



THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

JUNE 2021

PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

NIPISSING NATURALISTS CLUB

THE WOODLAND OBSERVER

From the editor:

And so it begins...

Summer, that is. As I write this sitting in my backyard, our resident squirrel seems to be enjoying the summer weather. He consistently lies on his belly on the deck, enjoying the sun-warmed wood on his undersides. When the heat intensifies later in the summer, he'll drape himself over some stacked concrete blocks that are in the shade under the cedar tree.

The warmer weather brings out other denizens that we haven't seen since last summer. Gartersnakes, northern watersnakes, and even an emerald-coloured smooth greensnake, have been seen since the weather warmed. Blanding's and Snapping Turtles are also out along the big pond just south of Decair Road on the bike path. More than 30 painted turtles were spotted basking in that pond too. Many of them were only a year or two old indicating some successful hatch years. In the past week, painted turtles have started digging their nests so fingers crossed for more successful hatch years.

And, of course, the birds are back in glorious song and colour. Along that same section of the bike path, Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are singing. Two Black-billed Cuckoos on either side of the path sing back and forth to mark their territories. Warblers, including several Blackburnians, and vireos are almost overwhelming during their dawn chorus.



Smooth greensnake (left, above). Nesting painted turtle (right)



Blanding's Turtle (and mosquito)

Summer is a good time to get out to see our old furry, feathered, and scaled friends; to see plants that we haven't seen since last spring and summer. If you get any photographs of our friends that we haven't seen since last year, send them in and we will publish them in the next newsletter, which will be in September.

In this issue, we have the photo contest winners and pictures from other members, information on the Chimney Swift watch, a search for the largest flower in the world, and a review of an invasive species app. Have a safe summer everyone. See you in the fall where we may even be able to meet in person once again.

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Invasive Species Counter



At a recent board meeting, Rachel Sturge highlighted an app called the **Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System** (EDD MapS) for Ontario. It functions similar to eBird or Clam Counter (see May newsletter), except this one is for invasive species. There is an online version or an app for Apple and Android devices. It is available for other regions, but this article refers to just the Apple [Ontario version](#). The opening pages are straight-forward (left pictures)

Scroll through all the species to see which ones are labeled as invasive, or tap on species categories, such as aquatic animals or aquatic plants. For example, reporting Canada Thistle: Tap on **Terrestrial Plants**, and scroll to find the thistle.

From the scrolling species page (far left), there are two options. The first is to tap on the small blue circled exclamation mark, which will show several pictures of the species. The second option is to tap on the plant name. This will bring up the camera menu (near left).

To add a photo, tap on “**Tap Here to Add Photo**” caption. Tapping the GPS location or Map icon will show your present location on a map. If entering data at home, but the plant was seen elsewhere (e.g., Lee Park) then tap on the **GPS Location**, and tap on the map. A blue dot will appear where you tap. Tap **Done** in the bottom right, and the previous menu will return.

Once information, photos, and location are entered from this menu, tap on **Save** in the bottom right corner. This will move your species into the **Upload Queue**, which you can access from the home page menu (top far left picture).

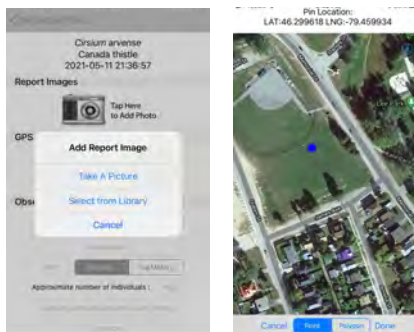
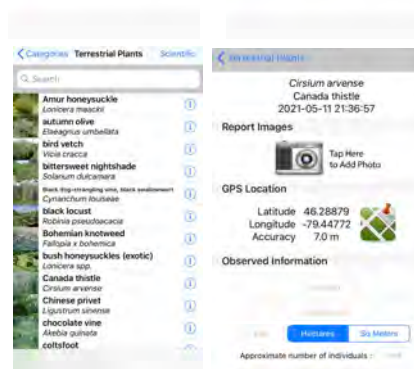
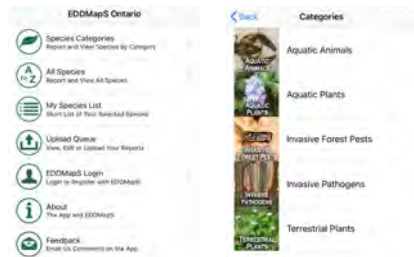
Tap on the **Upload Queue** option to upload the observations by tapping on the Actions button at the top right. The Action button will give the following choices: **Select All**, **Upload**, **Delete**. Or tap on just the species that you want to upload or delete.

