and is aided by a training CD included in the monitoring package. Monitoring marsh birds requires a little more training. It is generally advised that participants be able to correctly identify at least 50 common birds by sight and sound.

In the spring of 2017, I was approached by Bird Wing to take over monitoring the provincially significant marshes in Laurier Woods Conservation Area. The two marshes in Laurier Woods had been monitored for a number of years by Elaine and the late Craig Hurst. I have experience identifying birds by ear, and I know at least 50, and I'm not too bad with frogs, so I happily

agreed to take on the task. I'm a big fan of turtles too, so I thought this might be a great opportunity to also count the turtles in the marshes. (For the record, my largest turtle count one early spring morning soon after ice-off was 65 Midland Painted turtles basking at the back Arum Pond.)

Throughout the monitoring season, participants are asked to conduct a total of three amphibian surveys and two marsh breeding bird surveys. Different species of frogs will call depending on the temperature, which is why three separate visits are required to the marsh. This will ensure that all species of frogs that are in the marsh will be accounted for.

In terms of amphibians, in the Central region between the 43rd and 47th parallels where we are, the first survey is conducted between April 15 and April 30 when air temperature is above 5°C; the second is from May 15 to May 30 when the air temperature is above 10°C; and the third and final is between June 15 to June 30, when the air temperature is above 17°C. These are only guidelines, and as many of you may recall, there was still ice on the ponds and lakes at the end of April and into May.

Surveys are conducted at least a half hour after sundown and before midnight. After an initial settling down period, participants listen for 3 minutes, documenting the number of frogs calling and, if possible, mapping where the different individuals are calling from within a 100m radius in front of the surveyor. The best nights for surveying frog populations are damp and foggy or when light rain is falling – the kind of weather where you'd rather be at home with a hot cup of tea binging on Netflix.

Surveys for marsh birds are conducted twice between May 20 and July 5, and must be conducted at least ten days apart and when temperatures are not below 16°C. This presented a problem this year as it took some time for the temperatures to warm up. Therefore, I was not able to conduct the first survey until June 16.

The bird surveys can be conducted either in the morning or evening, although what is most important is that the time remains consistent within the survey period and also from one year to the next. The bird surveys are slightly more complex to conduct than the frog surveys. They start with a 5-minute period of passive listening, followed by playback calls – each one minute apart -- of the Least Bittern, Sora (at right), Virginia Rail, Common Gallinule/American Coot combination and Pied-billed Grebe. This is then followed by a second 5-minute period of listening for birds responding. Despite my being more likely to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for a late-night owl survey, I

Kaye Edmonds

conducted the bird surveys starting at 7 a.m., a not too horribly early hour even for me. As luck would have it, my predecessor also conducted the bird surveys in the morning, so the data has remained consistent.

Overall, it appears that the back Arum Pond is the place where any frog who is a somebody wants to be because that is where the action is. My first survey on May 5 was met with a reasonably lively chorus of Spring Peepers – too many calling to identify individuals, but not exactly a make-your-ears bleed cacophony. At the main pond, I heard only two individual Spring Peepers (at right) making their bid for a mate. What was interesting at the main pond, however, was the sorrowful call of a Sora making its plea amongst the cattails. Although I was not surveying for birds at the time, I did document it as it is one of the species of focus for the marsh bird surveys.

Renee Levesque

Renee Levesque

My second visit to Frogland was on May 29. A completely different assemblage of frogs was now calling with a mix of Northern Leopard Frogs (at left), Green Frogs and a consistent level of Spring Peepers. On the edge of the woods, three Gray Treefrogs were searching for mates with their enchanting trills. The main pond was somewhat barren of anuran noise, with only a few Spring Peepers calling, but nary a Green or Northern Leopard Frog.

Mink Frogs, with their pungent smell of garlic and onions and their tiny tool belts, made their debut on the third visit to Laurier Woods on June 27. Mink frogs can be easily confused with Green Frogs, but if you pick them up and give

them a sniff, they truly smell like garlic and onions. Arum Pond and the main pond were host to a combination of Mink Frogs doing their *tap – tap – tap* and Green Frogs (below) strumming their banjos.

The bird surveys unfortunately did not produce any responses to the birds on the playback calls. I have in the past seen Pied-billed Grebes, although I have not seen any in Laurier Woods this year. The marshes were not devoid of the usual feathered suspects, however, with the expected Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler all in attendance, the most numerous being the noisy Red-winged Blackbird. A Double-crested Cormorant did a fly-by, likely on its way to Lake Nipissing to bolster its unjustified reputation as the cause of the Walleye decline in the lake. During the second survey, I thought I heard a Least Bittern (below); however, it was off in the distance and I couldn't be sure it wasn't a Black-billed Cuckoo. They do sound very similar.

Renee Levesque

For more information or if you'd like to get involved as a participant in one of the many citizen science programs, I have provided a few links below. Conducting these surveys is a great way to get yourself out into nature with the added benefit of knowing that you are doing your part, however small, to preserve our natural environment so important to the health and well-being of us all.

