THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

MAY 2019

NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

From the editor:

Stewardship of our natural lands

As I write this on the first day of May, it does not feel like May, but by the time you get this newsletter, surely it will feel more like spring. Over the last weekend in April, I took part in Bird Wing's monthly Bird Bash and it was very chilly by Lake Nipissing, especially at Cache Bay on the Saturday when full winter gear was required to stay warm, and even on North Bay's waterfront on the sunny Sunday. You can see our "snowberg" on icy Lake Nipissing in the photo below.

Renee Levesque

Birds do figure prominently these days what with spring migration in full force. We are waiting now for the wood warblers to return and there may be some that can be seen when Dick Tafel conducts the guided Laurier Woods bird walks this year, **starting May 4,** and continuing every Saturday at 9:00 a.m. throughout May. Details inside.

Peter Ferris writes about his canoe trip with his dog, Sarge, on the Hart River in Yukon's Peel River Watershed – a remote and pristine wilderness, a wilderness in which Peter did not encounter a single person or a single piece of garbage.

If we put our minds to it, we too can have a city free of discarded garbage. Mel Alkins is asking us to take part in a three-day clean-up of our City during May. Details inside.

The book review this month is on Nate Blakeslee's book, *The Wolf,* a thought-provoking look at Yellowstone's wolf recovery program, with a focus on the world-famous wolf, O-Six.

There is another animal story in this issue, this one a humorous and light-hearted look at three deer and one fox that recently visited Steve Pitt's bird feeder and what occurred when they met head-on!

On May 25, Lori Beckerton will be leading a plant/wildflower walk in Laurier Woods. Details of that walk and others are on the Laurier Woods website at http://www.laurierwoods.com/. By then the beautiful Red Trillium that graces this month's cover should be in bloom. I took that photo many

years ago at High Rock Lookout Park in Sundridge where so many trilliums bloom each year in spring.

Mel Alkins is also asking members to take part in helping create a pollinator garden on North Bay's waterfront, a garden to attract butterflies and bees and other pollinators. Details inside, as well as Brent Turcotte's short article about his presentation on butterflies and moths as pollinators at the Eco Fair and Seed Exchange this past winter.

Flowers and shrubs are not the only thing to be planted this spring. Trees will also be planted. Tree planting off Hwy 11 North, near Sand Dam Road, will take place May 25. Details inside. I think of planting trees, like planting gardens, as hope for the future. Ralph Waldo Emerson, American philosopher and poet: "The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

There are many surveys, watches and counts that take place in the spring and they are listed inside, as well as articles on the importance of taking part in SwiftWatch and helping out with bat monitoring.

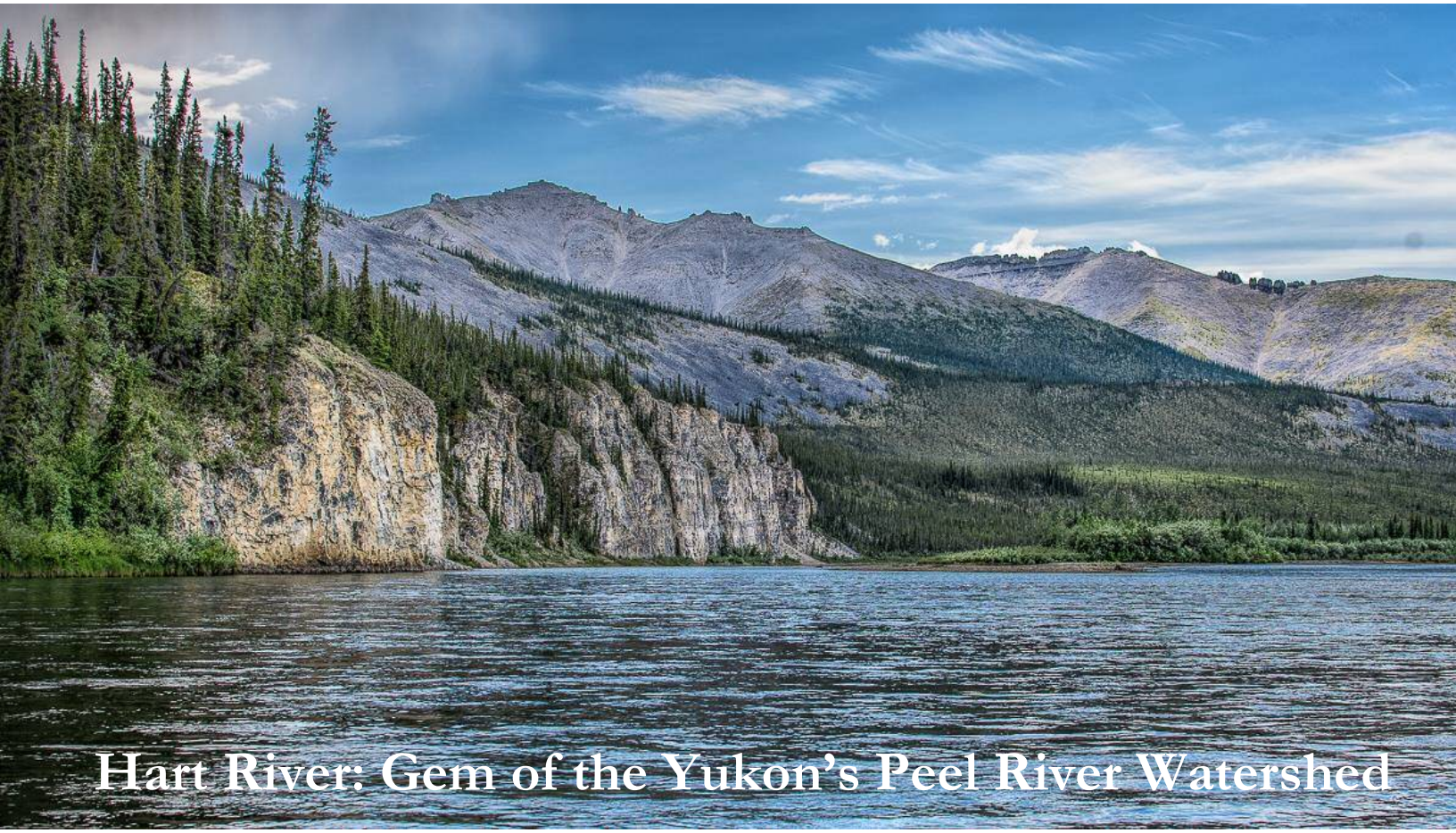
This month the article I chose from a past newsletter is by former club president, Ted Price, who writes about an outing in 2001 to the McConnell Lakes area. I chose this article because it connects with bat monitoring that takes place in that area and with tree planting.

In May, there is also Ontario Nature's Northern Gathering with the theme, Hope for Changing Times, to take place in Sudbury with Sudbury Naturalist Club acting as hosts. Details and agenda are inside. I spent a few of my early years growing up in a mining community north of Elliot Lake. I remember so well how black and barren Sudbury was then and there is not a time I travel to Sudbury today that I am not amazed at the re-greening and transformation. What better place than Sudbury to emphasize this year's theme.

And in keeping with that theme, the speaker at our meeting in May is Rachel Sturge, Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Toronto. Rachel, a member of our Club, will talk about the role of bird monitoring strategies in avian conservation, strategies that are used to help us determine, plan and manage conservation priorities, moving us towards Stewardship of our natural lands and in so doing, effecting real change.