This is still a new app so there are some glitches. It says you can upload observations using a guest account, but I can only upload if I sign in under my registered name. And the app signs you out as soon as you move away from the log-in page so if I upload a report, I have to sign in again if I want to submit more observations.

Another glitch: The search function does not return an entry if you type in more than two letters of the species' name. E.g., “co” finds “coltsfoot”, but “col” returns no hits.

Some species are missing, e.g., Himalayan balsam. Inclusion also seems arbitrary: why is Manitoba Maple listed, but not European flowers like dandelions, hawkweeds, and plantain?

Still the app is a useful tool to let conservation managers know how far and how fast an invasive species is spreading. And with enough people using it, the app can provide an early warning system for conservation authorities who could remove the species from their area before it gains a firm foothold.



What's Happening to the Chimney Swifts in North Bay?

by Fred Pinto

Chimney Swifts are small aerial insectivores that overwinter in the Amazon basin and fly to their breeding grounds in North America in the spring. Chimney Swifts have been breeding around North Bay for thousands of years. The shores of Lake Nipissing have a number of large wetlands that produce large amounts of flying insects, an excellent food source for Chimney Swifts. The wetlands and forest dynamics produce tree cavities in living and dead trees that serve as roost and nest sites for the Chimney Swifts.

In the near past when people heated their homes with wood the chimneys served as roost and nest sites for these birds. Today most homes have capped or removed their chimneys. A few open chimneys that still exist serve as roost and nest sites for Chimney Swifts. North Bay has a large uncapped chimney in the downtown area that is a very large roost where thousands, and more recently hundreds, of these birds used to roost. They usually arrive in North Bay around mid- May each year.



Clouds of midges over the lake serve as a plentiful food source for the swifts. Photo by Fred Pinto



Swifts entering the chimney in the evening. Photo by Fred Pinto

Members of the Nipissing Naturalists have been monitoring the Chimney Swifts for several years as part of Bird Canada's Swift Watch program. The Swift Watch program was instituted to monitor the number of Chimney Swifts as small studies suggested that this bird species was declining. Swift Watch engages hundreds of volunteer observers to monitor the number of Chimney Swifts at specific sites on particular dates using a defined protocol. The large dataset that is collected annually provides a better estimate of the trend in this aerial insectivore's population.

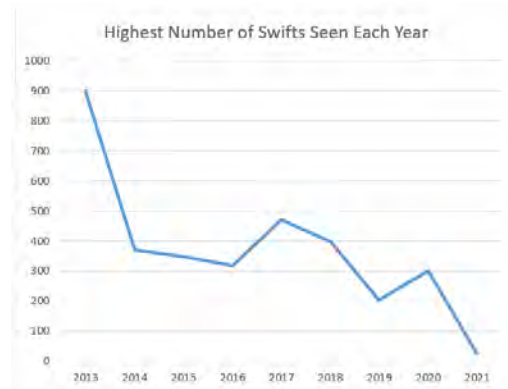
Many club members enjoy coming out in the late evening to the Main Street West roost to monitor the birds and see the playful birds excitedly chatter as they zoom around in flocks chasing after swarms of insects or maybe just having fun. The finale each evening is the coordinated descent into the chimney. It is amazing to see the birds fly down into the chimney without bumping into one another.

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This year the number of Chimney Swifts entering the roost at the Main Street West site is down dramatically. It appears that this chimney at the time of writing this article is not being used as a roost. Only 2-3 birds, assumed to be a nesting pair and helper, have been observed entering the chimney at dusk. The total number of birds seen flying in the vicinity of the Main Street West roost has been declining and this year is very low. Why this is the case is not known.