Renee Levesque

For more information on volunteer programs, check out Bird Studies Canada at

https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/programmap/index.jsp?lang=EN

Also check out: Ontario turtle tally at
http://www.torontozoo.com/Adoptapond/turtletally.asp

And finally, Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas at

https://ontarionature.org/programs/citizen-science/reptile-amphibian-atlas/

Editor's Note: *Paul also wrote an article on frogs that will appear in October's issue of The Woodland Observer.*

SwiftWatch

By Renee Levesque

SwiftWatch is a citizen science program through Bird Studies Canada that monitors and conserves Chimney Swift roosts and nests. This is an important citizen science program because the population of Chimney Swifts in Canada has declined by 95% since 1968. Reasons are many but habitat loss is the main one. Chimneys today are capped, preventing swifts from entering them; or they are steel-lined, making it impossible for swifts to vertically cling to chimney walls; or they have been torn down. For October's issue, Melanie Alkins, Chimney Swift Steward this year, will be providing a full report on all the data she and others have gathered since the spring.

In the meantime, the numbers supplied by Melanie for the Main Street West roost during the four official SwiftWatch count days are:

May 23: 31 May 27: 67 May 31: 152 June 4: 3

As you see, the numbers varied from 3 to 152. How do these numbers compare to those of 2017? This year's are quite a bit lower. The numbers on the official count days last year were 211, 97, 472 and 345. And in 2016, they were 81, 70, 134 and 224. I do not have this year's numbers for optional count days before the official count days, nor for other days from June 4 on. There could be many reasons for variations over three years and for the decline on the official count days this year. Perhaps the slow start to spring?

Of the three other North Bay chimneys monitored this year, one had 2 swifts on May 27; one had 1 on May 27; and one had 2 on May 31.

Further to my report in the September 2017 newsletter, I mentioned that Bird Winger, Doug Patterson, had alerted April McCrum and me to a roost in a private home in Mattawa, but because Doug has moved to Nova Scotia, I am not aware whether that roost was monitored this year.

For further information on SwiftWatch Ontario or Maritime results for previous years, see https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai/chsw/index.jsp?targetpg=chswnews, and click on a specific year.

Photo by Kaye Edmonds

Early morning chorus

Text and photos by Renee Levesque

Because the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) must begin 30 minutes before sunrise, the two most difficult things about my accompanying Paul Smylie on June 23 for this annual survey were: Falling asleep early enough so that I would feel alive and awake at 3:30 a.m. when my alarm was to go off, and then getting up when the alarm did go off. But I did and was out the door by 4:00 to meet Paul at 4:15 at Tim Horton's on Seymour.

I was on the highway headed for Tim Horton's when I just happened to glance at the fuel gauge and saw I was out of gas. At least the fuel gauge indicated I had 0 km left. I just hoped that 0 did not mean 0 because there were no gas stations opened at that time of the morning.

But I made it and made it in time to have a much-needed cup of coffee. This was the first year I took part in this survey – well, went along with Paul while he conducted the survey. Paul has been conducting the BBS for seven or eight years now, with various people accompanying him over the years – Dick Tafel, Marc Buchanan, Kevan Cowcill, Luke Stephenson and Balbina Rosabel. Before Paul took over the route, Dick did the survey for approximately 20 years.

Paul and I began the predetermined, roadside route at Trout Pond Road (below**)**, off Hwy. 17 East just after 4:30 a.m**.** From there we went along Development Road, around Lake Nosbonsing, through Astorville and ended up on Wasi Road. To maintain consistency of

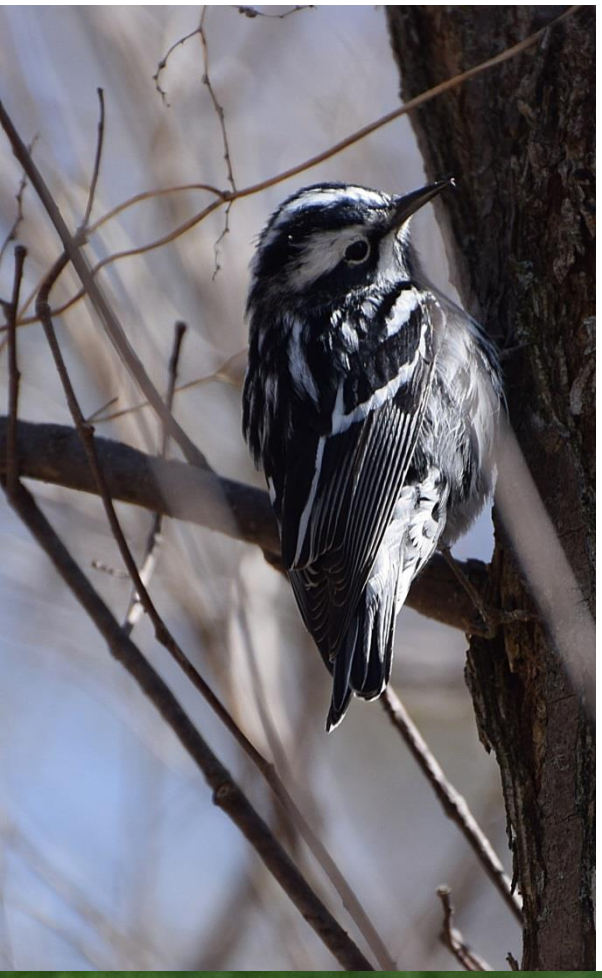
reporting, Paul conducts the survey on the same route and at the same stops each year. I was but a bystander of sorts.