Renee Levesque, editor
rlevesque1948@gmail.com

Jocko Point in late April, Renee Levesque



Hart River: Gem of the Yukon's Peel River Watershed

Text and photos by Peter Ferris

In late June 2018, my nine-month-old German Shepherd, Sarge, and I set out for the Yukon to canoe the remote Hart River in the Peel River Watershed. After a five-day drive and some exploring along the way, we arrived in Whitehorse where we spent two days getting organized and experiencing the special charm that is palpable in the Yukon's capital city. We then drove four hours north to the small village of Mayo where I chartered a floatplane to fly us over the Mackenzie Mountains to Elliott Lake, the starting point of our trip.

After making camp on Elliott Lake for one night, we started downstream on Elliott Creek for approximately 27 kms to the Hart River. The creek was very shallow at some points and I had to wade the canoe for a number of kilometres. I hoped that Sarge would follow along the shore, but he insisted on wading the creek with me. When I noticed one of his paws was cut and looking a bit raw, I decided to slow down so as not to aggravate his condition. We took three days to follow the creek to the Hart, stopping along the way to explore.

The Peel River Watershed is a remote and pristine area, free of any significant development. It includes a number of other major rivers that flow into the Peel River – Rat, Snake, Bonnet Plume, Ogilvie, Blackstone and Wind Rivers – which joins the Mackenzie River in the Mackenzie Delta.

The Peel Watershed is located at the tip of the North American Cordillera and covers an area roughly the size of Scotland (77,000 square kilometers). The terrain is quite mountainous and features the Ogilvie, Richardson, Mackenzie, Wernecke, Canyon, Knorr and Rackla Mountain Ranges.

In 2011, after years of land-use planning, an independent commission came up with a recommended land-use plan that would have protected 80% of the Peel Watershed. However, in 2012 the Yukon government rejected that plan and offered its own plan to protect only 30% of the watershed. In response, the Yukon First Nations, as well as environmental groups, argued before the courts that the government had breached its treaty obligations under the Yukon UFA (Umbrella Final Agreement), an agreement that stipulated a collaborative process for land-use planning. In December 2017, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favor of the Yukon First Nations. Today, the Yukon Government and the First Nations are working toward approval and implementation of a final land-use plan for the watershed.

I find it difficult to describe the Hart for this truly is a river and region whose wildness and pristine beauty overwhelm one's senses. It has been the one canoe journey during which I did not see a single piece of garbage or any visible sign of human presence, with the exception of a single Native hunt cache. I cannot do better than to quote from *Wild Rivers of the Yukon's Peel Watershed* by Juri Peepre and Sarah Locke:

In a constellation of superb Yukon wild rivers, the Hart is among the very finest. From sinuous and slow moving wetland channels to frothy white waters under lofty ramparts, the Hart is a river of infinite variety and surprise, battalions of gendarmes guard the mountain flanks, while in the valley below, multiple rows of shale ledges cleave the waters. The Hart is wild and remote, sometimes strenuous and always inspiring.

Over the years, the Hart River had become my river of dreams, filling me with a powerful yearning to experience its remoteness and secrets.

Overall, the Hart is a class 2, with a number of class 2+ and 3+ rapids. Bedrock ledges form most of the difficult rapids, while sections of the river featured frequent tight turns, very fast currents and numerous sweepers (*fallen trees that are partially or completely blocking passage on a body of water).* I managed to successfully run all the rapids on the Hart, though heavy rains significantly increased the river's volume and the last rapid nearly swamped my canoe. I had to gently nurse to shore an unstable boat full of water to empty and reload it.

As with any other canoe journey, there were unpredictable challenges. One of those challenges was trying to discourage my puppy from playing in the river and possibly being swept downstream by the heavy currents. At a few campsites, I leashed him to be sure that didn't happen.

On one occasion, following heavy rains, I noticed the river was rising very rapidly and threatening to drown the campsite I had made on a gravel bar. Fearing the worst, I broke camp at about 1:00 a.m. and under the Yukon's midnight sun, paddled several kilometers downstream and set up camp on higher ground.

Another challenging event involved navigating some extremely tight turns in very fast water and being pulled into a sweeper. (*The danger is being swept into the maze of branches by the current and becoming trapped*.) Luckily, I was able to go under the obstacle, although barely, and the only damage was a lost paddle which I later recovered.

Along the route, I encountered much wildlife, including Black Bear, moose, eagles, Osprey, Canada Geese, several species of ducks, including Surf Scoters and mergansers. Unfortunately, while the Yukon is home to one quarter of the world's Grizzly population, I was not blessed with any sightings. My camera was always at the ready, however, just in case. While I don't usually carry a firearm on my trips, I did bring one with me on this journey, again just in case.

While paddling the Hart, I thought often of the First Nation peoples who for many thousands of years travelled and lived on this land, adapting their lives to the habits of the animals on which they depended, and making virtually everything they needed from natural materials, including numerous parts of the caribou, a primary food source. Today, these same indigenous peoples who continue to make a living from the land are the leaders in advocating for the protection of their ancient homeland.

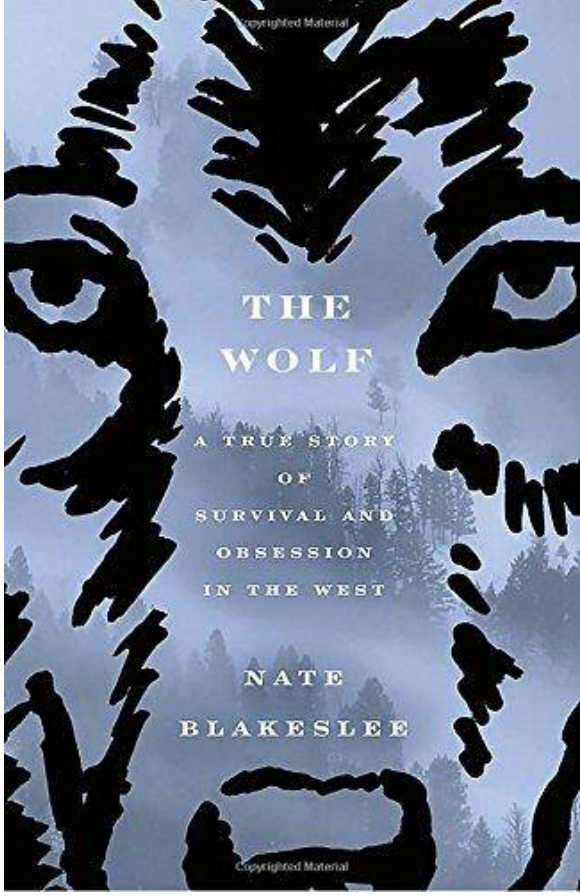
On the final section of the Hart, before it enters the Peel River, the land starts to change as mountains give way to plains. Once on the Peel, I had my work cut out for me because I had to paddle, portage and line several very difficult sections of the river, characterized by powerful currents, big ledges, holes and chutes that offered exhilarating, but challenging, whitewater canoeing.

After approximately 18 kms on the Peel, I took-out *(ended my trip)* above the virtually unnavigable Aberdeen Canyon and called for a pick-up. I had the option of taking an 8-km portage around the canyon and continuing downriver, but that will have to be a trip for another time.

From all that I have read and seen, The Peel Watershed is a pristine environment that deserves to be protected for present and future generations to experience its splendour. It remains a healthy and intact ecosystem where wolves and wolverines are still common and caribou and moose still provide sustenance to First Nation peoples.

I plan to experience more of the area by canoeing another of the watershed's rivers this summer before joining my brother, sister-in-law and three others in Fort Simpson to canoe the Broken Skull and Nahanni Rivers in the Northwest Territories.