Number of Swifts entering the chimney during each observation day

| Year | Number of Swifts/Observation Day | | | |
|------|----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
| 2013 | 50 | 125 | 900 | 400 |
| 2014 | 370 | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| 2015 | 150 | 12 | 57 | |
| 2016 | 317 | 81 | 70 | 134 |
| 2017 | 118 | 120 | 211 | 97 |
| 2018 | 62 | 67 | 152 | 4 |
| 2019 | 124 | 204 | 310 | 76 |
| 2020 | 23 | 26 | 35 | 135 |
| 2021 | 2 | 2 | | |



Number of swifts entering the chimney, and highest number of swifts each year, showing the decline.

A review of the literature on Chimney Swifts published in scientific journals and government reports do not describe factors that contribute to roost abandonment. One observer in Quebec reports a roost was abandoned when Chimney Swifts at that site in Quebec were attacked by a Merlin.

The Chimney Swifts are particularly vulnerable to an aerial predator when they descend as a group into the chimney as they slow down and flutter their way in. Last year a Merlin was observed attacking the Chimney Swifts as they entered the chimney in July. Following repeated attacks the Chimney Swifts stopped using the roost last year.

It was unclear at the time if this was the time for the usual departure of Chimney Swifts or if they abandoned the roost early. The Merlin has been seen in the neighbourhood again this year, so we can speculate that the low number of Chimney Swifts this year reflect the reaction of the Chimney Swifts to predation that they endured last year.

However, there are many more potential explanations, such as the state of their winter habitat, events during their migration, or that they could have chosen another roost, etc., that without additional information we cannot rule out.



*(Left): Merlin on the ground. It had caught a young starling, which is hidden behind the Merlin's outstretched wing. Photo by K. Cowcill
(Above): Midge (Chironomid) are plentiful food sources for swifts and other insectivorous birds. Photo by Fred Pinto*

Searching for the largest flower in the world

by Fred Pinto (photos by Fred)

I was on the island of Borneo in Malaysia in the spring of 2016 and had some free time. South East Asia has the world's oldest rain forests and coral reefs. These tropical ecosystems have persisted in this region for millions of years while other parts of our planet experienced many changes that caused changes to their plants and animals. As a result South East Asia, including Borneo, is extremely biodiverse. So I hired a local birding guide to explore the island and see some of Borneo's bird life and other interesting plants and animals.

On the last day of my birding adventure I was at Poring National Park located near Mt Kinabalu. "Poring" means bamboo in one of the local languages. This national park had some *Rafflesia*, the world's largest individual flower in bloom. There is another even larger flower, the *Amorphophallus titanum*, or Titan arum but it is made of many smaller flowers.

After my early morning birding trek I went off to find the *Rafflesia*. Its common English name is "corpse flower" as it emits the smell of rotting flesh to attract flies and beetles that help in pollination. I kept upwind from the flower!

The orangey-red flower with polka dots has a plastic-like look both because of its colour and texture. The flower is about 1 m (3 ft) in diameter and weighs around 8 kg (15 lbs), though some are even larger and heavier. Its looks are not the only strange thing about this flowering plant. It has no visible leaves, stem or roots. Being completely parasitic it obtains all of its nutrients and water from its host plant.

Rafflesia produces very fine fibres that are embedded into the tissues of the host plant. These fibres look like hyphae of a fungus which may be an interesting feature as new research shows that *Rafflesia* has lost most of the genes found in plants. For example

Rafflesia has lost its genes that encode for chloroplasts, these all-important cell organelles that are critical for photosynthesis in all green plants. *Rafflesia* also has a very high number of transposons or jumping genes. Jumping genes are genes from other organisms that get integrated into a non-related species. Yes, nature has been modifying the genes of unrelated species all along.



The area around the Rafflesia is fenced off to prevent people from compacting the soil. Rafflesia is very sensitive to soil compaction. It leads to the flower dying out sooner and the plant producing few flowers. Tourists are the major cause for the decline of the plant.



Close-up of the giant flower in bloom. The flower is either male or female. You have to look beneath the central disc to determine the sex of the flower.

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The purple cabbage-like structures are the flower buds that have not bloomed as yet. The buds take months to develop while the flower only blooms for a few days. You can see parts of the host plant a vine from the genus Tetrastigma. Tetrastigma is also a parasitic vine that grows on trees.

