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Join the WRN Board!

Multiple positions open for three-year terms beginning June 2023.

Contact pastpresident@waterlooregionnature.ca



Sightings along the Speed and Grand River trails in Cambridge.

Photos: Don Thomas

THE HERON**SPRING 2023**

RECEPTION HALL
 WATERLOO KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 50 ERB STREET WEST, WATERLOO

**Ornithotherapy**

By Rebecca Marquez, Wild Birds Unlimited Kitchener

What comes to mind when you think of peace? Is it a feeling? Perhaps of tranquility wrapped in warmth? Is it a place? Somewhere you frequent regularly, the surroundings worn into your memories? Or a beloved space in your home that radiates comfort? These are sensations that are conjured for me, your sense or place of peace may be different; however it manifests, it is deeply felt, its absence experienced as a loss.

Many individuals describe viewing or being in nature as peaceful. This feeling of wellbeing is strongly acknowledged in the field of medicine with doctors in all provinces prescribing nature as a therapeutic treatment. Included in the list of potential prescriptions are National Park passes, walking, jogging, and other forms of movement. The only qualifier is that it be meaningful contact with nature (PaRx, 2023). In that vein, the act of watching birds has become a focal point of study as it conjures feelings of elation and wellness in participants. Ornithotherapy was born from this study and is defined as “the mindful observation of birds benefitting our minds, bodies, and soul” (Crossley, 2021).

When we stop and consider the birds and their movements, we are fully investing in something outside of and yet deeply connected to ourselves. Consider a chickadee as it collects food. Watch them choose a black oil sunflower seed, pause, drop the seed, eye another seed inquisitively, pick it up, flit to a branch, and with great dexterity cling upside down, move itself around and into position to coax and – if that fails – force the seed under the loose bark of a tree to repeat the process ten, twenty, thirty times. You may feel the process to be comical, it might make you smile. As you settle into position, leaning against a tree for support, you find the world falling away. You exist in this moment, there is no other earthly concern on your mind but the movement of the chickadee. Maybe you pause to think about how hard these little beings have to work to survive. And then maybe you think about how you fit into this. And just maybe, you feel a little closer to nature, to yourself. You find your heartbeat is steady and slow, your breathing even and regular: peace.

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All WRN Club meetings are held in the Reception Hall of the Waterloo Knox Presbyterian Church

50 Erb St. West

Regular Meetings begin at 7:30pm. Doors open at 7pm.

All parking is FREE

All parking access is off Dupont Street.

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Submission Deadlines:

Fall Issue
July 20th
Winter Issue
October 20th-
Spring Issue
February 20th



President's Corner

Why Should I Care About Salamanders?

When I get asked about why salamanders are important, my first response is because they exist. Our environment and ecosystems are built on living members from tiny seeds and salamanders to the tallest trees and top predators, and all the interactions in between. For many nature lovers, the intrinsic value in salamanders is clear. We want to watch them, learn about them, and protect them; but that fascination and appreciation isn't equally apparent to all. Luckily there are a lot of important reasons why we should all care about salamanders and keep them from going the way of the Dodo.

Salamanders are both a predator and a prey species, making them an essential link in the food chain in most forest ecosystems. They are ferocious predators of insects and arthropods meaning they play an important role in natural pest control. Some salamanders, like the Spotted Salamander, have larval forms that eat aquatic insects, helping to control pesky populations of mosquitos by feeding on their larvae. Some larger salamander species (not

found in Ontario) even eat small rodents!

Salamanders are, in turn, eaten by rodents, birds, and snakes. As the most common vertebrate species in most eastern deciduous forests, they are an important and abundant food source to sustain other wildlife. By being efficient predators of insects and providing ample food for other species, salamanders play an important role in transferring energy up the food chain. They also help manage decomposition and nutrient cycling in the forest ecosystem by being active predators of invertebrates.

One of my favourite reasons to care about salamanders perhaps unsurprisingly ties back to monitoring. At the **rare Charitable Research Reserve**, salamander populations have been monitored for 15+ years via seasonal weekly checks of placed cover boards in forested sites. WRN Teens use a similar protocol to monitor salamanders at SpruceHaven.

Lungless salamanders, like the abundant Eastern Red-backed Salamander, are highly sensitive to contaminants in their environment and therefore make excellent indicator species. They can be quick to respond to environmental stresses like pollution, so changes in their population size and demographics over time can be an early warning sign of ecosystem distress.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), amphibians are the most threatened vertebrate group worldwide, with over 40% of amphibian species in decline. So whether the sight of a salamander makes you feel squeamish or delighted, there are many great reasons to protect the salamanders and ensure they can continue to play their important role in our ecosystems!