Book Review



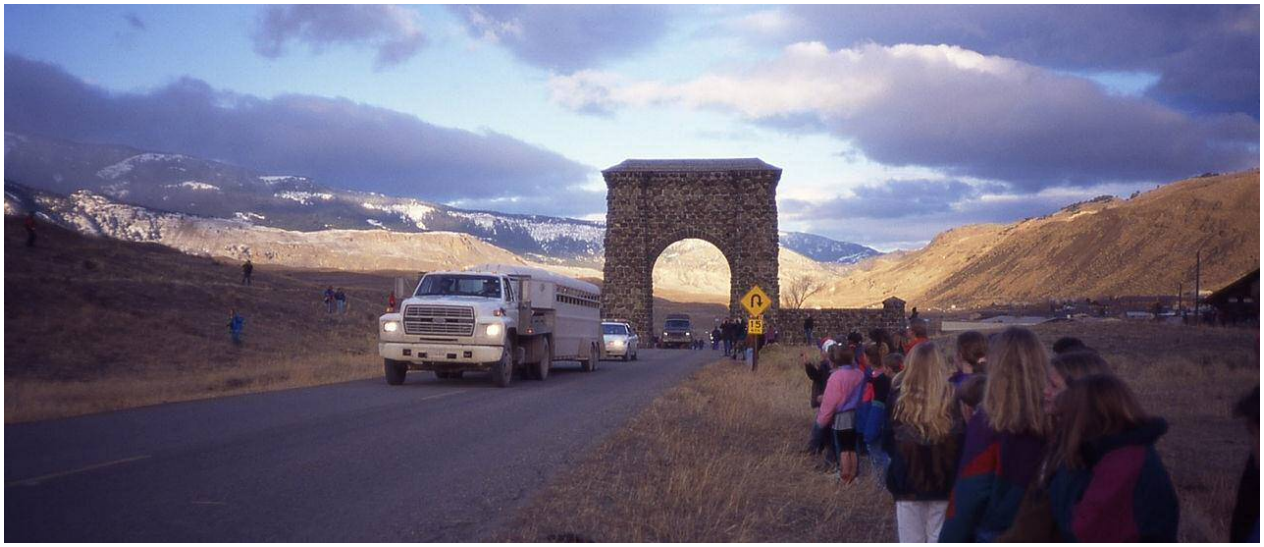
The Wolf: A True Story Of Survival And Obsession In The West
By Nate Blakeslee
Random House of Canada
Oct. 17, 2017
304 pages

By Allison B

I received the book, *The Wolf: A True Story Of Survival And Obsession In The West*, last Christmas from a family member who thought I might enjoy it given my interest in the history of game and predator management in North America. As an undergraduate student at the University of Guelph, I spent a period of time researching the history of wolf populations in Algonquin Park and Isle Royale National Park, and so this book, which focuses on one of the more high-profile wolf management cases in North America, aligns with my interests.

Long considered to be one of the more polarizing issues within the world of natural resources management, predator re-introduction is the central theme of this detailed and engaging book by author Nate Blakeslee, a book he describes as a "non-fiction book that reads like a novel in which many of the main characters are wolves". In doing so, Blakeslee, a native Texan who spent a number of years in the northern Rockies, has crafted a thought-provoking summary of the Yellowstone wolf recovery story.

For those who may be unfamiliar with this case study, the American government reintroduced wolves from Alberta to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in 1995, after their widespread decline in the US in the 1920s, by the end of which, Gray Wolves had been hunted to eradication. *(Photo below shows the first wolves being taken into Yellowstone in January 1995.)*



Diane Papineau, National Park Service

This eradication of wolves, not only in Yellowstone, but in the lower 48 states had resulted in a number of severe and unexpected consequences to the landscape. Government biologists believed that re-establishing natural predation on the fluctuating prey populations might stabilize the ecosystem and provide for sustainable management moving forward. This decision was, and remains, one of great contention, as both pro-wolf and anti-wolf parties continue to dispute, right up to the Supreme Court, the value of this reintroduction.

Dan Stahler, National Park Service

Stitching together the relevant human narratives, past and present, of the Yellowstone wolf story, Blakeslee artfully balances the experiences and emotions of those at the forefront of this decision. He does an excellent job of fairly recounting the vastly different perspectives of the people who are part of this story. For example, throughout the book, he documents the experiences of the people who live in the communities surrounding Yellowstone, including hunters, ranchers and outfitters whose lives and livelihoods are immediately impacted by the re-establishment of this predator on the landscape.

Blakeslee also commits time to describe the scientific dedication of the biologists and park rangers in Yellowstone, past and present, whose careers involved endless hours of field research to support the reintroduction project and to monitor its impacts. Finally, he presents the viewpoints of conservationists and tourists who have flocked to the park in annually increasing numbers since the wolves have returned.

In between his recounting of the social and political events that form this story, Blakeslee chronicles the personal histories of the wolves themselves. Relying on field notes from lifelong wolf observers, Rick McIntyre and Laurie Lyman, the author tells stories of the rise and fall of Yellowstone's packs.

Without sparing any of the more savage details, he recounts the adventures of these animals as they fight to establish themselves within a harsh landscape. He focuses particularly on O-Six (seen in photo below and top right on previous page), a charismatic and intrepid female whose unlikely survival and rise to alpha status lead her to become a legend among wolf enthusiasts.

In summary, Blakeslee does an effective job of walking his audience through a large body of content that provides a detailed recounting of the social and political components of a complex case study. His use of stories and voices of real people keeps the narrative flowing and provides the reader with a variety of perspectives. The author also infuses drama by using the wolves themselves to tell their story, lending a unique quality to the narrative and a continuous reminder of the wildness of the northern Rockies.

Editor's Note: *O-Six, the most famous wolf in the world, was shot in 2012 outside the protected boundaries of Yellowstone National Park. She was shot by a hunter in Wyoming during the first legal hunt after the US government lifted the Endangered Species Act protecting Gray Wolves in that state. Her death caused an international outcry. There are many websites devoted to O-Six and the wolves of Yellowstone National Park.*

O-Six was an alpha female named by wolf-watchers after the year of her birth. She was an especially handsome wolf, "a benevolent matriarch and attentive mother", larger than most females, and one that could take down prey on her own.

"After she was shot, the rest of the wolf pack came out of the woods and circled their fallen leader. And then they began to howl." (Nate Blakeslee, CBC Radio interview.)

Guided bird walks in Laurier Woods

On Saturday mornings, from 9 to 11 a.m., May 4 to May 25 inclusive, you can enjoy bird watching walks in Laurier Woods with Dick Tafel.

May is the prime time to see wood warblers and you are bound to see plenty of them in Laurier Woods. Warblers are colourful, active birds, smaller than sparrows, with thin needle-pointed bills. Most have some yellow in their plumage, like the male Cape May Warbler in the photo below on the right, with its bright yellow collar, distinctive chestnut cheek patch and black streaks on its yellow breast and down its flanks. But some warblers don't have yellow in their plumage, like the male American Redstart in the photo below on the left with its dramatic orange patches that contrast with its coal-black coat.

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

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

From 2001: Field trip to the McConnell Lakes area

Editor's Note: This article written by Ted Price appeared in the 2001 May issue of The Woodland Observer. It is about a field trip taken on April 26 by the local Citizens' Committee of the Ministry of Natural Resources. It has been edited to fit the format of this newsletter and photos have been added.

The group met at the MNR where they split into two groups, one group heading out by van to the McConnell Lakes area, and the other group, arriving by helicopter from which they had a bird's-eye view of the area. The guide for the forest stand tours was Ian Kovacs.

