

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

FEBRUARY 2019



NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB



From the editor:

The beauty and splendour of winter when all is still and quiet

Except for my many years in Timmins, many years ago now, I can't recall a January as cold and as snowy as this past January. But I was so much younger then that I didn't really care how cold or snowy it was. Now I do. Unlike some, I am not a winter person, although there are winter days I do appreciate for their beauty, their stillness and their cocooning effect. A walk through the silent woods on a winter's day when it is not too cold can be very peaceful and at the same time invigorating.

Nipissing Naturalists Club has had two winter wonderland hikes so far and another one is scheduled for February 12. Details of that hike, less strenuous than the first two, are inside this issue. More hikes are to come, so stay tuned. When the winter hikes are completed, I plan to do a collage of the hikes based on photos sent to me.

In February you can also take advantage of the Family Day holiday weekend to get outside and enjoy winter and also take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, starting Friday, February 15, the day after Valentine's Day, and continuing until Monday, February 18. It is a free citizen science event in that you don't need to belong to Bird Studies Canada to take part. See

<https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/gbbc/> for details.

This month's cover, a photo of a Snowshoe Hare by member Stephen O'Donnell, ties in with winter, but also with an article in *National Geographic* in which Kevan Cowcill is quoted. Not often one of our members gets quoted in *National Geographic*! His quote and what the *National Geographic* article is about can be found in this issue, along with another wonderful photo of a Snowshoe Hare by Stephen, as well as trail camera photos from Kevan.

And speaking of photos, this issue highlights the second place photo winners in December's photo contest. Congratulations to Oriana Pokorny, Rick Tripp and Laura Turcotte. It just so happens that Rick's splendid photo was taken in February and so I cropped it to fit the heading on "From the editor".

We had quite a fun Annual General Meeting (AGM) in January – good pot luck food, an excellent silent auction which raised \$427.00 for the Club and a presentation by Fred Pinto, Dick Tafel and Connie Sturge highlighting our events, speakers, outings and financial well-being in 2018. A summary of the AGM is in this issue, along with two collages of 2018 events. Lots of members get thanked for the volunteer work they did on behalf of the Club in 2018, but there is one non-member I really need to thank

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and that is John Levesque who always heeds my panic call of “JOHN!” when something goes wrong on a newsletter page.

I would like to every now and then highlight something about the Club from the past. And what better time to begin than in an issue that highlights some of our accomplishments. In this issue, Nipissing Naturalists Club’s logo, designed by Christine Page, former Club secretary, is highlighted, thanks to Janis Reed who mentioned the logo to me as a possible article.

We have two new Directors, Rick and Katie Tripp, replacing Riley Cormier and Julie Falsetti who, because of other commitments, have stepped down as Directors. Katie’s bio is in this issue. Rick’s will be in March’s. However, Riley graciously agreed to be our representative at the Club’s booth at the Seed Exchange and Eco Fair, with its theme being butterflies as pollinators, and member Brent Turcotte will be talking about butterflies and moths. I hope many members will get out and support the Eco Fair to be held at St. Andrew’s United Church on Sunday, February 24. Details of this event are inside.

The ‘Interesting finds’ article this month is about the Slaty-backed Gull, a very rare find indeed in our area, and a gull seen by many who travelled to North Bay just to see it. You just never know what you might find at your local landfill site!

In the winter 2018 issue of Ontario Nature’s magazine, *On nature*, Lisa Richardson writes about Nipissing Naturalists Club. John Hassell, editor, gave me permission to reprint the article, and Sarah Wheelan, with her superb keyboard skills, typed the article for me for inclusion in *The Woodland Observer*. It is time once again to nominate those who are deserving of Ontario Nature’s eleven awards. You will find details and links inside.

The book review this month is again by Chris Connors and is about recognizing nature’s signposts. Whoever predicted that this winter would be very cold and snowy read nature’s signs well, and I hope Wiarton Willie has also read them well with his prediction of an early spring.

One of nature’s highlights in January was the Super Blood Wolf Moon, also featured in this issue with photos by Kaye Edmonds who braved the cold at the waterfront to get her photos. Trust Kaye!

Our speaker at this month’s meeting on February 12 is April McCrum who will provide us with an overview on how she goes about doing environmental assessments.

Keep those emails coming – two in this issue! As suggestions: a photo of hearts in nature, a Family Day outing, or a response to a book review – do you plan to read any of the books reviewed.

- Renee Levesque, editor
rlevesque1948@gmail.com



53 years on and still going strong

Nipissing Naturalists Club's Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on January 8 at our meeting location, 175 Lakeshore Drive, in the former Tweedsmuir Public School.

Following a very delicious pot luck dinner and introductions of the 29 members who attended, Fred Pinto, President, provided the Annual Report for 2018; Connie Sturge, Treasurer, provided the Financial Report for 2018; and Dick Tafel, Chair of Bird Wing, provided the Bird Wing report for 2018. After the meeting, there was a silent auction, raising \$427.00 for the Club. An excellent amount! Thanks to all members who donated auction items, brought pot luck dishes, helped set up the auction table and the serving table and helped in the kitchen. It was a case of everyone pitching in to help make the AGM the success it was! (Number of Club members as of the end of January is around 80.)

History:

This year marks 53 years of education and enjoyment of nature for Nipissing Naturalists Club. The Club got started in 1966, making it the oldest environmental group in North Bay. It began as the Nipissing Field Naturalist Club, and became incorporated in 1992 as Nipissing Naturalists Club Inc. It is run by a volunteer Board of Directors composed of no more than 12 individuals, supported by many members who take on additional roles and tasks.

Some notable achievements of Nipissing Naturalists Club are:

Initiated the protection of 240 acres of woodland within the City of North Bay known as Laurier Woods Conservation Area.

Recognized Louise de Kiriline Lawrence with an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque at Pimisi Bay, 2016 (left).

Published *Species at Risk in the Lake Nipissing Watershed*, 2008. (Copies available at \$5.00 each.)

The only known club in North America to monitor bats using the NABat square, ongoing since 2016.