A Colourful Duo



Thank you to club member, Rose McClelland, for sending in this picture of a Blue Jay and a Baltimore Oriole taken at their feeder on May 10th. The oriole is a rare sighting for this area, probably even rarer than Northern Cardinals.

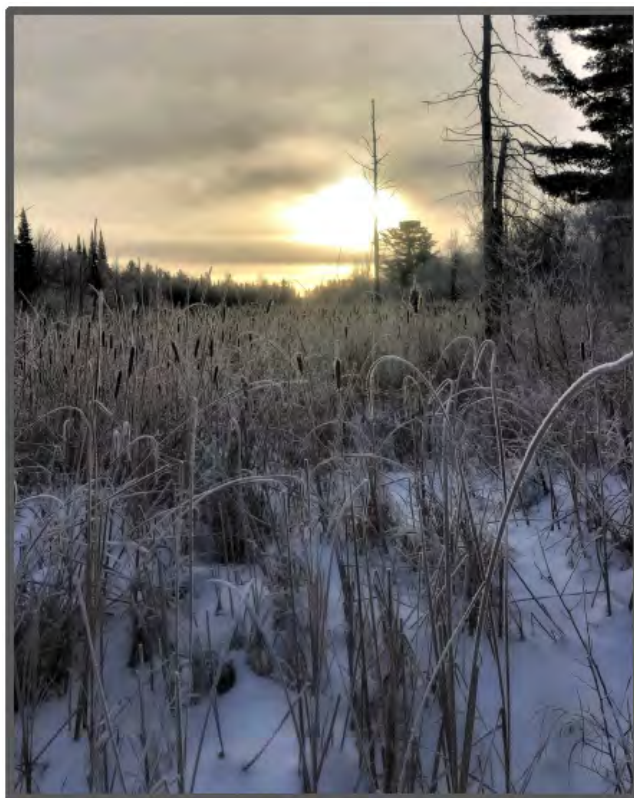
The orioles in Ontario usually lay 4-5 eggs, although can have as few as 1 or as many as 6. Nesting success is fairly high with at least one egg hatching in 80-95% of the nests that were studied.

2020 Fall and Winter Photo Contest Winners

*Some excellent photographs were submitted again this year. The cover page of this month's newsletter is from Buddy Myer's winning submission for the **People Enjoying Nature** category. Below are winners from other categories.*