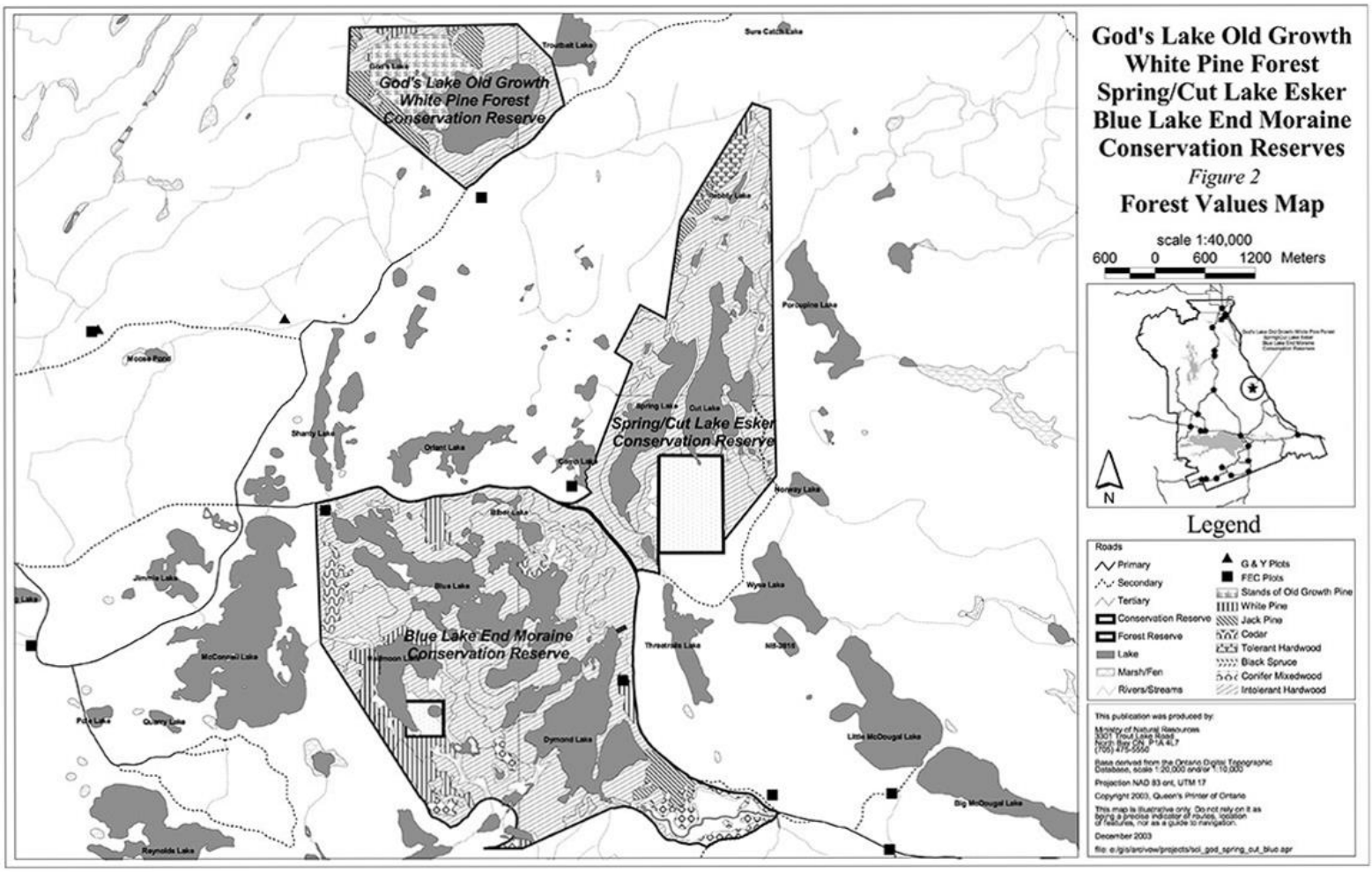
By Ted Price

Renee Levesque

Near McConnell Lake, we checked out a forest stand that had been scheduled to be clear-cut in 1999. However, when the loggers arrived, they found so many White, Red and Jack Pine that they changed their strategy. Instead, the White Birch and poplar were cut and the pine was left to seed, allowing this stand to revert back to its original pine.

We then visited another area slated for selective cutting this year and next. The trees to be cut had been marked with yellow paint. Ian explained how the markers left the best trees unmarked to allow them to seed the area for better production in the years to come. Ian also showed us an area that had been clear-cut and planted with Red Pine in 1998.

From all appearances, the young trees were thriving, reaching a height of two to three feet, although there was much competition from poplars.



It was then on to the old Junior Ranger Camp on McConnell Lake for lunch where we were joined by the second group which had arrived by helicopter. After lunch, the group which had arrived by van boarded the helicopter that was parked a short distance from the camp in an open area near the shore of McConnell Lake. There were six of us on board, including the pilot.

It was a very gusty day and those of us in the helicopter certainly felt it! But our pilot proved more than equal to the challenge. He flew us over the area we had seen in the morning and then showed us several points of interest: an extensive peatland, a large White Birch stand, the Little and Big Jocko Rivers, an end moraine, an esker, an old growth White Pine forest and an area that had just been harvested.

Although the ride was rough, we survived it with no ill effects. The only unfortunate thing was that the conditions in the 'copter were not conducive to taking photos from the air.

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Quick Draw Red and the Whitetail Gang: A true story

Text and photos by Steve Pitt

If you have bird feeders, you will know that not just birds take advantage of your hospitality. Over the years I have seen mice, voles, chipmunks, squirrels, raccoons, my neighbour's collie and a herd of White-tailed Deer sampling the assorted goodies I leave out. As beautiful as the deer are, they can be a bit of a nuisance. Not only do they occasionally break the feeders, but they bully the birds, other beasts and even each other.

On Thursday, April 11, the White-tails finally met their match! It started with yet another new face at the feeder, a lone Red Fox. Anticipating the pending return of black birds and ducks, I had put down a screen tray of mixed seed for birds that prefer ground foraging. Maybe the fox dropped in looking for a duck dinner, but finding none, it settled for seed.

The fox was just starting its meal when the usual gang of White-tails arrived looking for their daily power lunch. The resulting stand-off reminded me of an old Gary Cooper movie. The deer stood in a row looking down at the fox as if they could not believe that an interloper was gobbling up their bird seed. The fox barely looked up from the tray.

The biggest White-tail stamped its foot. The fox kept eating. The White-tail then stepped closer and stamped its foot again. Still the fox kept eating. The White-tail then stepped up to the edge of the tray, lowered its head and wagged its tail repeatedly like a battle flag. Still no reaction from the fox.

The White-tail then lowered its head to the edge of the tray and stared the fox directly in the eye. The fox stopped eating for a moment, burped in the deer's face (cross my heart), and resumed eating. Two of the White-tail gang then closed in on either side to support their leader. The fox finally raised its head. I checked my watch. It was High Noon.

The fox drew first, discharging a single loud "Yip!" from the hip and the deer scattered. For the next ten minutes, they lingered indignantly at the tree line watching the fox leisurely finish its lunch. Then Quick Draw Red slowly turned and walked off into the west, while somewhere Tex Ritter was singing.

Michael Arthurs

Interesting early spring find: Long-tailed duck

By Renee Levesque

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*): On Saturday of the Easter weekend, Kaye Edmonds went birding in Calvin Township and because it was such a nice day, she stopped at Smith Lake off Hwy 630 to have a picnic lunch. She was peacefully sitting there eating her sandwich when what to her wondering eyes should appear through a small bit of open water near the shore, but a Long-tailed Duck! Kaye threw her sandwich down, grabbed her camera and later posted her sighting on eBird. (Kaye's photo is below.) As a result of her posting, some of us headed out to Smith Lake a couple of days later and there it was, probably in the very same spot where Kaye saw it.

Kaye Edmonds

Usually we see two or three Long-tailed Ducks by King's Wharf/ the Government Dock in late November or early December. But with the freezing of Lake Nipissing very early last year, they did not come to their usual spot, although some of us were lucky to see a couple in Trout Lake a week before the Christmas Bird Count, but not on Count Day. So to see one in the early spring and so close to shore was quite special.