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During Bat Week in 2015, helped set a world record for the number of bat houses built.

Installation of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, 2018 (right).

Board of Directors:

Board of Directors for 2018 were Fred Pinto, President and Speaker Coordinator; Marc Buchanan, Vice President; Connie Sturge, Treasurer; Oriana Pokorny, Secretary; Sarah Wheelan, Website and Facebook; Paul Smylie, Trip Coordinator; Matt Procunier, Refreshment Coordinator; Louise Simpson; Riley Cormier; Julie Falsetti; and Allison Bannister. With the exception of Julie and Riley, all will continue as Directors for 2019 and will be joined on the Board by Rick Tripp and Katie Tripp.

The Board and members wish to thank Riley and Julie for their services on the Board and to the Club in 2018.

Club Volunteers:

Non-board members frequently step forward to offer additional and much-appreciated and required assistance in the operation of the Club. In 2018, these members were Mel Alkins, SwiftWatch; Lori Anderson, compiler, Christmas Bird Count; Kaye Edmonds, nature and science festivals; Rebecca Geauvreau, lead in the bat monitoring project; Renee Levesque, editor of *The Woodland Observer* and Bird Wing Scribe and all those who submitted articles and photos; Rachel Sturge, nature festival; and Dick Tafel, Chair of Bird Wing. In addition, many members contributed refreshments for our socials following our monthly meetings and many members and non-members helped through monetary and in-kind donations and provided support in bringing the Motus Wildlife Tracking System to North Bay.

Club Objectives:

To observe and enjoy nature through field trips, meetings and discussions.

Putting North Bay on the map for wildlife tracking

A Canadian innovation, Motus Wildlife Tracking Network uses miniaturized automated radio telemetry technology to study the movements of birds, bats, insects and other flying animals over vast distances and with incredible detail.

Motus contributes to a better understanding of migration patterns and population health for species that live here year round and those that travel through. This enables us to make better decisions related to development and environmental protection. Motus data helps identify important habitat for migrating wildlife, estimate survivorship, and define key periods when wildlife may be vulnerable.

Motus is now worldwide with 450 stations, including North and South America. The station here in the Laurentian Escarpment Conservation Area now fills one of several large gaps in coverage within Ontario. (See Map)

North Bay/Nipissing Region sees much activity during the spring and fall bird migration seasons which, thanks to this station, will now be tracked.

Motus Wildlife Tracking Station is a joint project of the Nipissing Naturalists, North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority and Bird Studies Canada. It is made possible through community support and donations from many people and organizations!

Supporters:
City of North Bay
North Bay Hydro
Spectrum Group
Laurentian Ski Hill

Learn more!
Motus www.motus.org
Nipissing Naturalists www.nipnats.com
Bird Studies Canada www.bsc-eoc.org
North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority www.nbmc.ca

Species tracked:
American Redstart
Black-bellied Plover
Nipissing Warbler
Red King

Renee Levesque

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To stimulate and increase personal and public interest in and understanding of our natural history.

To promote conservation and wise use of our natural resources, including soil, water, woodlands, plants and wildlife.

To cooperate with other organizations and agencies having the same or similar objectives.

How objectives were met:

1. Nine monthly meetings with guest speakers:

February: Shannon Kelly, Big Cats and Elephants

March: Daniel Pike, Whales in the North Atlantic and Other Places

April: Larry Dyke, The Jet Stream – Messenger of Climate Change

May: Julie Robinson, Local Conservation Reserves

June: Mary Marrs, Volunteering at a Syrian Refugee Camp

September: Jeremy St. Onge and Delphanie Colyer, Eating Wild Food (right)

October: Matt Rideout and Katlynd Treiber-Vajda, Caribbean Reef Buddy

November: Luke Thomson, Falconry and Nuisance Bird Control

December: Chris McVeety, Major Forest Pests



Jayson Demeester

2. Events and Outings:

Dog sledding in Calvin Township, thanks to Roseanne Van Shie and Paul Smylie.

GPS Workshop, thanks to Eric Mattson.

Foraging for wild food and a summer barbeque, thanks to Jeremy St. Onge, Delphanie Colyer and Gary and Connie Sturge.

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Marram Grass and Himalayan Balsam walk along the shores of Lake Nipissing, thanks to Roy Summers, Martha Gould and Fred Pinto.

Visit to the fire site near River Valley, thanks to Andrée Morneault.

(See collage of events and outings following this article.)

3. Involvement with the Community and other Organizations:

Installation of Motus Wildlife Tracking System (right) in conjunction with North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority and Bird Studies Canada, with special thanks to Gary Sturge.

Hosting the Northern Regional Meeting of Ontario Nature.

Fifth Annual Louise de Kiriline Nature Festival at Laurier Woods Conservation Area, in conjunction with North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority and Friends of Laurier Woods Inc., with special thanks to Fred Pinto and Louise Simpson.

Bat monitoring program using the North American Bat Monitoring Protocol (NABat) and supplying data to researchers, thanks to Rebecca Geauvreau.

Participation in Eco Fair, Sustainability Fair, Callander FunFest, Cranberry Day and Science Festival, raising awareness of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System and the Club, with special thanks to Louise Simpson and Kaye Edmonds. (See collage following this article.)

Guided walks in Laurier Woods Conservation Area from May to November in conjunction with Friends of Laurier Woods Inc. and North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority.

Nipissing Naturalists Club's website and Facebook, thanks to Sarah Wheelan and contributors.

Nipissing Naturalists Club's Newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*, thanks to Renee Levesque and



Renee Levesque

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contributors, with special thanks to those who contribute regularly: Kevan Cowcill, Kaye Edmonds, Fred Pinto and Paul Smylie.

4. Bird Wing:

Meetings from January to April and September to November with Dick Tafel as Chair, Gary Sturge as Treasurer and Renee Levesque as Bird Wing Scribe.

Field outings monthly from May to August and one in November - Laurier Woods; Powassan Lagoon and Chisholm Township; Callander Lagoon; Cache Bay and area; and North Bay landfill site.

Monthly Bird Bashes.