All survey routes are 24.5 miles (39.4 km) long and consist of 50 three-minute stops, each 0.5 miles (0.8 km) apart. At each stop, Paul records the total number of species seen or heard within about 400 metres. I had the task of noting the number of vehicles that drove past. It was not a difficult task for the first few hours of the survey because just how many people are out and about at 4:30 a.m.? But by the time we got to Lake Nosbonsing and Wasi Roads, there was quite a bit of vehicular activity and I would sometimes forget that I was not to listen or look for birds, but to note and count vehicles! I also noted any additional excessive noise that could possibly interfere with our hearing a bird – cows mooing, dogs barking, Spring Peepers peeping, planes flying overhead, water gurgling, to name a few.

My other task was to let Paul know when we reached each stop. I messed up once when it seemed as if we went a bit beyond the 0.8 km and had to turn back to find the stop. For the record, Paul did not get annoyed with me, but after that I paid even greater attention to where we were to stop because despite my being new to this survey, I figured if I messed up once more it could take a while for Paul to regain confidence in my ability to read his tiny notations on his stop chart – a chart that shows where each stop is and on which he has made several notations as to what signs to look for to recognize the stops. But signs and indicators change a bit over the years – a house built, a sign covered by vegetation, a new driveway put in, a hydro pole's number too distant now for aging eyes – any number of little things. I updated the chart as we went along.

The Breeding Bird Survey is conducted across Canada, the United States and Mexico at the height of June's breeding season. The data gathered is used to determine long-term, large-scale

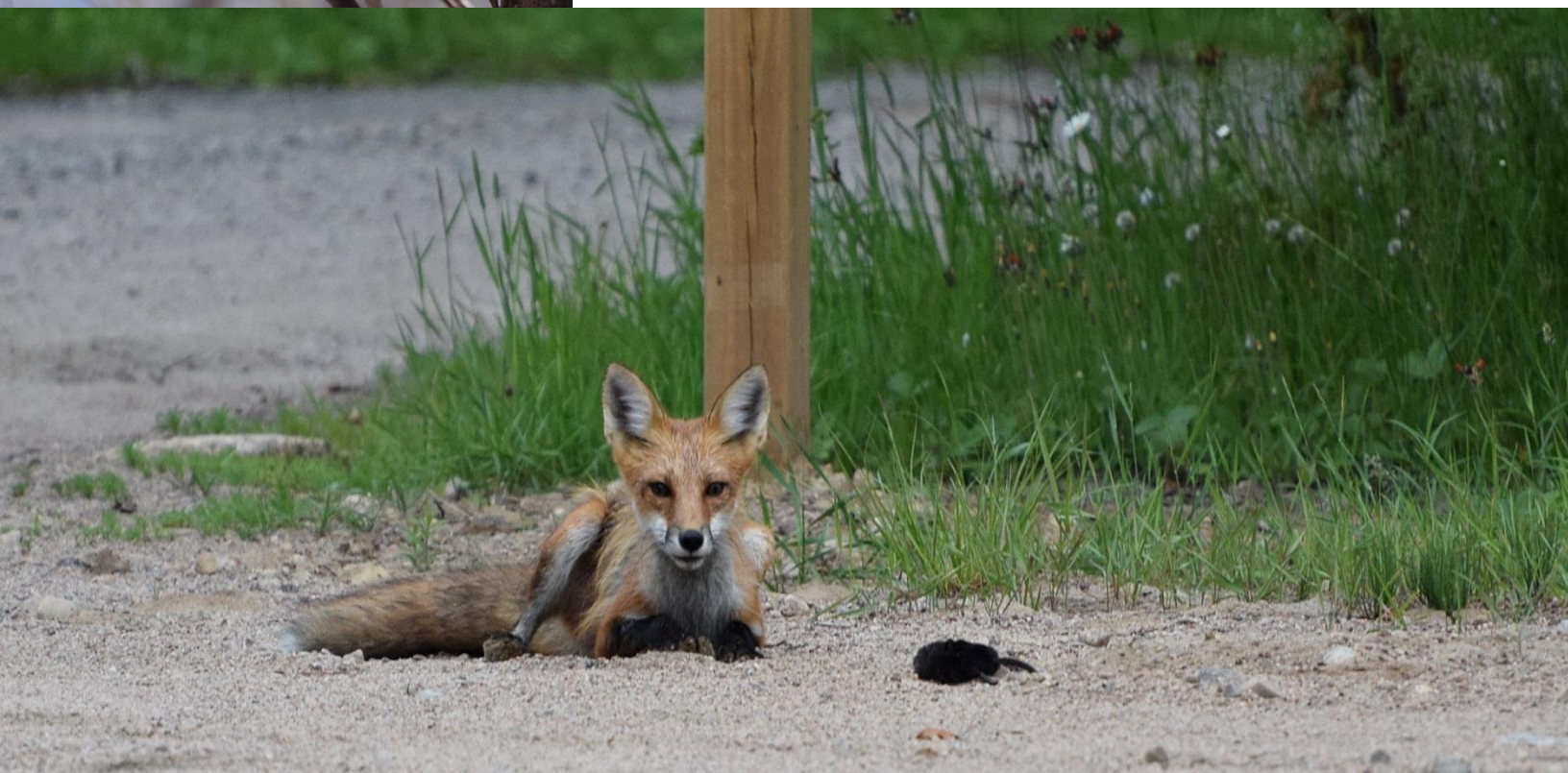
population trends, relative abundance and species composition in North America's breeding birds. Data are used by scientists, wildlife managers, educators, students and the general public.