The Long-tailed Duck is the only living member of its genus *Clangula.* It is a medium-sized diving sea duck that breeds in the Arctic. It is often the most abundant bird in the high Arctic, breeding in tundra and taiga regions as far north as 80 degrees N.

Come late fall, it migrates in very large flocks south to the cold and temperate water coasts of North America, western Greenland, eastern Asia and the Great Lakes. Its migration takes a relatively short route, straight out to the sea, with the majority of those on the west coast wintering on the Bering Sea. The longest migration distance is down the coast. It usually migrates along coasts and not overland, but when it does migrate overland, it flies very high. In the spring, it migrates early.

Stephen O'Donnell

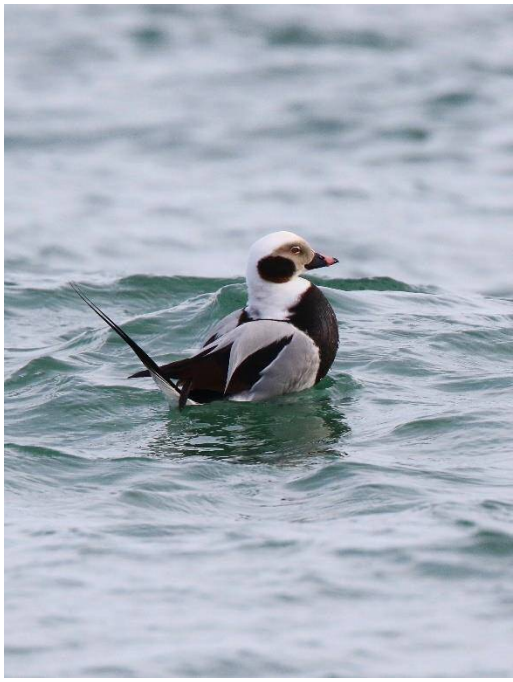
Because it uses its short, pointed wings to dive, it can dive more deeply than other ducks. (The photo above shows its short, pointed wings well.) It is one of the deepest diving ducks, diving up to 60 m or 200 feet to forage, although most feeding is done within about 9 m or 30 feet of the surface. It eats mollusks, including mussels, clams and periwinkles; crustaceans; insects; a few small fish; fish eggs; and some plant material, such as grasses and pondweeds.

It is a duck with a complex moulting process, a duck that changes its plumage continuously from April to October. In winter, the male is quite distinctive with a dark cheek patch on a mainly white head and neck, a dark breast and a mostly white body. In summer, the plumage is more or less reversed, with a white cheek patch and a dark head, neck and back. In the photo at the top of the next page, taken in early April on the St. Lawrence River, the male is in the process of changing to his complete breeding/summer plumage. It is just the back of his head that still needs to darken.

Michael Arthurs

In the winter, the female has a dark crown and a white head and neck. In summer, her head is dark.

The male has a long, slender tail, 10 to 15 cm (about 4 to 6 inches) in length (as in the photo below right), and a small, dark grey bill with a pink band. When the male displays, he raises his tail high in the air, shakes his head back and forth, and then, while calling, tosses it back with his bill pointed up.



Michael Arthurs

It is a very vocal duck, more vocal than most ducks. Its vocalization is very distinctive and very loud and nasal-sounding and can be heard from some distance. It was once erroneously named after women because of its gregarious vocalizations, erroneous because **it is the males which make the most noise!**

The nest site is on dry ground close to water – on low-lying tundra; in hilly areas; on barren ground; and on the edges of the northern forest. The young leave the nest shortly after hatching. They can swim and dive well and feed themselves when quite small, although they continue to be tended by the female. They are able to fly after 35 to 40 days.

The Long-tailed Duck is an abundant species, with populations in the high Arctic in the millions. There are serious declines in some areas, mainly on the west coast, but seemingly no evidence of this on the east coast. However, estimates can be difficult to obtain because it winters in flocks of various sizes, is widely distributed and can be far offshore. Its dense concentrations make it vulnerable to oil spills and other contaminants in the northern seas, and because it dives deeply, a large number can get caught in fishing nets.

Sources: All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Audubon Field Guide; Birdweb; and Wikipedia.

Surveys, counts and watches

American Woodcock, Renee Levesque

By Renee Levesque

Bird Studies Canada coordinates citizen science/volunteer programs throughout Canada. Below are those offered in our area:

American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey: Takes place in May and monitors the breeding populations of this species in North America. I know of only Gary and Connie Sturge who participate in this survey.

Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program: Takes place in May and June and involves the monitoring of assigned routes in marshes to track the presence and abundance of marsh birds and amphibians. Paul Smylie will be monitoring Laurier Woods as he has done for the past three years.

Canadian Lakes Loon Survey: Takes place from June to August to assess the long-term health of Common Loons and the lakes they depend upon. I am unaware if there are any participants for this survey. **If there are, please let me know.**

Project NestWatch: This watch involves monitoring bird nesting and breeding success. If you have a bird nesting in your backyard, you are a candidate for this watch.

Common Loon, Rob Rodger

Great Canadian Birdathon: This annual Birdathon to raise money for Bird Studies Canada for bird research and preservation takes place over a 24-hour period in May. In our area, it will take place the weekend of May 25

and 26. Contact Dick Tafel at rtafel@sympatico.ca if you wish to participate. Dick will also be collecting donations for Bird Studies Canada towards the preservation and conservation of birds.

SwiftWatch: Key dates are from late May into June to monitor the number of Chimney Swifts. See article that follows for more information on this important citizen science program of a threatened species and who to contact should you wish to participate.

eBird: eBird Canada is an online bird sighting database to which you can contribute your bird sightings and through which you can find out what birds are where through maps, graphs and tables.

A reminder to those who enter their sightings on eBird that **May 4 is Global Big Day.** See: https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-4-may-2019

Barred Owl, Renee Levesque

Surveys that have already taken place, but will be back again next year:

Nocturnal Owl Survey: Completed in April by at least 4 or 5 teams. There is a Bird Wing trophy awarded to the best owl survey report. Most team members belong to Nipissing Naturalists Club.

Christmas Bird Count, Kaye Edmonds

Project FeederWatch: To help scientists monitor winter birds, this project involved counting birds at feeders from November to April. Most Bird Wing members participate each year in this survey.

Christmas Bird Count: This count is between December 14 and January 5 inclusive. It is a one-day bird count that takes place across Canada, the United States and Latin America. Many members of Nipissing Naturalists Club and Bird Wing take part in this count.

Great Backyard Bird Count: This annual count takes place over the Family Day weekend. Participants count birds seen for as little as a few hours or for the entire 4 days of the count. Some members of Bird Wing take part in this count.

For more information on the above programs, check out Bird Studies Canada at http://www.birdscanada.org/ and click on Citizen Science at the top of the home page. Or contact Kathy Jones, Bird Studies Canada, Ontario Program Volunteer Coordinator, by phone at 1-888-448-2473, ext. 124, or by email at volunteer@birdscanada.org.

To learn more about birds, surveys and field outings, you can also attend Bird Wing meetings that take place at the North Bay Public Library on the fourth Tuesday of every month from September to April inclusive, followed by field outings from May to August inclusive.

Other bird surveys:

Breeding Bird Survey: This survey takes place in late June. In recent years, it has been undertaken by Paul Smylie who will do it again this year. For more details, see: https://ec.gc.ca/reom-mbs/default.asp?lang=En&n=416B57CA-1.

Non-bird Surveys:

Bats: Nipissing Naturalists will again monitor bats in the McConnell Lakes area this June. For more information, see the article that follows.