- Jenna



A previous version of this article first appeared on the **rare** blog: <https://raresites.wordpress.com/>

Photos: J. Quinn

OUTINGS, ACTIVITIES, THINGS TO DO &

Monthly Member Meeting & Nature Presentations

Anyone with an interest in nature is welcome to attend our free monthly meetings. We start with a few announcements of noteworthy upcoming events, conservation issues or projects. We welcome new members and guests and we invite all to share their recent local noteworthy nature sightings. The main feature is a presentation by a guest speaker on one of a variety of interesting topics.

Meetings are held on the fourth Monday of the month at 7:30pm in hybrid format. Join in person at Reception Hall, Waterloo Knox Presbyterian Church, 50 Erb St. West, Waterloo or register at waterlooregionnature.ca/meetings/ to join on zoom.

Upcoming Meetings: For full presentation descriptions and presenter biographies and register to attend online visit: waterlooregionnature.ca/meetings/

Monday, March 27, 2023 @7:30pm– Big, Bold, and Boreal: Protecting the largest private conservation project in Canada's history with the Nature Conservancy of Canada

Presenter: Kristyn Ferguson, Program Director– Large Landscapes, Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)

Join Kristyn Ferguson from NCC as she discusses the wild ride of conserving the largest conservation project in Canada's history, the Boreal Wildlands, near Hearst, ON. Learn more about NCC, NCC's Large Landscapes work in Ontario, and the intensive efforts that are currently underway to protect and conserve 30% of Canada's lands and waters by 2030.

Monday, April 24th, 2023 @7:30pm– What Aquatic Invertebrates Tells Us About Water Quality

Presenter: Larry Mellors, Vice-President, Trout Unlimited Canada, Middle Grant Chapter

Most of us have heard of the canary in the mine. Aquatic invertebrates are the canary in water. Join Larry Mellors from Trout Unlimited Canada to examine what these aquatic invertebrates tell us about water quality.

Monday, May 29, 2023 *AGM* @7:00pm– Alvars and Alvar Flora (Note the special time for AGM)

Presenter: Bob Bowles, Founder and Coordinator, Ontario Master Naturalist Certificate Program, Lakehead

Alvars are one of the rarest ecosystems occurring in only five countries and making up a very small percentage of world ecosystems. They are restricted to coastal islands off Sweden, eastern European Baltic region (Estonia, Western Russia), United Kingdom (two small areas), Ireland (the Burren) and the Great Lakes Region of North America. Join us for this excellent opportunity to learn more about this rare habitat and its species of rare flora from Bob Bowles and continue the learning by registering for a field trip with Bob on June 1st to visit this rare ecosystem firsthand!

UPCOMING CLUB OUTINGS

The most up to date public health guidelines will be followed for all outings. Unless otherwise noted, pre-registration by contacting the outing leader is required. Non-members are welcome but are required to sign an insurance waiver.

Early migrants along Lake Erie north shore

Leader: Jim Burrell burrellsc@golden.net

When: Wednesday, March 15 from 8:30am until 3:00pm

Location: Meet at 8:30 at the Car Pool parking Lot south of Hwy 401 on Fountain Street.

Description: We will travel to Aylmer and then to Lake Erie all the way to Long Point stopping as needed. Our objective will be early north bound migrants and any other local residents birds and fauna. We will lunch at Long Point. Bring water, snacks, lunch, scopes/bins, cameras and warm clothes. We will limit ourselves to 20 people. **Registration is required by contacting Jim at burrellsc@golden.net**

North Shore of Lake Ontario

Leader: David Gascoigne davidmgascoigne@gmail.com 519-725-0866 226-747-7299 (C)

When: Saturday, March 18, 2023 beginning at 8:30am for a full day outing

Location: We will meet at the commuter parking lot on Highway 6 just south of Highway 401 where we will carpool as much as possible.

Description: First stop will be at the DesJardins Canal in Dundas where a wide range of waterfowl is possible, including close views of Hooded Merganser. The vegetation should yield a variety of species including American Tree Sparrow, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers – and who knows what else? Early migrants will have arrived and Turkey Vultures are often seen overhead.