Ongoing since 1966, the survey is one of the oldest surveys of breeding birds in North America. In Canada, it is coordinated by Environment and Climate Change Canada, with Bird Studies Canada acting as Ontario's provincial coordinator. Currently, there are more than 3,000 active Breeding Bird Survey routes across North America.

I am unsure exactly how many species Paul and I heard and saw – around 65 I would say. I know Paul heard a lot more than I did. Try hearing a Black and White Warbler in the distance even without any traffic or noise of any kind. Paul can, but I'm afraid my ears are not what they may have been. Not that I really know because I did not start birding until about 10 years ago. Maybe in my 20s and 30s and 40s, I could have heard a Black and White (at right) miles away! I will never know. Birds are not easily seen in late June because of leaves on trees and shrubs, so hearing and identifying a song is a very definite requirement.

At one of our very early stops, Paul and I watched, a Red Fox toying with a mole (below). The fox started to trot off with the mole, but changed its mind and dropped it after seeing us. It was dead by that time. I am sure the fox came



back and picked it up for breakfast after we left. It was a non-birding highlight.

Traffic was a major factor in hearing birds by the time we got to Lake Nosbonsing and Wasi Roads. The sun was also getting stronger and the morning warmer. I was beginning to look fondly back on the peace and beauty of Trout Pond and Development Roads in the very early morning.

In addition to thoroughly enjoying my first BBS, my finally hearing a Winter Wren (at right) for my lists this year – on Village Road in Astorville and on Wasi Road – made a very early morning June outing with good company even more enjoyable.

Paul Stein, Wikimedia

If you wish to participate in next year's North American Breeding Bird Survey, and there are routes that need to be surveyed, the requirements for participating are:

1. The ability to quickly and accurately identify all birds in the area by sight and by sound.
2. Good hearing and eyesight.
3. Access to suitable transportation.
4. An intention to participate in the survey for at least two years.

If you meet these criteria and are interested in participating, contact Liz Purves, Ontario BBS Coordinator, Bird Studies Canada, at 1-888-448-2473, ext. 132, or by email at lpurves@birdscanada.org.

For more information on the rules of the Breeding Bird Survey, visit Environment and Climate Change Canada at https://ec.gc.ca/reom-mbs/default.asp?lang=En&n=5EE0ADBA-1.

Seldom seen, sometimes heard

By Gary Sturge

In early June, our trusted NipNat/Bird Wing Scribe and point woman for birding stuff sent out to bird watchers an email she had received from Kevin Hannah, Population Assessment Biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada. A couple of years ago, some of us had helped Kevin with his winter finch study. His request this time was for volunteer surveyors to collect data on nightjar populations in Ontario. The format was similar to other studies some of us have participated in through Bird Studies Canada.

Well, I looked at Con and asked, "Are we up to this at this time in the season?" Of course her answer was yes. So I stuck up my hand, or rather sent Kevin an email to volunteer.

Elly Knight

Now as we all know?? "Nightjars are a family of cryptic birds that forage for flying insects at night. These beautiful birds have long, pointed wings for flight, and are highly camouflaged against the leaves and branches they roost upon during the day. Many of these species are highly migratory, spending their winters as far south as Argentina. During the summer, nightjars breed across Canada, generally laying two eggs directly on the ground with no nest. (See photo at right.) Due to their nocturnal behaviour and cryptic appearance, nightjars are rarely seen, so it is most important to learn how to identify nightjars by sound!" (Extracted from Canadian Nightjar Survey Protocol – 2018 document.)

Nightjars in Ontario are Common Nighthawks (see photo of female incubating at top of next page) and Eastern Whip-poor-wills. Because of population declines, both are listed as Threatened, hence the immediate need to find out more about them.

Elly Knight

My next thought was: I'll call on our other bird survey partners, daughter Rachel and new NipNat'er and Bird Winger Matt Procunier to form our team of ears. Needless to say, both were enthusiastic.