Northern Watersnake, Renee Levesque

Reptiles and Amphibians: The Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas is a citizen-science project through Ontario Nature that tracks distribution of reptiles and amphibians. See https://ontarionature.org/programs/citizen-science/reptile-amphibian-atlas/ for further details.

Butterflies: Butterfly sightings can be made on eButterfly http://www.e-butterfly.org/ and iNaturalist https://inaturalist.ca/. In fact, sightings of all animals – invertebrates, birds, amphibians, mammals, reptiles and fish - can be made on iNaturalist.

SwiftWatch seeks volunteers

Jim McCulloch, Wikimedia Commons

Volunteers are required to participate in our annual SwiftWatch project through Bird Studies Canada. Key volunteer evenings for counting the number of Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica)* descending majestically into their main roost on Main Street West, North Bay, and into other roost chimneys are **May 22, May 26, May 30 and June 3**. However, because Bird Studies Canada uses count data right up until fall migration, volunteers are always welcome to count up until then.

Adult swifts leave their roosts in June to nest, but they return in July and August with their young. Unlike their roost sites, their nest sites consist of only one nest at each site. The nests are small, only 10 cm wide, and are attached to vertical brick and wood surfaces using glue-like saliva.

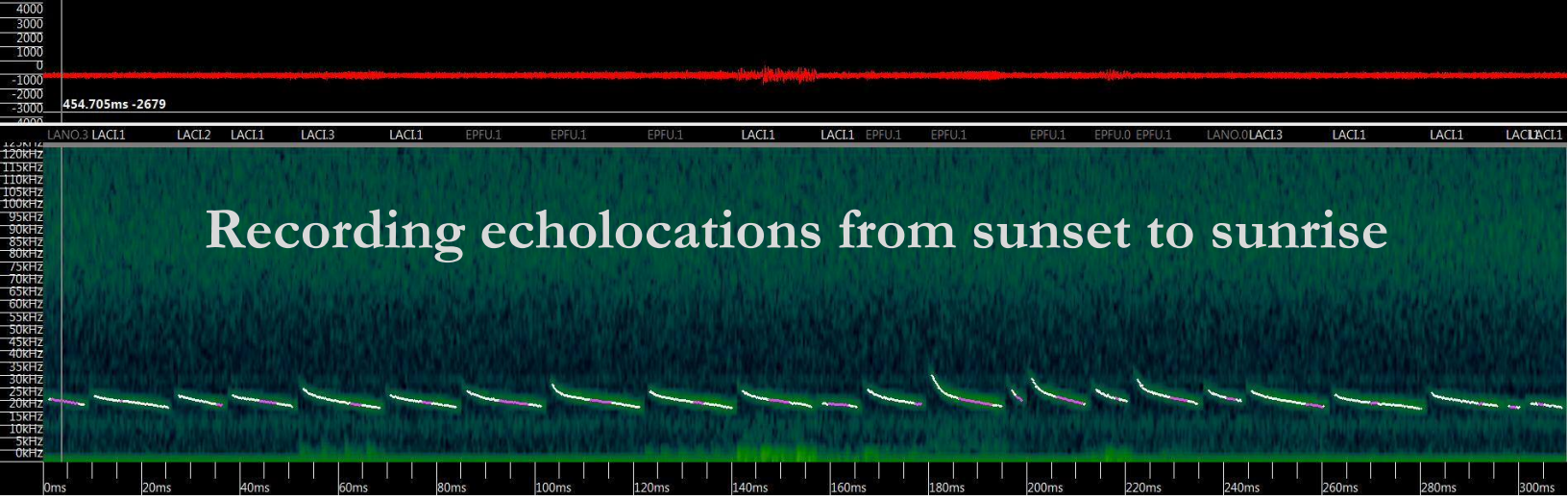
Kaye Edmonds

If you would like to volunteer to take part in this important citizen science project in aid of a bird which is considered Threatened in Ontario, contact Allison Bannister, Board Member, at aebannis@lakeheadu.ca, and if you can, indicate the evenings you will be available so Allison can draw up a schedule to make sure all roosts are covered for those key evenings.

For more information on Chimney Swifts in Ontario see: https://www.ontario.ca/page/chimney-swift. And for those members who have not had the privilege of seeing Chimney Swifts descend a chimney at dusk – first one, then a few more and then many more - watch this You Tube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky0d_TWNEfY.

Courtesy of birdspix.com

Getting together as a group to watch and count Chimney Swifts, birds that eat, drink, mate and even sleep on the wing, is definitely a gratifying way to participate in this citizen science project. It doesn't get much better!



Courtesy of Rebecca Geauvreau

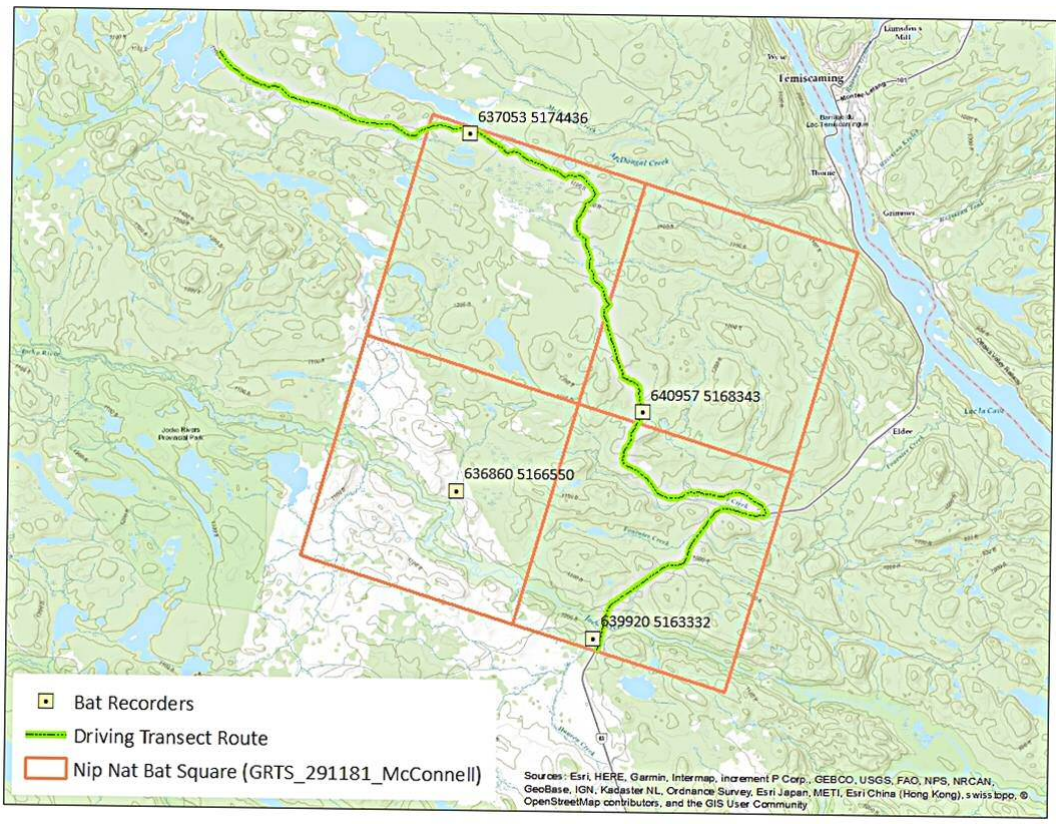
By Rebecca Geauvreau

Nipissing Naturalists Club has been part of the North American Bat Monitoring Program. (NABat) since 2016.

There are eight species of bats in Ontario, all of which eat insects exclusively. Five of the eight species spend summers and winters in Ontario, while the other three head south for the winter.