Next stop will be at Woodland Cemetery where we will check whether the resident Eastern Screech Owls are cooperating. Then we will go to Grindstone Creek for gulls and waterfowl. A short foray along the Hendrie Valley Trail has the possibility of numerous passerines and a chance to hand feed chickadees, nuthatches and possibly Downy Woodpecker.

Next we will head to LaSalle Park in Burlington where some Trumpeter Swans will probably still be present. A walk along the boardwalk through the wooded area might yield Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, and more as well as another chance to hand feed Black-capped Chickadees.

Our next stop will be at Paletta Park where warm, clean washrooms await and a chance for numerous waterfowl and passerines. Our final stop will be at Bronte Harbour in Oakville for waterfowl, possible early Red-necked Grebes, gulls and the outside chance of a Snowy Owl.

There is no shortage of washroom stops along this route and we will stop somewhere to have lunch together. This is a full day's outing so be sure to pack a lunch and snacks if you need them. Dress according to the weather, bring binoculars, a scope if you have one, a field guide and lots of enthusiasm. Registration is required by contacting davidmgascoigne@gmail.com

Interested in leading an outing?

Offers to lead outings for any season are always welcome. Remember, you don't need to be an expert to lead an outing. Please contact the Outings Director at outings@waterlooregionnature.ca with your ideas and interest. A BIG thank you to all who have lead outings this year!

Long Point and Port Rowan Area: Waterfowl and Early Spring Migration

Leader: Stewart MacDonald stewjmacdonald@aol.com 519-658-7880

When: Tuesday, April 4, 2023 beginning at 7:00am for a full day outing

Location: Meet at Homer Watson-401 Car Park

Description: Long Point provincial Park is the 4th oldest Provincial Park in the Province of Ontario, established in 1921. It is located in a designated World Biosphere Reserve, and is one of the largest bird and waterfowl migration and staging areas in North America.

Please join Stewart MacDonald, an experienced birding guide with over 30 years of birding in Canada and in 20 countries globally, as we search for Waterfowl and Early Spring Migrants! It is very possible to see over 20 different species of Waterfowl, including the rare in Ontario Eurasian Wigeon, and other birds such as Bald Eagles, and Sandhill Cranes. Although the focus of the outing will be Waterfowl, we will also look for other early migrants, such as Rusty Blackbird, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee, Pine Warbler and others. The outing will conclude around 12:30. If enough participants wish to have a group lunch, this can be arranged by Stewart in a local restaurant. Be sure to bring WARM clothing, good walking boots (as it will be muddy in some places), binoculars and spotting scope, if you have one. Car pooling is highly recommended as parking in the Long Point area is limited. The outing will proceed Rain or Shine. Washrooms in the Long Point area are few so please keep that in mind when travelling. **Registration is required by contacting Stewart directly.** The outing is limited to 15 people.

Garbage Cleanup at Laurentian Wetland, Kitchener

Leader: David Gascoigne davidmgascoigne@gmail.com 519-725-0866 226-747-7299 (C)

When: Wednesday, April 12 at 9:00am for approximately 3 hours

Location: Meet on David Bergey Drive, just off Ottawa St. S. in Kitchener.
Park on the side of the road opposite the wetland.

Description: Laurentian Wetland is a jewel in the midst of urban sprawl. The sheer volume of trash is an eyesore, a danger to wildlife, it pollutes the wetland and is discouraging to say the least. We are going to clean up as much as we can and hope that our example will give pause to people who might think of throwing away their coffee cups, pop cans etc., to say nothing of those who dump old sofas there.

Please consider joining us in this very worthwhile effort. Gloves and garbage bags will be provided, but if you have strong, sturdy gloves of your own it would be wise to bring them. Similarly, if you have a garbage pick-up tool, that would be helpful too. The ground will probably be wet in places so rubber boots would be a wise choice of footwear. Bring your binoculars so that we can do a little birding during the break or immediately on completion. **Registration is required by contacting davidmgascoigne@gmail.com**

ROM SPECIAL OFFER

WRN Members save 15% off ROM Admission

Buy your tickets online and enter the promo code:
THEHERON

Valid until April 23, 2023 @ROMtoronto #ROMWPY

Treefrog pool party © Brandon Güell



Earth Day Clean-Up, Kitchener-Waterloo

Leader: Roger Suffling rcsuffling@uwaterloo.ca

When: Saturday, April 22, 2023 at 10:00am for approximately 90mins

Location: The Catalyst Centre car park. 137 Glasgow Street, Kitchener.
Please park at the back of the lot near the railway.