Bird Wing, Bird Bash, Christmas Bird Count, Nocturnal Owl Survey and Year-end Bird Count Reports, thanks to Dick Tafel, Renee Levesque, Lori Anderson and all who participate and contribute. All reports are posted on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website by Sarah Wheelan.

May bird walks in Laurier Woods with Dick Tafel.

Promotion of Citizen Science projects, such as Christmas Bird Count, Great Canadian Birdathon, Project FeederWatch, Nocturnal Owl Survey, Great Backyard Bird Count, SwiftWatch, Breeding Bird Survey, Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program, Canadian Lakes Loon Survey and Singing Woodcock Ground Survey. Thanks to all participants and organizers.

Promotion and support of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System.



2018 IN REVIEW





Nipissing Naturalists Club was very active in 2018 promoting the Club and the Motus station at various events, thanks primarily to Louise Simpson and Kaye Edmonds, as well as others who showed up for booth support at some of the events – Sarah Wheelan, Connie Sturge, Renee Levesque, Dick Tafel, Fred Pinto and Andrée Morneault. These events were, left to right, the Science Festival, Chippewa Creek EcoPath, Callander Funfest, Cranberry Day, and, not pictured, the Eco Fair and the Sustainability Fair. Photos by Kaye Edmonds, Vandela Edmonds and Sarah Wheelan.



The club's logo – calming and natural

By Christine Page

Editor's Note: The Annual General Meeting is a time when many are thanked and highlights over the years are emphasized. There are some things that after a time are simply taken for granted, like our wonderful logo. But it didn't just design itself. Someone had to design it and that person was Christine Page, former secretary of the Nipissing Naturalists Club. At Janis Reed's suggestion, I contacted Christine to ask her about the design. Her response is as follows:

In creating the current Nipissing Naturalists Club's logo, I wanted to focus on what the club represents: nature.

A simple design was important because a highly detailed logo when resized to a very small image would not be clear and crisp. I tried out various designs and tested them until I was satisfied with a simple and easily recognizable logo that lent itself to all sizes, large and small.

I chose mainly green and | blue for the logo because of the calming effect those colours, so prevalent in nature, instill. Nothing dramatic. Nothing flashy. Just natural.

I can't quite recall, but it is possible our hosting the 2005 Ontario Nature conference motivated the Club to come up with a logo, although the logo was in use on the Club's newsletters from early 2004.

Club members were invited to submit their designs. At one of the meetings, there was a PowerPoint presentation of the 4 or 5 submissions, after which there was a vote by ballot for the one that Club members wanted as their logo.

I was surprised and pleased at having my logo selected. And no... I didn't vote!



A photograph of a white snowshoe hare sitting in a snowy field. The hare is facing right, with its ears upright and its body slightly hunched. The background is a soft, out-of-focus snow-covered landscape.

A hare-raising discovery

Snowshoe Hare, Stephen O'Donnell

By Renee Levesque

It is not every day someone we know gets quoted in a *National Geographic* article. But Kevan Cowcill gets quoted in a recent “Animals Weird & Wild” article (January 11, 2019) entitled “Hares are cannibals and eat meat, surprising photos reveal” by Adam Popescu. While studying mammal populations in 2010 for MNR’s Multi-species Inventory and Monitoring Program with the Wildlife Assessment Unit, Kevan discovered that Snowshoe Hares are not exclusively herbivores.

Kevan had set up cans of sardines thinking he would probably see only animals like wolves, lynx, marten, fisher and other weasels eating the sardines. But what the trail camera also captured were Snowshoe Hares pulling sardines out of the cans.

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“They'd stand up on their hind legs and pull the sardines out of the can that was nailed to the tree... I've seen one at a carcass, but I assumed it was just gnawing on the bones as I've found numerous bones and antlers with gnaw marks from hares and from rodents. Maybe it was actually eating the meat too?”

Kevan's trail camera photos below show the hare in a sitting position, then standing on its hind legs and then finally pulling the sardines from the can.

To learn more about hares not only as fish-eaters, but also as meat-eaters and cannibals, you can read the entire article by Adam Popescu at:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2019/01/snowshoe-hares-carnivores-cannibals-photos-yukon/> in which he writes, “... when snow blankets the landscape and temperatures plunge..., hungry hares scavenge other hare carcasses, as well as several species of birds.... And, in an ironic twist on natural selection, hares also dine on dead lynx—their main predator.”



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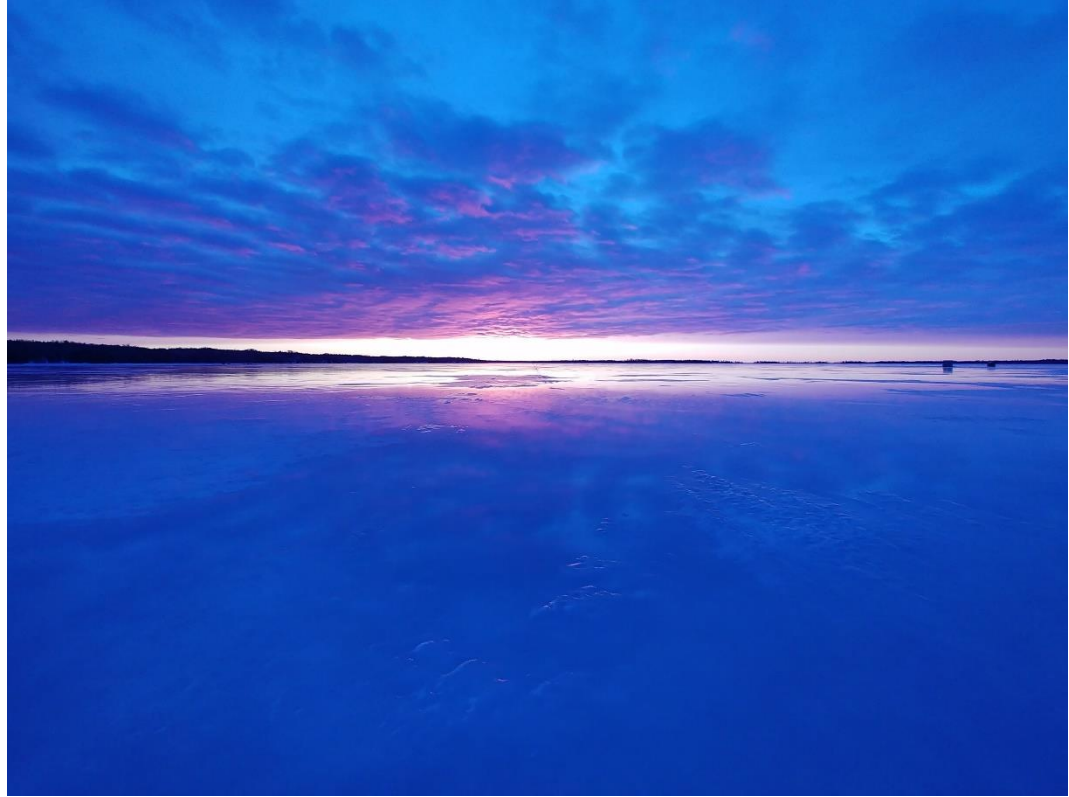
Runners-up in photo contest