Although all eat insects, Ontario's bats have different habitat and prey preferences. The Hoary Bat, for example, is quite large relatively speaking and eats mainly moths and other large flying insects, while Little Brown Myotis is very small, only about the weight of a $2 coin, and eats small insects like flying midges and mosquitoes.

The NABat square is 100 square kilometres in size and is divided into four 25 square kilometre quadrats. A single passive acoustic recorder is deployed in the 25km2 quadrat for a few weeks at the beginning of June. It is programmed to record bat echolocations from sunset to sunrise for the entire period. During that same time period, volunteers conduct two nighttime driving transects along a 25km stretch of road that intersects the bat square.



The above map indicates the location of the passive recorders and the driving transect. The Club's driving transect is partly outside of the 100 km2 bat square because of the lack of roads in the area that meet the 'no switchback' criteria.

Each time a bat passes near the microphone (~20 – 40 m), the recorder detects and records what is known as a bat pass. (The recorder is being installed in the photo at right.) The number of bat passes does not reflect the number of individual bats, only the number of bat passes. For example, it could be one or two individuals foraging near the microphone over the course of many nights; it could represent a group migrating to its summer habitat; or it could represent a small group of females at a maternity roost.

Shown on the heading is a spectrogram, a visual image of a Hoary Bat's echolocation. Each line is called a pulse and together the pulses represent a bat pass made by an individual bat. Each pulse is unique to the bat species, similar to a fingerprint.

Courtesy of Fred Pinto

Bats that have been regularly detected over the years are Big Brown Bats, Hoary Bats and Silver-haired Bats; sometimes detected are Eastern Red Bats and Little Brown Myotis.

This year, Nipissing Naturalists will once again tackle bat monitoring, from the end of May to early June. Last year, the passive units were deployed on May 31 and retrieved on June 17, and the driving transects took place at night on June 6 and June 9.

Volunteers are always welcome. The flies may be bad at that time of the year, but at least there's no snow – maybe! If you wish to take part in the bat monitoring program or require further information, including this year's dates, contact Sarah Wheelan, Director, at sarah.wheelan@gmail.com.

Those valuable secondary pollinators

By Brent Turcotte; photos by Mark Olivier

***Editor's Note**: Brent did a presentation on Butterflies and Moths as Pollinators at the North Bay Seed Exchange and Eco Fair, held at St. Andrew's United Church on February 24. His presentation consisted of many photos and a discussion about butterflies and moths and their role as pollinators.*

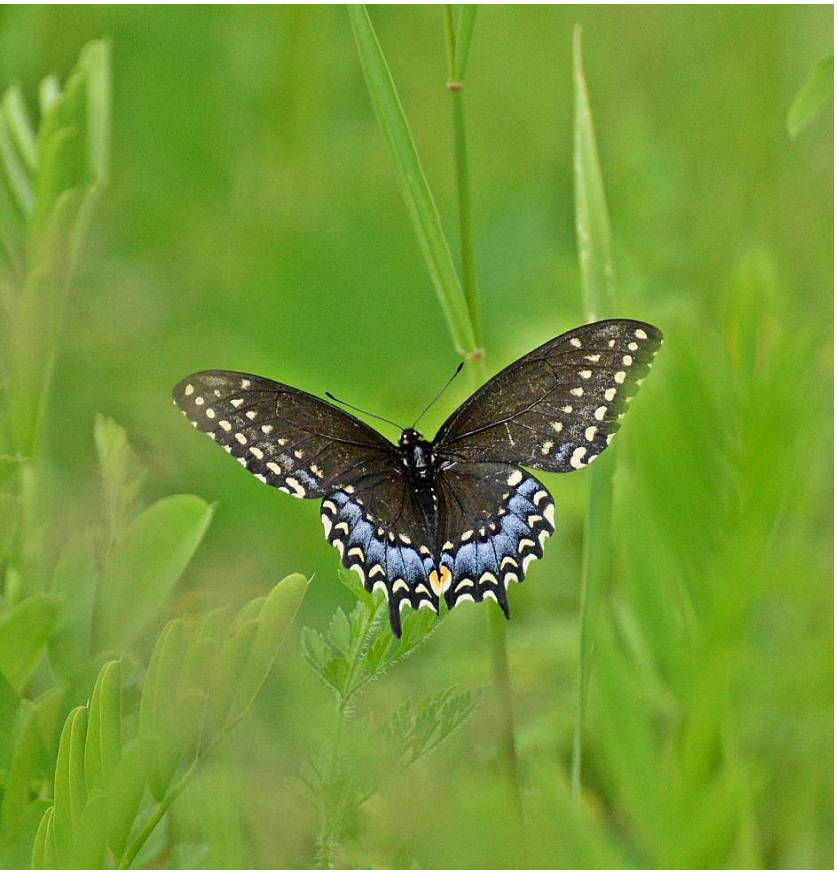
American Lady

We all know that bees are the dominant animal pollinators of flowers, their importance to foods we eat and their role in preserving our biodiversity. What is not as well-known is the role that other pollinators play, pollinators like butterflies and moths.

Although butterflies and moths are not as effective as bees, they are valuable secondary pollinators. Their long, thin legs do not allow them to pick up much pollen; however, they make up for that by visiting flowers more frequently. When they probe for nectar, they go for flat, clustered flowers, flowers that are mostly brightly colored – red, yellow and orange. Butterflies (and birds), unlike bees, can see red. You won't see bees at flowers like the Cardinal Flower.

Eastern Comma

In preparing for the presentation, I uncovered a common myth that bees are responsible for one in every three bites of food we eat. Not true. To start with, at least 60% of our food is wind-pollinated. Plants are also pollinated by animals other than bees – by ants, butterflies, moths, flies (mostly hoverflies), wasps, beetles, birds and mammals. One source gave a figure of 7% for pollination



Black Swallowtail

by bees, and another gave 30%. I think it is a little higher than 7%, although 7% is still significant.

A key slide of the presentation I provided was a graph that showed the contribution of different insect groups across 37 crop studies for which visitation data were available. The graph shows that bees make up slightly more than one half the flower visits, and about half these bee visits were made by honeybees. About a 1/3 of the visits were by flies, leaving about 1/6 for everything else.

Melon, citrus fruits, apples and pears are examples of crops that depended mostly on bees. In two of the tree studies for mango, the majority of flower visits were by flies. Rarely consumed fruits in our area – custard apple and soursop – had most of their flower visits by butterflies and/or moths. Oilseed Rape appears ten times in the graph, showing variance in what pollinates it at each different site. You can view the graph at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4711867/.

In addition to being secondary pollinators, butterflies and moths and their larvae are also an important food source for birds, bats and other wildlife.

Editor's Note: *If you wish to attract butterflies to your garden, and who wouldn't want to, choose a sunny spot, plant some good nectar plants and butterflies will come. Plants to consider are chives, yarrows, daisies, mallows, rudbeckias and asters, to name some.*

As you will see from Mark Olivier's photos, butterflies make great photographs and they are easier to photograph than most birds because they often stay put on flowers for some time while extracting nectar. I thank Mark for agreeing to use many of his photos on the poster Louise Simpson, Director, made for our booth at the Seed Exchange and Eco Fair.

Silvery Blue

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Million pollinator garden challenge

By Mel Alkins

This summer Nipissing Naturalists Club will be taking over one of the Heritage Gardener beds on Memorial Drive, transforming it into a Pollinator Garden!

No experience is necessary, just a little courage, some curiosity and the desire to work outside to help make something beautiful and useful for our pollinator friends.

What will this entail?

The gardening season runs from May to October each year, kicking off with a spring community cleanup in May and finishing off with planting bulbs in October.

You will be working as part of a team under my guidance as Team Leader and with the support of the Heritage Gardeners Team of Experts.