Description: We're going to cleanup the Twin cities! (Well, not ALL of them but at least a good part of the Iron Horse Trail). Bring a garbage grabber or garden gloves if you have them. We'll provide garbage bags and plastic gloves. There is the option to have lunch together afterwards at one of the cafes at the Catalyst Centre if interested. Please contact Roger Suffling rcsuffling@uwaterloo.ca to register in advance.

Long Point Provincial Park - Early Warblers and Other Migrants

Leader: Stewart MacDonald stewartmacdonald@aol.com 519-658-7880

When: Wednesday, May 3, 2023 beginning at 6:00am for a full day outing

Location: Meet at Homer Watson-401 Car Park

Description: Please join Stewart in an exciting day of birding in the Long Point Provincial Park! The focus will be on land migrants vs waterfowl in this excursion. We will begin our birding adventure in the Old Provincial Park, then move over to the Old Cut Bird Banding Station (there is a bathroom there!!), and we will finish with an easy hike in the Park itself, exploring the wooded areas.

Some of the possible early Warblers we could see are the Kentucky Warbler and Blue Winged Warbler, amongst others! Other notable birds could include Red Headed Woodpecker and Scarlett Tanager!

This outing will last until 1200 and then we will break for lunch. Participants may choose to bring their own lunches and find a picnic table...or if enough of us wish to dine together, Stewart can make a reservation for lunch in Port Rowan. Please dress for the weather, and bring comfortable walking shoes and your binoculars. The outing will proceed rain or shine. Car pooling is encouraged as parking in the Long Point Area is limited. There is one bathroom at Old Cut but we will NOT be starting there, so I recommend that participants use facilities enroute. **Registration is required by contacting Stewart directly.** The outing is limited to 15 people.

Voices of the Night, Huron Natural Area, Kitchener

Leader: Fraser Gibson fn.gib@sympatico.ca

When: Thursday, May 4 at 8:00pm for approximately 90mins

Location: Meet at Huron Natural Area parking lot, Trillium Dr. Kitchener

Description: Experiences the Voices of the Night as we focus on the American Woodcock, but also listen for and identify amphibian and possibly owl calls. In April and early May the American Woodcock partakes in an interesting, flight and sound mating display. The old fields at Huron Natural Area have been favoured by this species in the past, so hopefully the late evening ritual will again be observed. The nearby wetlands should provide the habitat necessary for a variety of singing amphibians and the woodlands are known to be home territory for owls.

Majority of the hike will be on maintained trails. Some may venture a short distance off the trail for a better view of woodcocks. Bring binoculars, a flashlight and dress warmly. Washrooms may not yet be open for the season at this time of day. **Registration is required by contacting Fraser at fn.gib@sympatico.ca**

Hullett Marsh

Leader: David Gascoigne davidmgascoigne@gmail.com 519-725-0866 226-747-7299 (C)

When: Saturday May 13 at 8:30am for a full day outing

Location: Meeting place TBA (to be announced) at time of registration

Description: For several years my good friend Curtiss MacDonald, who was born and raised in the area, organized a trip to Hullett Marsh in Huron County. Like everything else it was interrupted by COVID, but we are ready to do it again. Curtiss has agreed to accompany us and has already advised that he has room for three others in his car. We will stop at various spots to search for waterfowl, raptors, resident and migrating passerines, and anything else that captures our interest. A moderate amount of walking is involved, but nothing too strenuous. On this outing nature's bathroom is pretty much your only option – so be prepared! This is a full day's outing so be sure to pack a lunch and snacks if you need them. Bring a folding chair so that we can have lunch in the field. Dress according to the weather, bring binoculars, a field guide and lots of enthusiasm.

It became a tradition on visits to Hullett Marsh that at the end of the day we would swing by a country store where Curtiss would buy everyone an ice cream. No doubt we can convince him to do this again!

Registration is required by contacting davidmgascoigne@gmail.com

Rondeau Provincial Park—Warblers and Songbirds

Leader: Stewart MacDonald stewjmacdonald@aol.com 519-658-7880

When: Tuesday May 16, 2023 at 8:00am for a full day outing

Location: Meet Stewart inside the Rondeau Park gate at 8:00am

Description: Rondeau Provincial Park is located on the North Shore of Lake Erie and is a World Renowned Birding Destination. It is known for its Old Growth Carolinian Forest and extensive coastal wetlands. It is also one of the most Exciting Birding Destinations during Spring Migration in Ontario!