Next, I perused the map for available routes and several near my area were available. I chose the route called CARR which is mostly along Highway 534 where we live, "our street" in cityspeak. Carr, according to Bing and Google maps, is at the intersection of Pilger's Road and Hwy 524 which is only a half kilometer east of 534 and 524 corners. Here the route starts with Stop 1, runs east along 534 and King Side Road, back to 534, and eventually onto Hwy 654 into Nipissing Village, with stops approximately every 1.6 km. The route ends at the second entrance to Nipissing Union Cemetery, a very quiet spot late on a full Moon evening.

Now as to the format, those familiar with the Nocturnal Owl Survey will recognize the similarities between these surveys. However, the Nightjar Survey is more detailed at each stop and the manner of recording a bird is different.

The survey is to be done between mid-June and mid-July, preferably within a week on either side of the full Moon. There are 12 stops and at each, the surveyor listens for 6 minutes in one-minute intervals, so it helps to have someone with a stop watch or smart phone that can do this. The weather conditions, noise and traffic are also recorded at each stop, as well as temperature at the start and finish times. The survey commences 30 minutes before the exact sunset time for your locale; therefore, at 9 or 10 minutes per stop, you should be finished in two hours and on your way home.

Once we volunteered, we did not pick a date for the survey, but instead waited for weather reports closer to the full Moon event. Additionally, assistant surveyor Rachel was teaching a summer course and would not be available until a Thursday evening. We didn't want to do the survey on a Friday or weekend because of the amount of traffic on those days, especially with Hwy. 534 having very narrow shoulders on which to park.

In preparation, surveyors are encouraged to listen to various birding websites to familiarize themselves with the call and "wing booms" of the Common Nighthawk (see photo below) and the signature call of the Eastern Whip-poor-will. As part of its courting ritual, the Common Nighthawk makes a *whooshing* sound as it dives with its wings. Several wing booms in a minute are significant, indicating one serious dude! As for the Eastern Whip-poor-will, well, if *whip-poor-will* is heard over and over again, there is no doubt it is the Eastern Whip-poor-will.

Ernie Frayle

Con and I did a planning run one afternoon about two weeks in advance of the survey. Using our GPS, we found the stops, recorded identifiable landmarks and picked safe parking spots. Finally, two days in advance of the survey date and 30 minutes before sunset, we did a trial run starting at Stop 1 and doing several stops, listening in hopes of hearing some survey candidates. We had no luck until Stop 12, the cemetery. In the growing darkness and with just 2 minutes left, we finally got a *whip-poor-will* again and again**.** That was promising!

Well, a day before the full Moon, on June 28, our Thursday survey evening finally arrived, as did Rachel after a four-hour drive. There was a lot of vacation traffic already heading north in advance of the Canada Day weekend. Young Matt arrived spot on 8:00 p.m. We reviewed our

bits and pieces, documents, flashlights, compass etc., and off we went. Arriving at Stop 1, we set up. There was a farmer completing his baling in the nearby field, so the noise level was high. Thankfully he finished after minute 2 and made his way across the highway to his farm – just minor tractor noise after that. Well not surprisingly, we had No Joy at this stop, so on to Stop 2.

We hadn't really noticed before, but the wind was picking up, condition 2 or 3 on the survey rating, and with it there was increasing tree leaf and branch rustle. The mosquitoes were growing very bold and annoying. There was a lot of bird noise and activity. None of this helped us prioritize our listening.

On and on we went with no luck with our target species, but lots of thrushes, sparrows, robins, crows, warblers and others. Somewhat disappointed, we arrived at Stop 10 on King Road. Surrounded by woods and tree rustling and plagued by mosquitoes, we set up. Nothing until minute 4, when Con and I thought we heard an *eeent*. Rachel and Matt at the other end of the stop heard something as well and when we got together to listen, sure enough it was a *pweeent*, the call of a Common Nighthawk. We had success finally!

This raised our morale and off we went to Stop 11, but no luck. Then it was Stop 12, the cemetery. Having heard the Eastern Whip-poor-will (see photo below) two nights earlier, our expectations were high. But alas all was as quiet as a cemetery. Still, there was a lovely Moon!

We all went off home tired, safe and itchy. Rachel left for Toronto bright and early, having made a long drive for a very short one-night visit. In retrospect, we should have likely cancelled the survey that night. Too much noise, wind and traffic. We recorded 19 vehicles which is by far the largest number we have ever encountered on any survey. But busy young Matt and Rachel had already scheduled their time and so we went with what we had.

In the next days, I recorded the data online, a cumbersome process. Next year, I'll print, scan and email. But for sure it is a survey we plan to do again and again.

There are routes still available as close as Bonfield. See http://cmnmaps.ca/nightjar/. For further information, including protocol, see http://wildresearch.ca/programs/nightjar-survey/ or contact Kevin Hannah at kevin.hannah@canada.ca. You can also contact me and I will email you the information and the links.