They may have been runners-up, but their photos could just as easily have been winners!

Landscape: Rick Tripp.

Rick's amazing photo, for which he did not use a filter or undertook any post production work, is of Callander Bay looking west.

"It had rained heavily late in February, followed quickly by very cold weather. This series of events happens every few years and is amazing each time. The thick ice would have made a Zamboni driver jealous. It is probably a combination of the reflectance of the ice and the sky colour at the time that made the colours what they were."



To capture this photo, Rick used a LG V30 phone.

Fauna: Laura Turcotte.

Laura took the photo of the Great Blue Heron on Lake Nosbonsing using a D3100 Nikon camera with a 300 mm lens.

Not only did Laura luck out in that the Great Blue Heron stayed put, but also she saw it sitting on top of a tree – not often that happens.

"This heron was trying to stay cool with his beak open and was far too hot to be bothered to fly away. He stayed in the tree like that for more than thirty minutes while we floated by with two loud toddlers waving fishing rods in the boat. I was also surprised to get such a clear shot since no one in the boat would sit still."



Flora: Oriana Pokorny.

Oriana took this photo of a Painted Trillium (*Trillium undulatum*) on Cranberry Trail while she was out on one of those delightful spring walks on a very warm day.



“The trail has Painted, Red and Nodding Trilliums which is pretty special. Red Trilliums (sometimes called Stinking Johnnys) are very common around here, but Painted Trilliums are not - and Nodding Trilliums are even scarcer. So I was excited to see all three in a row!”

We had painted trilliums in the back woods of my house and every year with my Grandma, we used to go “spring flower hunting” to find the trilliums, Dutchman’s Britches and Spring Beauty, to name only three.”

Oriana took her photo with a Nikon Cool Pix.

People Enjoying Nature: Laura Turcotte.

Laura took this beautiful photo of Brent and their daughter, Victoria, on Grey’s Road while they were “off on an adventure to find insects and Victoria was going to help her Daddy catch them.”



“The photo conveys a growing relationship and a shared love of nature. Daddy is sharing his love of nature and opening Victoria’s eyes to the world around her.” There is absolutely no doubt that is exactly what Laura captured.

Laura again used a Nikon D3100 camera and a 300 mm lens.



Kaye Edmonds

When the Moon, Earth and Sun align

By Renee Levesque

On January 20, we were witness, if we were awake at the time and dared to go outside in the frigid cold, to a Super Blood Wolf Moon – such a poetic name conjuring up images of werewolves, second only to vampires in 20th century horror films.



During a lunar eclipse, the Earth is between the Sun and the Moon, cutting off the Moon's light supply from the Sun. This results in a reddish glow, hence the blood reference.

The lunar eclipse began in North Bay as a partial umbral eclipse at 10:33 p.m., with the total eclipse beginning at 11:41. Totality lasted an hour, until 12:43, after which the Earth's umbra or the darker central part of Earth's shadow began moving away from the Moon's surface until eventually at 1:50 a.m.

Kaye Edmonds

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the Moon was seen as its shining super self again.

The super reference comes from the Moon's proximity to Earth, resulting in our seeing it as a very bright shining jewel. The wolf reference traditionally comes from the First Nations' name for the first full Moon of January, a time when "*amid the bitter cold and deep snows of midwinter, the wolf packs howled hungrily*" outside their villages.

One person who did go out in the bitter cold to see and take photos of this event was Kaye Edmonds who bravely made her way to an even more frigid area, the waterfront, to do so! She reports there were at least four vehicles parked there, but unlike Kaye, the occupants of the vehicles stayed in their vehicles – or maybe they weren't even there to watch the eclipse! For those who didn't get to see this event, you can catch it again in twenty-two years, on May 26, 2021.



pixabay.com

However, there is another astronomical event this year. On November 11, 2019, we will see, if it is not snowing or cloudy, the Transit of Mercury when Mercury passes in front of the sun. We will see Mercury as a silhouette on the sun, much like the Transit of Venus which I saw on Christmas Hill in Victoria, B.C. on June 5, 2012. In the photo on the left, that very, very tiny black dot you see silhouetted on the sun is Venus.



Interesting finds

The Slaty-backed Gull

By Renee Levesque

On a sunny and mild late November morning, three members of Bird Wing, Dick Tafel, Lori Anderson and I, made our way to North Bay's landfill site, hoping to get some good views of the Arctic Gulls, the Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. We did see them, in fact quite a number of Glaucous Gulls, including an adult which we rarely see. But little did we expect to see a Slaty-backed Gull. Not that we knew it was a Slaty-backed at the time.

It was Dick who was the first to notice this unusual gull sitting nicely in the sun beside Dick's car just waiting for more garbage to be dumped. Initially we thought it might be a Lesser Black-backed until we saw its bright pink legs. (A Lesser Black-backed has yellow legs.) I was able to get a photo of it before it flew off (above) and I did not get to see it in such plain view again. In the end, we decided it might be a Greater Black-backed, although its smaller size and its extensively streaked head did not fit the bill.