Please join Stewart, who has birded Rondeau for over 30 Years, in searching for Warblers and Other Notable Spring Migrants during this outing! It is not impossible to see over 20 Species of Warblers plus Vireos, Thrushes and the more Familiar migrants such as Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager and Rose Breasted Grosbeak. The Star of The Show is often the Prothonotary Warbler, which is an Endangered Species in Ontario, but is a regular visitor to the Park and one of the only places in Ontario where there is a high probability of seeing one! The outing will last for 4 hours and then we will take a lunch break in the picnic area, to dine and watch for sparrows. There is a fee to enter the Park and there are good washroom facilities where we will be. Car Pooling is STRONGLY RECOMMENDED as parking in Rondeau is Very Limited. The drive to Rondeau is approximately 2 to 2 1/2 hours from KW so plan accordingly. Bring your binoculars, good walking shoes and dress for the weather, as the outing will proceed rain or shine.

Registration is required by contacting Stewart directly. The outing is limited to 15 people.

Pipits Outings

WRN members are invited to attend Pipits club outings. Pipits outings typically run on Sunday mornings and WRN members can attend for \$5 per outing, or can purchase a membership for \$40.

To learn more about the group and outings, please visit: <https://thepipits.wildapricot.org/Trips> or contact Colleen at: thepipitsbirdingclub@gmail.com.

Spring Wildflowers — Stamm Woodlot, Waterloo

Leader: Fraser Gibson fn.gib@sympatico.ca

When: Thursday May 18 at 5:30pm for approximately 2 hours

Location: Stamm Woodlot – roadside parking, near intersection on Pinery Trail and Springwater Cres.

Description: April showers bring May flowers. Come for a stroll through Stamm Woodlot, a beautiful hardwood sugar bush on Waterloo's northern border. There we will search out, learn about and appreciate some of our spring ephemerals. Most of our route is a wide formal trail over gently rolling terrain, some wood-chipped. Wear sturdy shoes, dress warmly and bring binoculars as warblers will likely be moving through. No washrooms available.

Registration is required by contacting Fraser at fn.gib@sympatico.ca



Prairie Smoke and Little Bluestem Reserve Alvars, Kawartha Lakes

Leader: Bob Bowles rbowles@rogers.com 705-790-8884

When: Thursday June 1 from 10:00am to 3:00pm

Location: Meet at the Prairie Smoke Reserve parking lot on Lake Dalrymple Rd. at 10:00 am. It will take approx. 2.5 hours to drive from Kitchener to Lake Dalrymple. More details driving instructions can be provided upon registration.

Description: Alvars are one of the rarest ecosystems occurring in only five countries and making up a very small percentage of world ecosystems. Alvar is a Swedish word to describe unproductive habitat with little vegetation and is best described as a thin layer of soil over limestone bedrock with few trees and shrubs. However, alvars are habitat to many species of rare alvar flora, lichens, mosses, algae, birds, butterflies, dragonflies and other insects and animals.

We will visit Prairie Smoke Reserve and Little Bluestem Reserves, both in the Orillia/Kawartha Lakes region and owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. We will cover about 4-5 kms, walking over flat limestone bedrock. Bring your camera and binoculars, since you'll want to capture the glorious displays of rare plants with the many whites and yellows mixing with reds, oranges and blues giving a rainbow of colour of alvar flora.

Alvars flood in the spring and become very dry in summer but there will still be large pools of water on limestone in early June. Wear waterproof footwear and a hat and carry lots of drinking water since days can be extremely hot with very little shade on the alvar.

This is a remote area with no washrooms or places to buy food or gas. Bring your lunch, drinking water and insect repellent for those who use it.

Registration is required by contacting Bob at rbowles@rogers.com



**THANK YOU
VOLUNTEERS!**

TO ALL OUR WRN MEMBERS
WHO TOOK THAT EXTRA STEP
THIS YEAR TO HELP OUT,
YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR MARK!