Tom Murray

A survivor and an intruder

Marram Grass and Himalayan Balsam

By Martha Gould and Fred Pinto; photos by Renee Levesque

On July 15, a very hot Sunday afternoon, a small but intrepid group of explorers led by Fred Pinto and Roy Summers investigated the ancient Great Lakes shore, also known as the Lake Nipissing waterfront, from King's Landing to Timmins Street. The group was particularly interested in the Marram Grass growing in spots at the edge of the woods and along the sandy beach, as seen in the photo below.

Marram Grass thrives in sand and high winds. It is a coarse, tall grass that stabilizes sand dunes with a root system that is dense and deep. It has waxy leaves that roll inwards with tiny hairs along the inside, features that help prevent evaporation.

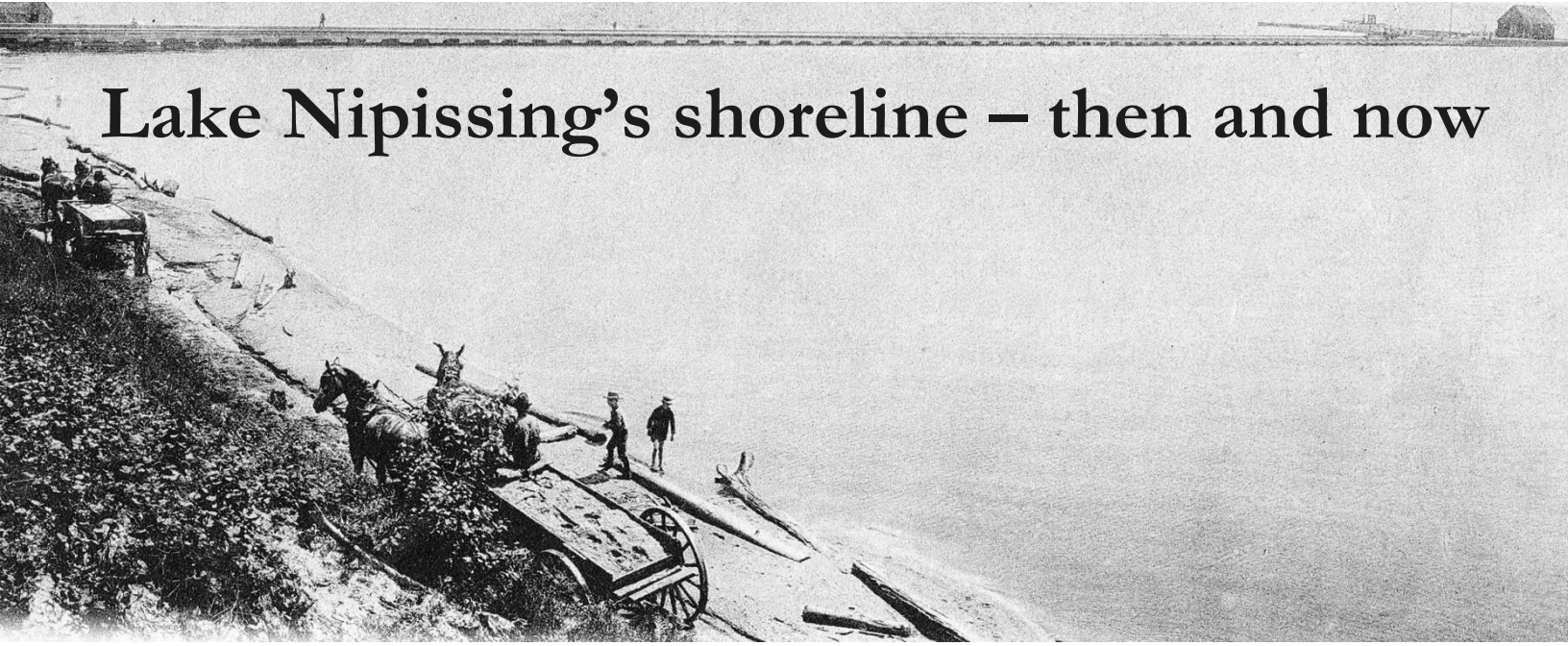
It is native only to the coasts of the North Atlantic Ocean and the shores of the Great Lakes of which Lake Nipissing was once a part. It established itself here after the glaciers began melting around 10,000 years ago and its persistence on the shores of Lake Nipissing indicates how far the Great Lakes originally extended.

Marram Grass was traditionally harvested for fuel, thatch for roofs and cattle fodder. It was also used in the making of mats, haystack covers and paint brushes.

Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), native to the western Himalayas, is an invasive plant taking over some of the understory along the trail. It is a large, attractive annual plant with beautiful, orchid-shaped pink flowers (see photo at right) introduced to North America by gardeners.