When I got home, I looked up gulls in my field guides but was not able to confidently determine what type of gull it was and thought it might even be a hybrid. So I posted it on eBird under Great Black-backed, knowing someone would get in touch with me if it wasn't. And it wasn't long before two birders did, Bruce Di Labio from the Ottawa region and Rick Stronks from Algonquin Park. It was Bruce who finally confirmed its identity as a Slaty-backed Gull after consulting with Newfoundland birder Bruce Mactavish.

For about 10 days or so, the Slaty-backed stayed at the landfill site during the day, then made its way to the open water on Trout Lake in the late afternoon. As more severe winter conditions set in, off it went. Subsequent to this sighting, two were seen in Brantford in December and one at the Windsor-Essex landfill site in January.

I emailed Jeremy Bensette, known for his Ontario Big Year in 2017, about these sightings after he reported on Ontbirds the one at the Windsor-Essex landfill site. He replied: *"What a crazy year for sightings of this normally mega-rare species. There was also one less than an hour from Windsor in Michigan this winter! It appears to be a different individual from today's (the one at the Windsor-Essex landfill site) according to a friend who saw them both. It would be*



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interesting to compare some high resolution photos of each of these individuals to try to determine how many were in the region and which were unique individuals.”

It seems this is what happened and Jeremy reported back to me that “after a few emails with Brandon Holden, it sounds as if there were probably four different individual Slaty-backed Gulls in Ontario this winter! Brandon looked at open-wing photos of each and is pretty confident they are all different, though he thinks the one found in Michigan up until early January was likely the same one from North Bay. Pretty interesting!”

According to eBird, the one found in Michigan was first reported on December 24, 2018, and, as far as I am aware, last reported on January 3, 2019. It was seen by many birders during this timeframe on Grace Lake in Wayne County.

The Slaty-backed Gull is a large, stocky gull, with pink legs the colour of bubble gum and with an orange-red gonydeal spot on a yellow bill. In adults, the mantle is slate grey, darker than a Herring Gull's, but not as dark as a Great Black-backed Gull's. In breeding plumage, its head is white, but in winter plumage the adult has extensive dark smudging on its head and upper breast. Its most telling feature is the broad white trailing edge on its wing tips with a “string of pearls” pattern on the underside of the wings, very noticeable in flight or when its wings are extended. (photo at right)

The Slaty-backed is a resident of the coastlines of northeastern Asia and a regular summer visitor to western Alaska, although in small numbers. It has been seen as a rare stray in many locations in North America, and was seen in November 2016 by member David Rooke in Waterloo. David posted it on eBird in amongst some Herring Gulls, describing it as a small Great Black-backed until alerted by Brandon Holden that it was actually a Slaty-backed. This Slaty-backed stayed in Waterloo from November 28 until December 2, and then in January 2017, one was seen by Brandon in Niagara Falls and Thorold. It is believed it was the same one David saw in Waterloo. Brandon also saw one in Lambton in May 2017, the first record of one outside the November to January timeframe.

To get such a rare bird in North Bay was a treat and to have the North Bay landfill site personnel cooperate in allowing birders from near and far to see it at the landfill site was much appreciated.

Sources: Audubon Field Guide, eBird, and Ontario Birds, August 2018 issue.



Bruce Mactavish

Book Review

The Lost Art of Reading Nature's Signs:

By Tristan Gooley

The Experiment; Reprint Edition (July 31 2015)

416 pages, Paperback Edition

By Chris Connors

I used to ask my students which direction is the wind blowing today, which direction yesterday, what does the shift tell you about tomorrow's weather? Where will you see the Moon tonight? What is its movement across the sky? Where is it in relation to the Sun, and what will that tell you about its current phase? Was it cloudy last night or could you see the stars? Almost no one could answer the questions. This wasn't just a matter of failing to look up in the sky when going outside, but also indicated many of the students had spent the past decade and a bit not noticing patterns in weather and lunar cycles.

Adults with decades more life experience are not much better because not noticing becomes a habit. It is a habit that the author, Tristan Gooley, wants us to break.

He wants us to learn to use our senses to read the world and the natural signs around us as if we were reading street signs to navigate, advertisements to tell us about local attractions, and that bakery smell to find food. He wants us to hear what most people don't hear, to notice what most don't notice, to remember what most forget if they even notice in the first place. He wants us to build a large picture from the small.

Basically, he wants us to first notice, then deduct in a Holmesian way. As he says, "*There are limits to our powers of deduction, but they lie far beyond the place most of us imagine. In truth, we rarely focus our powers of deduction and prediction on the natural world. But that is about to change.*"

To help with this, he has written a book. He also has a website, www.naturalnavigator.com, and even has a TED talk on natural navigation, <https://www.naturalnavigator.com/news/2019/01/the-why-and-how-of-natural-navigation-tedx-calgary/>.

First, he lays the groundwork. He suggests drawing landscapes to help spot subtle landmarks that we may have overlooked, such as vegetation differences on north versus south slopes, glacial striations that can help us navigate even in fog, smooth rounded pebbles near a valley bottom that may indicate an area prone to flash floods (don't camp there). He has the "Get



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SORTED” method, with SORTED being an acronym for a series of steps to help us notice details and patterns.

The book has chapters on weather prediction and observation, astronomy, the Moon and Sun. There are sections on tracking and on using bird behaviour to inform us about our surroundings. These sections are basic and are meant as starting points.



Photo of author by Mark Richards, from Paul Kirtley's Blog

Other parts of the book are travelogue adventures as he treks through remote Borneo or Columbia, asking his guides how they navigate. They don't give directions using “left, right”, but more “upstream, downstream, uphill, downhill”. They build mental maps of the terrain to track their movements over long distances to know where they are in relation to the terrain they traversed days earlier.