WRN Teens Report

By Brynn Roderick

WRN Teens have been meeting regularly over the fall/winter season. In late October, Teens went to **rare's** Eramosa Property 2 near Eden Mills. This was a collaborative work project with WRN, Nature Guelph, the Guelph Hiking Club, and **rare** and was focused on removing invasive shrubs, including Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*). In November, Teens returned to the Forest Heights Pollinator Patch located at Meadowlane Park, led by Giselle Carter, to assist with maintenance weeding and fall seed collection. It was great to check in on the garden after our previous visit in September. We've also been able to visit SpruceHaven and help out there a few times, now that we aren't busy checking the nest boxes and salamander boards. Using data collected over 5 years at SpruceHaven, a few Teens and adult volunteers have met on two occasions to transfer our research on salamanders, tree frogs, and nest boxes into online spreadsheets. Additional activities at SpruceHaven included salamander board and frog tube maintenance with Levi Moore, Teens guiding their family and friends on a hike organized by Thelma Beaubien, and a trail maintenance hike with WRN Kids led by Sandy Hill just before the holidays. In the first week of the new year, we enjoyed a hike along the Mill Race Trail in St. Jacobs. (Thank you to WRN Teen Matt for the suggestion!) We were lucky enough to hand-feed some hungry chickadees and meet some friendly ducks in the mill race! A week later, four Teens volunteered to help out at **rare's** Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids held at the **rare's** ECO Centre in Cambridge. Joining us were several families, a Teen expert birder, and a few adult volunteers. Our most recent event earlier this month was an owl prowl at the Laurel Creek Nature Centre in Waterloo. Teens and their families joined Levi Moore on a hike to find some owls. The dark forest was illuminated by the very bright full moon and we were lucky enough to see a curious Eastern Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*)! I'm sure that we're all looking forward to seeing the return of the Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) in spring at SpruceHaven!

Waterloo Region Nature Kids!

By Rachelle Swayze

WRN Kids and families have been busy this winter! Check out our blog for detailed recaps on all our outings and activities:

<https://waterlooregionnature.ca/kids-events/>

For our November outing we visited **rare Charitable Research Reserve** and learned about flint knapping and archeology. We saw a demonstration of flint knapping which was very interesting to the kids. We then hiked around and saw sites where artifacts have been found.

We don't usually have an outing in December but this year we joined the WRN Teens group out at SpruceHaven to do some trail work. We trimmed tree branches and took them home to make holiday decorations.

Our January outing was participating in the Christmas Bird Count for Kids at **rare** on a beautiful sunny Saturday. We headed out with binoculars and identified birds including Eastern Bluebirds and Goldfinches.

Mid-February we ventured out to Huron Natural Area for an Owl Prowl. We were hoping to hear Screech Owls and/or Great Horned Owls but unfortunately did not. It was still fun to be out at night anticipating hearing an owl. The wintery weather and icy trail conditions added to the adventure. Thank you to Fraser Gibson for leading us on this outing.

In February we met at Laurel Creek Conservation Area for a hike to some pine trees that have been host to Pine Shoot Beetle. We learned a lot about the beetle and used magnifying glasses to look at the tunnels they made under the bark of the trees. We made shelters by tying ropes to trees and hanging sheets. The kids also really enjoyed handfeeding the chickadees.

For our March outing we will be play a predator-prey game and in April we will be participating in the Canadian Shoreline Cleanup by picking up litter along the creek at Bechtel Park.

It is great to be out in nature learning and playing together!

WRN Photo Gallery



Ornithotherapy

continued from pg. 1

Ornithotherapy is a practice of personal betterment with ecological benefits. Because once you have considered the chickadee, you consider the chickadees, and the cardinals, and the goldfinches; the considerations become ripples for a larger awareness of the natural world.

We might then consider how being in nature and watching the birds forms a relationship between us. In observing, we see unique behaviours, in feeding the birds we learn food preferences and receive pleasure inherent in offering help, how we are accepted, cautiously, ever so cautiously at first, into their circle of comfort. We, in turn, bring them into our own metaphorical room of comfort. Gone are the walls to be replaced with trees and meadows and every living thing in between.

Bringing nature closer to us and our daily lives brings us tangible and measurable health benefits, and, dare I say, joy. It's as simple as that.

So what do you say? Should we go and find that chickadee?

Top: WRN Teens Friends & Family hike at SpruceHaven in November. Photo by Marg Paré.

Left: Eastern Bluebird (Dickson Wilderness Area) and Eastern Screech Owl (Bechtel Park). Photos by Fraser Gibson.

Birds of a Feather

By Dale Ingrey

Birds of one kind and colour always flock and fly together.