This insidious invasive plant causes two problems to Canada's ecosystems: It grows in moist conditions, usually in riparian zones like river edges and wetlands, but because it is shallow-rooted and, therefore, unable to hold the soil like deeper-rooted native plants, the area in which it grows is prone to soil erosion. In addition, pollinators are highly attracted to its flowers and prefer its flowers over the flowers of native plants. This results in lower native plant seed sets and the reproduction of native flowering plants, such as Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), a species related to the Himalayan Balsam, and also seen in places along the trail. (The photo at left shows the similarities between the invasive Himalayan Balsam and the native Jewelweed.)

Lake Nipissing's shoreline – then and now



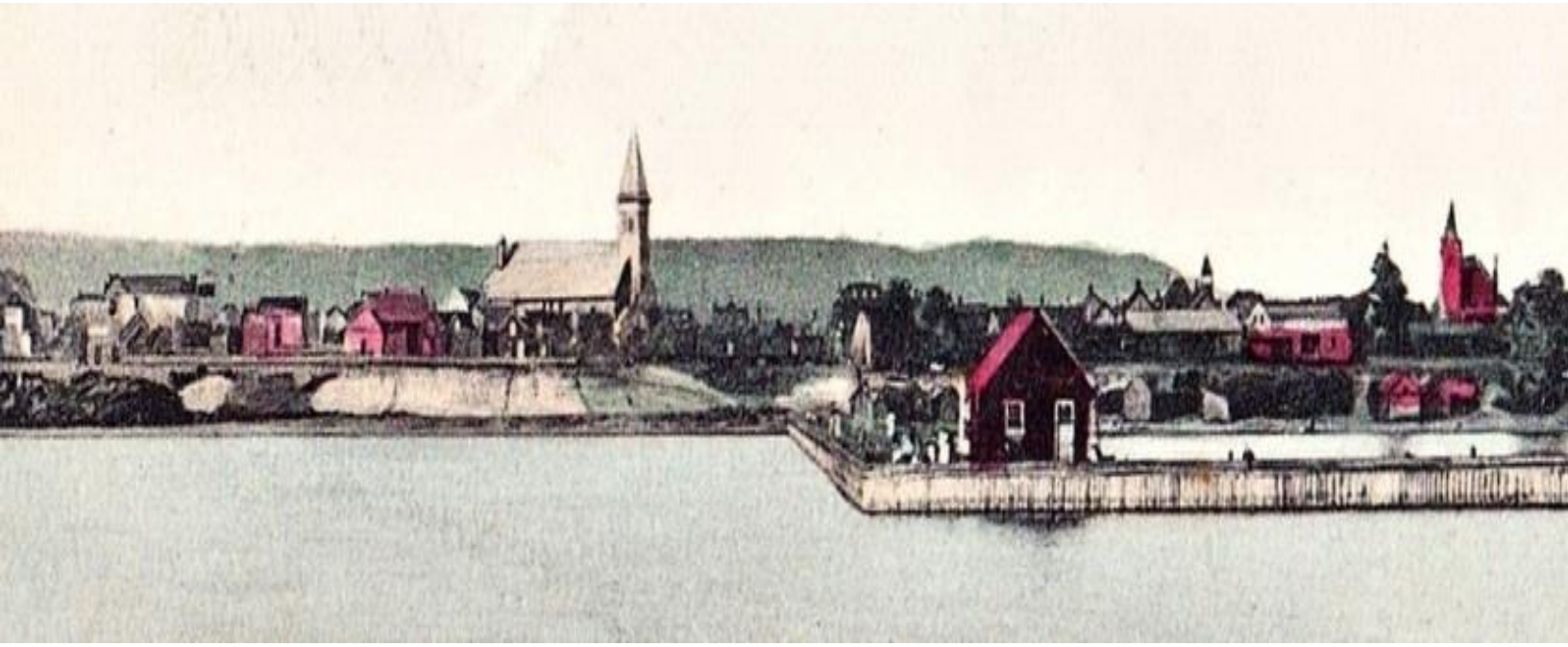
By Fred Pinto and Renee Levesque

Postcards from the personal collection of Renee Levesque

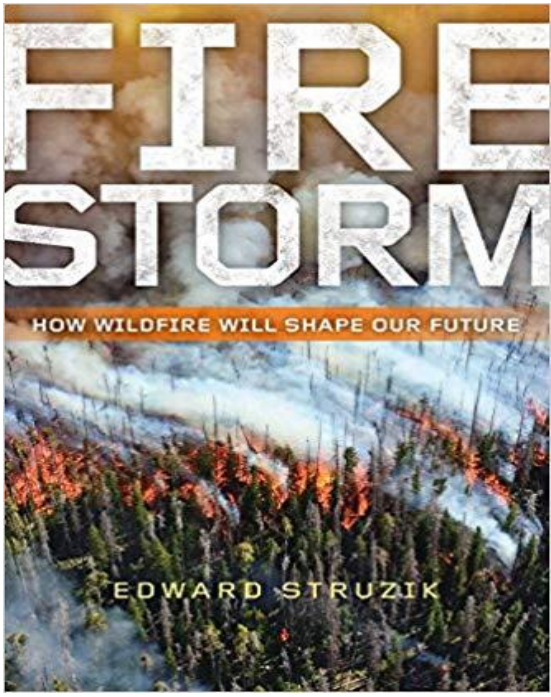
North Bay's waterfront and old rail lands were part of a large sand dune complex, ideal for native Marram Grass to grow and persist. Sand is carried by currents in Lake Nipissing and deposited along the beach. Today the flow of sand is blocked by King's Wharf (Government Dock), and the sand dunes, once prominent along the shores of Lake Nipissing, were levelled when the rail yards were built.