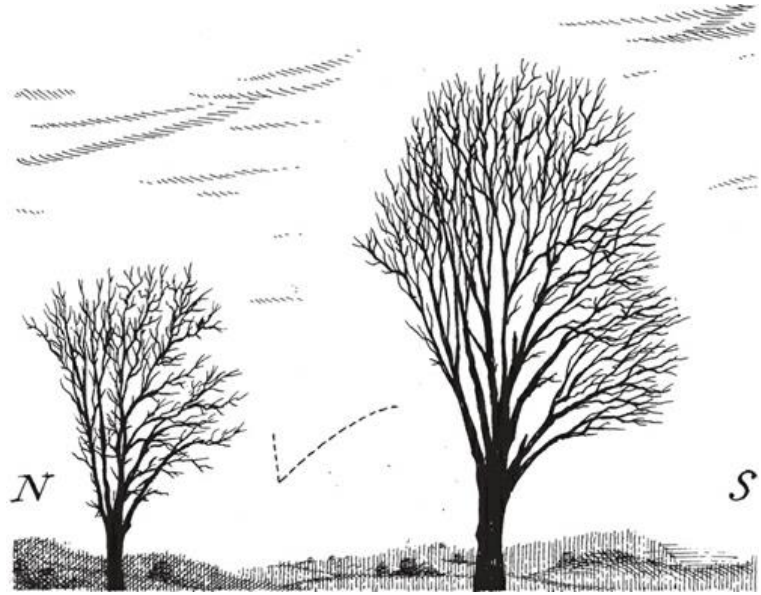
Most of his examples are taken from England, Scotland and Wales with their heavily managed fields that have been grazed by sheep for centuries, small woodlots, millennia of archaeological history and dense crowds of people tromping along footpaths on the moors. For example, telling directions while crossing farmers' fields based on the shape of small woodlands and heather growing darker on the side of the ditch that faces south; short grasses hiding among the long grasses that will tell us prevailing wind directions, while the long grasses tell us the wind direction over the past day or two.

Gooley provides other examples, some of which may be new to UK people, but are common knowledge for us. For example, alders and willows thrive in wet soil, beeches like dry soil,

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pinus like acidic soil, cattails indicate wet soils and deeper water, tree branches point away from prevailing winds (think of our iconic pines memorialized in Tom Thompson paintings), plants grow towards the light (see the figure from book at right), and how snow drifts can tell you wind direction. (I just finished shovelling those drifts so am quite aware, yet again, of what they tell me about wind direction.)

There are some universal bits of information. For example, we can learn how to tell the direction of travel of an animal through a distant field based on the reflection of grass. Everyone has noticed this reflection pattern from mown lawns or footsteps in the grass, but how many of us have taken the next step and considered what this information can tell us in other contexts?



All these examples, relevant or not, underscore the practical purpose of observation and deduction. One good example is the author found his way off the sides of a Canary Island volcano in the fog by noting that one lichen had a strong preference for the northwest side of dark lava rocks.

Using small cues like this, the author regularly challenges himself to cover long distances to a specific destination without traditional navigation aids like a map and compass. Given the British Isles penchant for cloud, rain and fog, he is forced to use navigation cues from small things that most people don't notice. Of course, this challenge isn't wise here – Gooley's cardinal rule is "*Don't be daft*" – because if we get lost here by "being daft", we are likely to find a near impenetrable swampy bush rather than a well-trodden footpath or a 500-year old rockpile fence that leads to one of hundreds of small villages where we can regain our bearings while having a refreshing spot of tea.

Even if you find nothing in the book that is new or relevant for our area, the message repeated throughout the book is to observe, note, deduct, test and conclude. Find what is relevant where we live, discover what it can tell us about navigation, sources of water, wind, weather, animal use, history and soil types. We are challenged to find novel connections by observation and deduction.

At the end of the book, there are Appendices with a potpourri of tips and tricks, like measuring widths, heights, distances and angles.

I found the book a delightful, engaging read. It is a book that will spark our imagination and open our eyes to new possibilities, even if we know all the material and have been practicing our observation, pattern recognition and deduction skills for ages. It will still make us look a bit more closely at something we thought we already knew well - and when we do, we will see something new.



You ain't nothin' but a groundhog

Text and photos by Renee Levesque

Canada's famous groundhog, Wiarton Willie, did not see his shadow when he popped out of his burrow on February 2, meaning we will have an early spring! Good news for those of us whose roofs can't hold much more snow. The other famous North American groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, from Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, also predicts an early spring, but not Canada's other well-known groundhog, Shubenacadie Sam, from Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. Sam didn't even want to come out of his burrow, but when he finally did, it was determined his shadow would have been seen had he ventured further from his hole.

Groundhog Day coincides with Candlemas, a Christian celebration that occurs on February 2, a period between the December solstice and the March equinox, winter's halfway point in the Northern Hemisphere. In Europe long ago, particularly in those areas of Europe that were German-speaking, it was the badger that predicted the coming of spring. This tradition was brought over to Pennsylvania, with the groundhog replacing the badger, and Groundhog Day was officially adopted in 1887. It didn't become popular in Canada until 1956 with the emergence of Wiarton Willie. As his fame grew, so did Wiarton's Groundhog Day festivities, until Wiarton Willie became a household name.

The groundhog is a member of the rodent family, a type of rodent known as a marmot, and is closely related to the squirrel. It is sort of a giant squirrel if you will. Although normally seen on the ground, it can climb trees and is a capable swimmer.

How accurate is our rodent meteorologist at predicting the weather? Well, he is right 37% of the time. Not great, but not too bad considering he is but a groundhog.