If I were pressed to name my favourite bird I would choose *Cardinalis cardinalis*, the Northern Cardinal without hesitation. For one thing the redbird, as it is commonly known, is one of the few year-round residents in southern Ontario to frequent my backyard feeders from October to May. For another, this colourful bird, with its distinctive red crest and black mask chooses to nest and raise its young near my house. In late summer and autumn I observe the adults teaching their fledglings how to forage for insects and grubs. In late October when I

fill the feeders they are happy to avail themselves of my largesse.

I suspect the lessons also involve being on the alert for predators, particularly Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks. I have witnessed a few successful dove kills by a Cooper's Hawk, but more often than not, the incident is only confirmed after the fact when I discover a pile of feathers scattered on the ground.

Aside from observing bird behaviour, listening to the myriad calls and songs of various species ranks high on the list of pleasures for me, as I'm sure it does for others. Just as human beings run the gamut from rap to classical in their musical taste, birds display a wide range of versatility, from the squeaky clothesline call of the blue jay to the melodious "cheer, cheer" and "birdy, birdy" songs of the cardinal. Who am I to judge whether one singer is superior to the rest? As Henry Van Dyke observed long ago, "The woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those who sang best."

As for feeding habits the cardinals are usually the first morning visitors to the sunflower feeders, intermittent feeders throughout the day and invariably the last feeders before dark. Goldfinches, house finches, tree sparrows and juncos all come to the buffet, some preferring the nyjer and millet feeders closer to the house. The nuthatches and chickadees patiently wait their turn to dart in, snatch their prize and fly off immediately to cache their seeds in a nearby tree crevasse. Downy, hairy and red-bellied woodpeckers also take seeds but they prefer suet cakes. House sparrows are also regular, albeit messy backyard visitors that scatter seeds indiscriminately. Once the blackbirds and grackles show up in the spring I am constantly refilling the feeders because they can empty a feeder in one day with their voracious appetite.

What is remarkable is that for the most part all the various visitors to the feeders have learned to accept other birds and seemingly have agreed to take their turn. Most birds get along with their own kind especially when they congregate in large



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groups for various reasons. Who has not marvelled at a murmuration of starlings, sometimes up to a thousand or more manoeuvring in perfect synchronization high in the sky on a cloudless day? Or what about the many hundreds of crows that suddenly descend on a deciduous woodlot in winter to roost overnight? Migrating birds also flock together for company and safety, witness the thousands of snow geese and tundra swans that make the journey north in the spring to their breeding grounds and then south in the fall to their wintering grounds. Only the predators, the owls, hawks and falcons prefer to live alone, primarily

because they don't like competition for food and territory. But even these loners manage to tolerate each other when they embark on their annual fall migration. The sight of a thousand broad-winged hawks kettling high in the sky over Hawk Cliff near Port Stanley, Ontario, waiting for favourable winds, is a sight to behold. Birds of a feather do indeed flock together.

On that note I will conclude this essay and take comfort in the hope that the resident cardinals and other backyard birds continue to frequent my feeders and provide me with countless hours of innocent pleasure. .

2022 Christmas Bird Counts: Waterloo Region

By Jim Burrell

The 123rd Christmas Bird Count (CBC) period concluded this past December. Local counts were held in Kitchener (89th), Cambridge (46th) and Linwood (17th). These count circles are 15 km in radius and are centered in the middle of each community.

Ethan Gosnell compiles for Kitchener, Levi Moore for Cambridge and Ken Burrell for Linwood. The information is compiled then submitted to Birds Canada and the Audubon Society where it can be retrieved and read online.

Some highlights from this year's counts follows:

Total Species:	Linwood	52	Total Individuals:	Linwood	15869 (above average)
	Kitchener	70		Kitchener	Not Available
	Cambridge	69		Cambridge	11500 (low)

Because these are one day events, weather plays a significant role in what is noted. Also, habitats play major roles in what is observed. Observers vie for the best habitats.

Some other findings are also noteworthy:

New Species - Evening Grosbeak (12) in Linwood; Savannah Sparrow (1) in Kitchener; Redheaded Duck (1) and Cormorant (5) in Cambridge

“Best” Birds - Kitchener – Cackling Goose (3), Wood Duck (3), Grackle (3), Field Sparrow (3), Red Shouldered Hawk (3), Coot (1), Bluebird (1)

Cambridge – Pied Billed Grebe, Field Sparrow, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Red Shouldered Hawk, Tufted Titmouse

Linwood – Winter Wren, Lapland Longspur

More than 150 volunteers participated this year, many are members of WRN. If you would like to take part in any of these counts next December, contact Ethan Gosnell (ethan.gosnell2@gmail.com), Levi Moore (levimoore@gmail.com) , or Ken Burrell (Kenneth.gd.burrell@gmail.com) . They will happily fit you in to an area of their count.