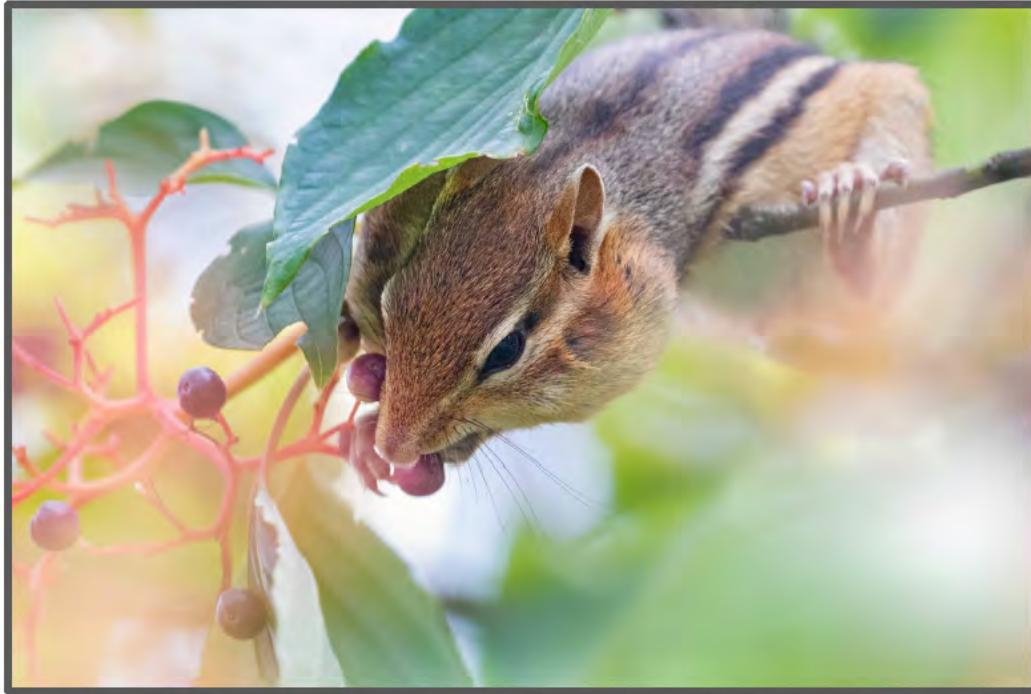


Greg Jaski, Wildlife 1st Place



Fred Pinto, Scenery 1st Place

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Stephen O'Donnell, Photographer's Choice 1st Place (highest vote count)

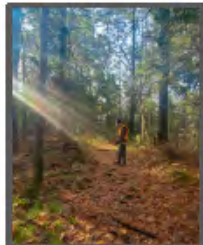


First, second, third place photos

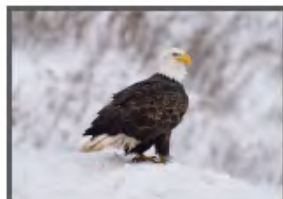
Category Wildlife:
Greg Jaski,
Art Heeney,
Karen Major



Category Scenery:
Fred Pinto,
Bill Sikora,
Grant McKercher



Category People Enjoying Nature:
Buddy Myers,
Grant McKercher,
Lynn Ingham



Category Photographer's Choice:
Stephen O'Donnell, Renee Levesque, Buddy Myers

Thank you to those who submitted photos, and to those who voted. Big thanks to Keith Pearson for organizing the vote and making the pdf of the winning submissions.

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Upcoming Zoom Talk June 8

Presentation

Invasive Fishes of the Great Lakes Region

This presentation will provide a brief overview of the origins and impacts of invasive freshwater fishes in the Laurentian Great Lakes. Dr. Sara Campbell is a Postdoctoral Researcher at University of Toronto, and researches the impacts of invasive species.

<http://www.invadingspecies.com/>



About Us

In 1992, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, established the Invading Species Awareness Program in order to address the increasing threats posed by invasive species in Ontario. Our objectives are to generate education and awareness of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, address key pathways contributing to introductions and/or spread, and facilitate monitoring and early detection initiatives for invasive species found within Ontario.



Upcoming Zoom Talk June 15

Presentation

Sing Birdie to Me: Variation of the song in two oriole species

Presentation

Amelia Suter will be presenting her research comparing the songs of the northern and southern populations of Yellow-backed Oriole (*Icterus chrysater*) and the Audubon's Oriole (*Icterus graduacauda*).

Presenter Biography

Amelia is a recent graduate of Ithaca College. She received a bachelor's in science in Biology and minored in Environmental Science. She is interested in pursuing a career in ecology or horticulture or a related field. In her free time she enjoys birdwatching; some of her favorite birds include Scarlet Tanagers, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and Baltimore Orioles. She also enjoys growing cacti and other houseplants.



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Please feel free to send photos, articles, thoughts, poems, favourite trees, book reviews, things you've observed and found interesting to Kevan at kncowcill@hotmail.com.

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Membership Prices

- **One Year Single membership \$20.00**
- **One Year Family membership \$30.00**

Renewal for **Bird Wing** can also be included with your **Nipissing Naturalists Club** renewal.
One Year Single **Bird Wing** \$5.00

An e-mail transfer can be sent to sturge@sympatico.ca or a cheque can be sent to our Club Treasurer, Connie Sturge, at 537 Hwy 534, Powassan P0H 1Z0.

If you send a cheque, please make the cheque payable to “**Nipissing Naturalists Club Inc.**”.

If you are also paying for Bird Wing by cheque, please send a **separate cheque** for that payable to “**Bird Wing**”.

Keith Pearson, Membership Director

Contributors this issue: Fred Pinto, Rose McClelland, Renee Levesque, Keith Pearson, Grant McKercher, Bill Sikora, Buddy Myles, Lynn Ingham, Stephen O'Donnell, Greg Jaski, Art Heeney, Karen Major,

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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/>.

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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/>.



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