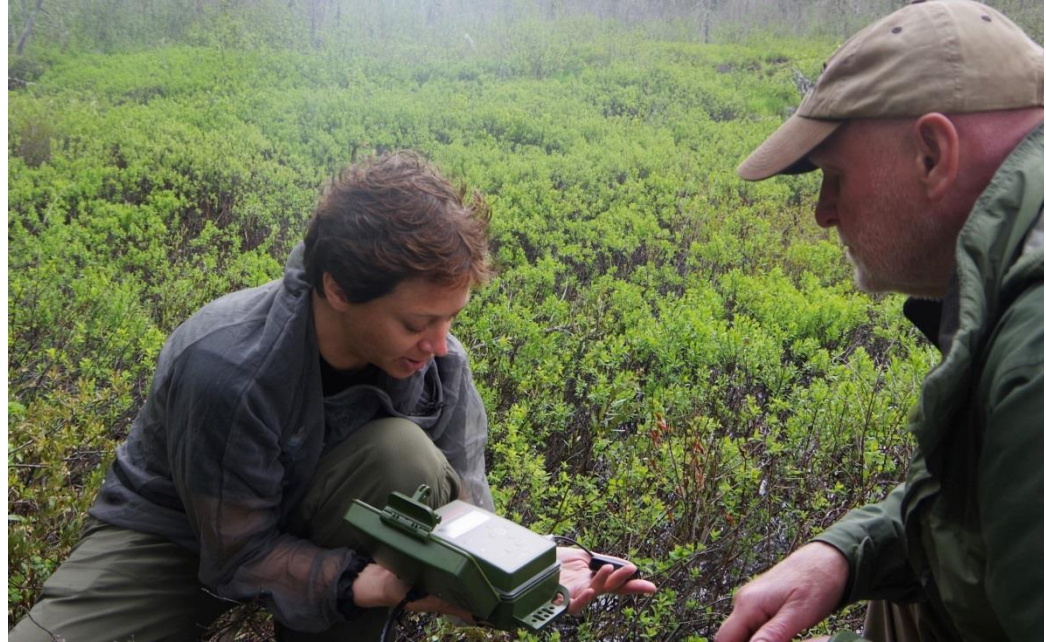
Celebrating a Northern legacy

By Lisa Richardson

Editor's Note: This article by Lisa Richardson appears in Ontario Nature's

magazine, ON nature, winter 2018, in a regular article entitled "Our Member Groups".

Permission to reprint it in The Woodland Observer was given by John Hassell, Director of Communications and Engagement and Editor of ON nature. You can read this article online, as well as many other interesting articles, at: <https://view.publitas.com/on-nature/winter-2018>.



Nipissing Naturalists Club (NNC) has created a festival to celebrate the legacy of a local author and naturalist. The group established the North Bay-based Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival in 2014 to honour its namesake's lifelong dedication to exploring and documenting the region's natural environment.

The event, held every August in Laurier Woods Conservation Area, features hands-on activities for participants of all ages and is run jointly with the Friends of Laurier Woods and the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority. In 2016, NNC also raised \$5,000 toward the cost of installing an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque at Pimisi Bay, just west of Mattawa, that honours de Kiriline Lawrence's many accomplishments.

NNC was formed in 1976 to explore the natural history of North Bay and boost public interest in, and understanding of, the area. The group contributes to the protection of Ontario's species and habitats by engaging local residents in its citizen science programs and helping biologists monitor at-risk wildlife.

For example, in June several NNC members helped install stationary acoustic recorders to monitor bat populations in and around North Bay. The work was part of the North American Bat Monitoring Program run by the U.S. Geological Survey. This was the third consecutive year that members of the group contributed to the program.

NNC also surveys local bird populations as a part of its Bird Wing program. Most of the surveys take place between April and July, and all the data participants collect is submitted to external monitoring programs, including Bird Studies Canada's Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program, SwiftWatch and Nocturnal Owl Survey, and the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

The photo above by Fred Pinto, the one used in the On nature article, shows Sarah Wheelan and Karl Dittman helping to install recorders to monitor bats.

Ontario Nature conservation award nominations

Ontario Nature recognizes excellence by honouring individuals, groups, government agencies and corporations who have worked towards protecting nature in Ontario. Eleven awards are presented to recognize this excellence. Click on the link below for information about these awards. If someone you know in our area is deserving of a nomination, please nominate that person or group. <https://ontarionature.org/take-action/conservation-awards/>.

On this site, you can also read the rules on who can nominate whom, but basically it is: Non-Ontario Nature members or groups must be nominated by two current Ontario Nature members or one Ontario Nature member group; and Ontario Nature members must be nominated by two people who can be either members or non-members or nominated by one member group. A group which is a member of Ontario Nature can nominate itself.

An individual or an organization can be nominated for more than one award, but each nomination must be submitted on a separate official form which can be found at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScfNo1kQ9_5TiFmKL72fV-3JIOMR3B6sNbCFO5JbaIBmQg4ug/viewform

Please make sure you read the rules carefully. If you have any questions or need help, you can contact Anna Dipple, Executive Assistant, Ontario Nature, at annad@ontarionature.org or at 1-800-440-2366 ext. 271.

Nomination deadline is March 25, 2019; winners are notified on May 3, 2019; the awards ceremony is in Hamilton at Mohawk College on June 1, 2019; and award winners are published in *ON nature*, Autumn 2019 issue.

Beverley Kingdon, a member of Nipissing Naturalists Club, was the recipient of the 2016 J.R. Dymond Public Service Award for her work in reintroducing the Trumpeter Swan to Ontario. Bev is pictured at right with former Nipissing Naturalists Club president, Angela Martin.



Emails to the editor

I received one photo (right) of a squirrel on Squirrel Appreciation Day, January 21, and that was from Steve Pitt. Steve reports, “*I had a squirrel and a Pileated*



doing a square dance around a White Pine trunk today. I suspect one of them was trying to raid the other one's peanut stash.” Doesn't seem as if the Pileated is bothered in the least by the squirrel.

Another email came in September from a donor to the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, Mati Sauks, about Blanding's Turtles. This is an adjunct to Paul Smylie's article on turtles in December and January's issues. Mati reports that in late September, “*three*

Blanding's Turtle hatchlings appeared at my front door – literally! Looks as if the eggs had been laid in the sand under my front deck (which is partially on granite). One of the hatchlings was attacked and unfortunately died. I released the other two into the woods in a safe, wet area.”

The photo at left shows a Blanding's Turtle being rescued from the highway by Dick Tafel.



Your Board of Directors

The two new Directors for 2019 are Katie Tripp and Rick Tripp. Rick will be featured in March's issue.