Membership Report

By Judy Watson

Thank You to Our Donors

Robert Bean and Ann Bean
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Anonymous - In memory of Bob Mundy

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Welcome, New Members

<i>Jade Anderson</i>	<i>Mavis Kerr</i>
<i>Patti Anderson</i>	<i>Larry Kryski</i>
<i>Heather Arseneault</i>	<i>Marianne McIntosh</i>
<i>Karen Ballard</i>	<i>Elizabeth Mueller</i>
<i>Donna Carpenter</i>	<i>Kruti Patel</i>
<i>Stephen Carpenter</i>	<i>Crystal Rose</i>
<i>Rachelle Clinch</i>	<i>Karen Vanderwolf</i>



WRN Holiday Outing. Photo: Jenna Quinn

SUBMISSIONS NEEDED!

If you have any articles, photographs, outing recaps, etc. you would like to see in our newsletter, please submit them to:

editor@waterlooregionnature.ca

Ontario Nature Report

By Fraser Gibson

Standing Strong

Ontario Nature has been very involved since the Government of Ontario introduced Bill 23 and opened lands in the Greenbelt for development.

The changes undermine environmental protection across the province and severely constrain our collective ability to engage in municipal planning decisions.

These law and policy changes spell disaster for the farmland and natural areas that sustain us, and stymie societal efforts to address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss through enlightened environmental planning and decision-making.

Ontario Nature continues to speak up and encourages you to do the same. Let's keep the pressure on by sharing information through social media, writing letters to the editor, attending rallies, and contacting MPPs and Ministers. Thank you to everyone who has participated in our campaigns so far. Here are some of our collective accomplishments to date:

- ⇒ [Bill 23 campaign webpage](#) with more than 2,500 unique visits
- ⇒ [Bill 23 backgrounder](#) with nearly 8,000 pageviews
- ⇒ [Joint media release](#) with the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance signed by more than 100 organizations and 100 individuals
- ⇒ [Bill 23 Action Alert](#) signed by 14,580 people
- ⇒ [Joint ERO submission on changes to the Wetland Evaluation System](#) signed by 70 organizations, as well as a [backgrounder](#)
- ⇒ [Joint ERO submission on the Greenbelt changes](#) signed by 78 organizations
- ⇒ [Greenbelt Action Alert](#) signed by 9,619 people
- ⇒ Unprecedented engagement through our social media channels
- ⇒ [ERO submission](#) about Bill 23 including changes undercutting conservation authorities (from Ontario Nature only)
- ⇒ [Submission to the Standing Committee](#) (from Ontario Nature only)
- ⇒ [Joint ERO submission](#) on offsetting policy currently circulating for signatures

“Big Tent” Initiative — Alliance for a Livable Ontario

In light of the many harmful changes in policy the Ontario government has introduced recently – including broad detrimental impacts to our environment, health and democracy – organizations from across sectors in Ontario are coming together to fight back. Ontario Nature is a proud partner in The [Alliance for a Livable Ontario](#) and we invite other organizations to learn more and consider joining the alliance.

The Alliance also hosts an [online form](#) to help keep track of how Bill 23 is harming Ontario and invites groups and citizens to send them any intelligence on local government efforts related to Bill 23 (e.g., Municipal Council meeting resolutions, discussions of property tax increases, discussions of new infrastructure costs).



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**WRN is a registered
charitable organization.
Membership fees and all
donations are tax
deductible.**

Objectives of WRN

TO acquire and disseminate knowledge of natural
history.
TO protect and preserve wildlife.
TO purchase and hold appropriate parcels of land for
the advancement of conservation.
TO support public interest in nature and its preservation
by supporting the enactment of wise legislation and by
other means as falls within the scope of the
Corporation.

General Information

Meetings are held on the fourth Monday of the month,
September to May with the exception of December.
Our meetings are free and visitors are always welcome.
Outings are scheduled almost every month.

Advertising Rates for The Heron:

Advertisement Size	Per issue	Full year (3 issues)
Full Page	\$200	\$520
Half Page	\$100	\$260
Quarter Page	\$50	\$130
One-tenth Page (business card)	\$25	\$65

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