I checked my personal collection of North Bay postcards and sure enough I have one of Lake Nipissing's shoreline from at least 1906 judging by the postmark of November 1 of that year. Compare the shoreline in the photo below, 112 years later, with the shoreline in the postcard at the top of this page.

Below is another postcard showing Lake Nipissing, the dock and North Bay in the background. You can see the height of the dunes in the area where today there is a children's playground and a public swimming area.



North Bay could use native Marram Grass along the waterfront to stabilize the sand that is blown by the wind.



Book Review

Firestorm: How Wildfire Will Shape Our Future
By Edward Struzik
Island Press, Washington D.C., 2017
257 pages

By Fred Pinto

I met Ed Struzik at a recent forestry conference where I bought his book, *Firestorm: How Wildfire Will Shape Our Future*. Ed is the author of five books and a fellow at the Institute for Energy and Environmental Policy, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, Kingston. He writes on a number of environmental subjects.

I had worked in various capacities on wildfires during my career in forestry and was interested in the latest syntheses on the state of knowledge and response to wildfires.

*Firestorm c*learly describes the results of wildfires, taken from various studies and experiences in Canada and the USA. Many may think the only impact is the immediate threat to life and property, but there are so many more impacts. Wildfires impact water quality; they release and redistribute mercury and radioactive materials; they result in outbreaks of insect infestations; and they result in animal and plant diseases.

The impact on water supply and quality are very significant. We have already experienced these fresh water impacts in Canada. When large fires occur, they result in higher amounts of dissolved carbon and sediments in surface water. These overwhelm and reduce the functionality of the disinfection process used in water treatment plants. More troubling is the result of chemical reactions between the disinfecting chlorine and the dissolved carbon. These reactions produce known and suspected carcinogens. The City of Fort McMurray has had to pay a steep price for water treatment since the fire of 2017.

Fred Pinto

Ed does not write to scare, but outlines what is known and what has been experienced. Readers can then form their own opinions.

As I spoke to Ed at the forestry conference, I could not help feeling we were living some of the impacts of what he writes about. The hotel was filled with conference delegates and evacuees from Kashechewan. The evacuees had been in the hotel for three weeks waiting for the flood caused by the ice jams on the north-flowing Albany River to subside. As I held the book, I reflected upon my own experience in helping to evacuate people in my previous career and how disruptive evacuations are.

Speaker for September's meeting

Jayson Demeester

Meetings are held at our new location on the **second Tuesday of every month**, from September to December and from February to June, **starting at 7:00 p.m.** The new location is**: 176 Lakeshore Drive, at the northeast corner of Lakeshore and Gertrude in the former Tweedsmuir Elementary Public School.**

September 25: Our first speaker after our summer hiatus is Jeremy St. Onge, Professor of Environmental Studies and Biotechnology, Canadore College, and former president of Nipissing Naturalists Club. Jeremy's topic will be **Eating Wild Food.** Some of you may recall Jeremy's article, "What it Takes to Eat Wild for One Year" in the June 2018 issue of *The Woodland Observer*.

"I can happily eat a diverse range of wild foods, from acorn weevil grubs to groundhog livers. I have become fairly adept at accessing various wild food resources from the Plantae, Animalia and Fungi kingdoms (with a few Protista and Bacterial hitchhikers)."

And so Jeremy and his girlfriend, Delphanie Colyer, "decided to tackle a full year of wild food eating. No grocery stores. No processed foods. Not even salt."

How will they accomplish this? "Well, we all know that at some point our ancestors did it. And even though they were accessing resources in a greater abundance than can be found today, we think it can still be done by carefully accessing certain resources at peak availability and abundance." This is something Jeremy and Del have been doing in preparation for their Big Year of wild food eating that begins on January 1, 2019. Should make for an interesting year!

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

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Monthly Bird Wing and Bird Bash reports are sent to members by email and posted on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website, https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/.

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

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Contributors this issue: Jayson Demeester, Kaye Edmonds, Ernie Frayle, Martha Gould, Renee Levesque, Jackie Manella, Fred Pinto, Paul Smylie, Gary Sturge and Brent Turcotte.

Special thanks to Kevin Hannah, Canadian Wildlife Service, for providing me with photos from Elly Knight and Tom Murray of the Eastern Whip-poor-will and the Common Nighthawk.

Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fees are: single $20. 00; family $30.00.

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

Please note: While the library is undergoing renovations this year, September's meeting will be held at LaPorte's Nursery on Lakeshore Drive. October and November's locations to be announced.

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