Katie Tripp:

Katie was born and raised in North Bay and Callander. She has a great love for Northern Ontario, nature and outdoor sporting activities. Her love of nature and the outdoors began when she was young and her family took her on canoe trips in Ontario's provincial parks.

This love for nature and the outdoors led Katie to pursue environmental studies. She is in her second year at Nipissing University where she is taking her B.Sc. in Environment and Physical Geography.

Katie was fortunate enough to spend the last three summers working outdoors. She worked for two summers as a Stewardship Youth Ranger, one summer at the North Bay District MNRF office and one summer at Temagami's Finlayson Point Provincial Park. These summer jobs opened up many horizons for Katie as she was given the opportunity to participate in many projects within the MNRF and the communities in which she worked.

This past summer, Katie worked in Quetico Provincial Park, near Thunder Bay. She started this summer job as an backcountry portage maintenance student and then moved on to work as a biology intern for Quetico Foundation, collecting data while canoe tripping throughout the park. These summer positions further increased Katie's knowledge of and love for the environment.

Katie enjoys spending time outside doing any type of outdoor recreation - downhill and Nordic skiing, hiking, paddling, canoe tripping, biking and swimming. She shares her love of sport by coaching swimming and cross-country skiing.



Courtesy of Katie Tripp

Upcoming events

Winter hike

The third winter hike of the season **for members only** takes place on **Sunday, February 10, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.**, at Lori and Janis Reed's 26-acre property, **117 Hart Road, Callander.**

Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the former Sears parking lot for carpooling. Carpooling is recommended because parking is limited to 4 vehicles in the parking area, although there is parking in the long driveway – first in, last out. Parking on the road is not recommended.

This is a snowshoe hike on a 1.3 km easy loop trail through mixed forest. You can also venture off the trail within the property.

Details of further winter hikes will be provided by Fred Pinto.

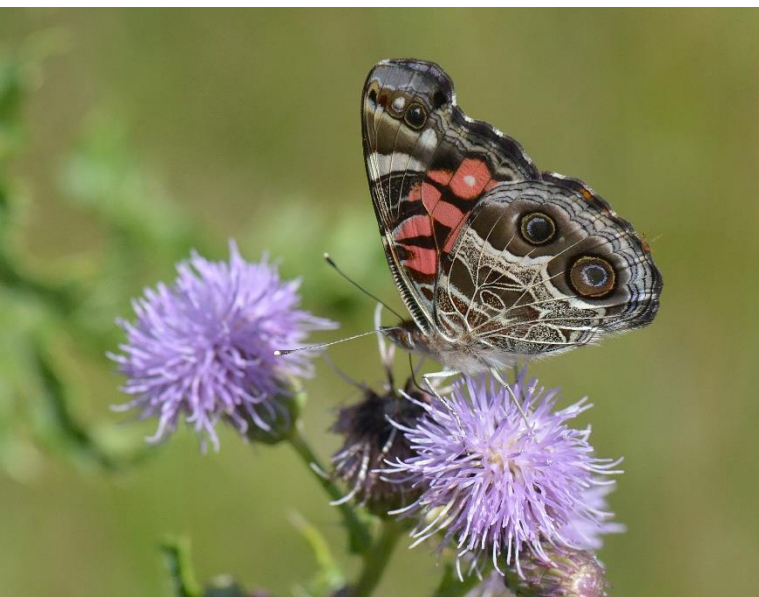
The butterfly as pollinator Seed Exchange and Eco Fair

The North Bay Seed Exchange and Eco Fair 2019 will be held on **Sunday, February 24, from 12:30 to 4:00 p.m. at St. Andrews United Church**, corner of Cassells Street and Algonquin Avenue.

Admission is a non-perishable food item.



Daniel Kaminski



Mark Olivier

This year the Eco Fair is celebrating the butterfly as pollinator. In addition to a seed exchange, there will be workshops, vendors, food, music and family fun.

Nipissing Naturalists Club will have a booth at the Eco Fair. Riley Cormier will be looking after the booth and Brent Turcotte will be conducting a PowerPoint demonstration on butterflies and moths.

Our February speaker: Field surveys and protection of species



Courtesy of April McCrum

Club meetings are held the **second Tuesday of every month**, from September to December and from February to June, **starting at 7:00 p.m., at 176 Lakeshore Drive**, the northeast corner of Lakeshore and Gertrude in the former Tweedsmuir Public School.

On February 12, our speaker is April McCrum who has a background in Biology and Environmental Technology. She has worked in the environmental field for nearly 14 years, 8 of those in the environmental consulting industry. She has done construction monitoring; has completed surveys for species at risk, for fish and for a variety of wildlife; and has undertaken surveys that determine natural heritage features.

April will talk about the protection of species during construction activities; about various field surveys she has conducted; and fish and turtle salvages in the North Bay and Sudbury areas.

April currently works as an Ecologist at AECOM, a multinational engineering firm.

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER



Board of Directors, 2018

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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/>.

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/>. **Editor:** Renee Levesque: rlevesque1948@gmail.com.

Contributors this issue: Katherine Byers, Christine Chatelaine, Kevan Cowcill, Jason Demeester, Kaye Edmonds, Vandela Edmonds, Daniel Kaminski, Renee Levesque, April McCrum, Stephen O'Donnell, Marc Olivier, Christine Page, Fred Pinto, Steve Pitt, Oriana Pokorny, Mati Sauks, Gary Sturge, Katie Tripp, Rick Tripp, Laura Turcotte and Sarah Wheelan.

Special thanks to John Hassell, editor, *ON nature*, for permission to reprint the article by Lisa Richardson, Ontario Nature, and to Noah Cole, Ontario Nature, for his photo of Bev Kingdon and Angela Martin. Also special thanks to Bruce Mactavish for permission to use his photo of the Slaty-backed Gull in flight, from his Newfoundland birding blog:

<http://brucemactavish1.blogspot.com/>.

Membership Fees

Annual Nipissing Naturalists Club membership fees are: single \$20.00 and 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, Bird Wing meetings from February through to April will be held at Laporte's Nursery, 1054 Lakeshore Drive, North Bay.



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