Teams typically try to spend 1to 2 hours a week maintaining their garden bed. Once our pollinator garden team is formed, we will pick a weekday evening and time that suits us all best.

This is free education and hands-on experience that will help you grow your gardening knowledge and become part of a bigger picture initiative **to help plant over a MILLLION pollinator gardens across the planet.** For more information see: http://millionpollinatorgardens.org/

If interested, please contact me at melalkins@hotmail.com

For more information on North Bay Heritage Gardeners and their volunteer incentive program, see: https://northbayheritagegardeners.com/.

national pollinator garden network

Keeping our city Clean, Green & Beautiful

By Mel Alkins

Nipissing Naturalists Club is joining in the latest and greatest local initiative designed to spread the beauty and stewardship that we get to enjoy at the waterfront across the entire City of North Bay!

I am asking members to join in the **Clean, Green & Beautiful** initiative first by making the commitment to ensure your property – residential, recreational, business or place of work – and perhaps even your street is litter-free.

I am also asking members to join in on three city-wide cleanup days over the course of the spring, summer and fall at a location Nipissing Naturalists Club will adopt. (The location is still to be determined.) If interested, please contact me at melalkins@hotmail.com. I will keep members informed of the cleanup dates and all pertinent details as they become available.

For the spring, the **City-Wide Clean-up Blitz will occur the week of May 7 to 11** in conjunction with Heritage Gardeners, City of North Bay, North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, Community Living, DIA, the North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce and many others.

You can pick up free yellow Pitch-in garbage bags at:

North Bay Heritage Gardeners, Suite 112, Oak Street East
North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, 15 Janey Avenue
North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce, 205 Main Street East
North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, 345 Oak Street West
The FARM, Downtown North Bay, 154 Main Street West

Tree planting on May 25

The Canadian Institute of Forestry, Algonquin section, in conjunction with Batesville Living Memorial Tree Plants, will be planting trees on Ranger Road, Hwy 11 North, across from Sand Dam Road, on Saturday, **May 25, from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m**. Nipissing Naturalists Club members are invited to attend to help plant the trees. No experience is necessary. All help is very welcome.

The trees that are to be planted are White Spruce, about 2 years old, and there are 2000 to plant!

Last year's tree planting, courtesy of Jean Pineau

Lunch and refreshments will be provided, including water. You can bring your own water, but preferably in a refillable water bottle.

As many shovels as possible will also be provided, although there may be a shortage. So if you have a shovel and pail, do bring them.

To register, contact John Pineau, John.pinneay@fpinnovations.ca or at 705-845-6310. If you have dietary needs, let John know at the time of registration.

About a week or so before the event, John will contact everyone who has registered by email to provide all the details. **Planters can car pool by meeting at the former Sear's parking lot at 9:00 a.m.**

Northern Gathering of Ontario Nature: Hope in changing times

Jane Goodall Reclamation Trail, alltrails.com

Ontario Nature in conjunction with Sudbury Naturalists and Junction Creek Stewardship Committee is holding its annual Northern Gathering in Sudbury from **Friday, May 10, to Sunday, May 12**, at Vale Living With Lake Centre, Laurentian University, 840 Ramsey Lake Road.

The agenda follows on the next page and includes the presentations, outings and times of each. Two of the outings are to the Jane Goodall Reclamation Trail to hear about and see the re-greening and transformation of Sudbury's landscape over the last 40 years, and to Junction Creek to take part in the release of a thousand Brook Trout. In the photo above of the Jane Goodall Reclamation Trail, you can see the tremendous job done in transforming this area over the years from rocky barrens devoid of vegetation to a young green forest.

For those who did not book rooms at the Sudbury University Residence by April 15, not to worry if you are interested in attending any of the presentations and outings. You can still take part in all or some of these events. A contribution of $5.00 for the Friday and Sunday events and $10.00 for any of the Saturday events would be appreciated.

If you do wish to take part in any of the events, first contact Barbara MacKenzie-Wynia, Regional Coordinator Nature Network, at Barbaraw@ontarionature.org, or by telephone at 416-444-8419 or 1-800-440-2366.

Northern Gathering, Sudbury: Agenda

Friday, May 10
Dinner is on your own.

Evening Program: 6:30 to 9:00 p.m., Vale Living With Lakes Centre, Laurentian University, 840 Ramsay Road.

1. Ontario Nature Updates, Caroline Schultz, Executive Director, Ontario Nature.
2. What We Should Know About Forest Management Plans, Viki Mather, Sudbury Naturalist.
3. Forestry is Simply Not Clear-cut: Reconsidering our Views of Trees, Mark Kuhlberg, Laurentian University.

Saturday, May 11
Continental breakfast: 8:00 to 9:00 a.m., Vale Living With Lakes Centre.

Field Outings:

1. 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.: *Junction Creek Festival with Trout Release*. Carpool to location.

This outing, an annual environmental event with displays and family activities, includes the releasing of 1,000 Brook Trout into Junction Creek, Twin Forks Playground. A light lunch and refreshments are available.

2. 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.: *Jane Goodall Reclamation Trail.* Parking lot is at the junction of Hwy 17 E and Garson, Coniston Road, Coniston.

This includes a walk along a 1-km self-guided trail and learning about the tremendous re-greening and transformation that has occurred in Sudbury over the past 40 years.

Dinner and refreshments: 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., Bioski Cottage, Lake Laurentian Conservation Area, 2420 South Bay Road, Sudbury.

Evening program: 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., back at Vale Living With Lakes Centre.
History and Projects of the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station, with emphasis on turtle research. Presenters are Steven Kell, Species at Risk Biologist and Project Coordinator, Shawanaga First Nation, and Taylor Wynia, Ecologist/Herpetologist, Skelton Brumwell and Associates Inc.

Sunday, May 12
Continental breakfast: 8:00 to 9:00 a.m., Vale Living With Lakes Centre

Morning Program: 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.

1. Northern Regional Director election
2. Nature Network update
3. Nature Network clubs' and groups' issues
4. Club updates

A light lunch will be served at noon before leaving for home.

Speaker for May: The role of bird monitoring strategies

Banding Northern Saw-whet Owl, courtesy of Rachel Sturge

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 former Tweedsmuir Public School. (January is the AGM.)

Our speaker for **May 14** is Dr. Rachel Sturge, Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus, where she teaches ecology and courses in zoology and ornithology.

North Bay's Motus Station, Renee Levesque

Rachel will discuss **the role of bird monitoring strategies in avian conservation.**

According to a report published in 2012, bird populations in Canada have declined on average by 12% over the last 40 years. The Living Planet Index, which monitors species at risk of extinction, reported in 2017 that of the 386 Canadian bird species tracked, grassland birds had declined on average by 69%, aerial insectivores by 51% and shorebirds by 43%. These numbers indicate the need for us to take serious conservation actions.

With the data gained from various monitoring strategies currently used, such as eBird, the Christmas Bird Count, banding stations in Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, we can determine, plan and manage conservation priorities to help us move towards Stewardship of our natural lands and in doing so, effect real change.

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

Board of Directors, 2018

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Bird Wing

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

Gary Sturge, Treasurer

Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe

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

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: Mel Alkins, Michael Arthurs, Allison Bannister, Kevan Cowcill, Kaye Edmonds, Peter Ferris, Rebecca Geauvreau, Lisa Hackett, Renee Levesque, Stephen O'Donnell, Mark Olivier, John Pineau, Fred Pinto, Steve Pitt, Rob Rodger, Rachel Sturge and Brent Turcotte.

Special thanks to Doug McLaughlin for use of his photo of O-Six and to the National Park Service for use of photos by Diane Papineau and Doug Stahler. Also thanks to alltrails.com for the photo of the Jane Goodall Reclamation Trail.

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**.

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