

Club Members Honoured by the Queen!

Queen Elizabeth II decided to honour Peace Officers, who served the Commonwealth so she commissioned a medal known as the Peace Officer Exemplary Service Medal.

In Canada, the Governor-General, acting as her agent selected twenty-three Canadian Peace Officers to receive this prestigious medal. Included in this group were two North Durham Nature members. Geoff Carpentier and Kim Lendvay both received this award. Geoff received his for 30 years of service and Kim for 20 years of service as a Peace Officer, who put themselves at personal risk to serve Canadians and protect the environment.



Local News

When is nature not natural?

by Derek Connelly

Many would argue that nature includes anything alive that is growing on its own steam without our help. Nature is normally chaotic and whatever can survive in an environment does. In some minds that eliminates all domestic animals and many of our ornamental plants which require special care. Some say, "If it's wild, it's natural". What about the introduced

species of living things from other parts of the world? Are they natural here?

We import many plants for our gardens and parks that don't normally live here, but if they adapt to our climate we are generally pleased. Other species however may have been brought here by accident or were planted thinking they would be fine, but now are a problem. These introduced plants or animals are called invasive species, but are they really unnatural?



Dog Strangling Vine wraps around trees and shrubs and blankets wildflowers and other plants, covering open areas. Why? Isn't there a balance in nature? Invasive plants are well named -they are aggressive because they have nothing in the local nature community to keep them in check.

So what are our choices? Bring in an introduced bug, spray herbicides, dig them out, mow them down or let nature figure it out and find a balance. Maybe a native bug or disease will adapt to control it??? That would be natural, while active control management by humans is not.

Meanwhile I top up the bird feeder, water the indoor plants, and keep looking for true nature in this unnatural world.

Scots Pine Management in the Uxbridge Countryside Preserve

What? Cutting trees in the Preserve? I thought it was a "Preserve"! What's up?

We are losing the meadows in the Preserve. Known as the Countryside Preserve, it has been set aside to protect the forests, thickets, swamps and open meadows. Meadows are where grassland birds can live: Clay- coloured, Grasshopper, Savannah and Vesper Sparrows and Bobolink and Eastern Bluebird have all been seen in the meadows there. Grasses and other prairie type plants are found here. They are pollinated by bees and other insects. Milkweed grows in abundance and here the Monarch finds a temporary home before its trip to Mexico.

In 2006, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority recommended a Management Plan for the Uxbridge Countryside Preserve which included the removal of the invasive species Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) from meadow areas to prevent the meadow from becoming a forest. Scots Pine is slowly taking over the meadow and we will undoubtedly lose grassland birds and other meadow plants and animals, some which are endangered or uncommon. For example, in the past decade the Eastern Bluebirds in the Preserve have not been successful, despite active assistance through the installation of nesting boxes. Why? That habitat simply has too many trees.

If we want a Forest Preserve without a meadow then we should do nothing, but if we want a Countryside Preserve we must manage it.

Fortunately Scots Pine is much easier to manage than other invasive plants. Mechanical means are very effective to remove it without using herbicides. This

year the Township's Trails Volunteers organized two events to "thin the meadows of Scots Pine".

During the first event in November, twenty-five people volunteered to cut or pull by hand small young Scots Pine. Official trail volunteers, Uxbridge Scouts, local residents, students looking for community hours and members of North Durham Nature all showed up. Armed with pruners or tree loppers, teams spread out into four areas of the Preserve to spend three hours weeding out the encroaching invasive small trees.

In mid-December, a second event took place. A local contractor Skyline Tree Service volunteered a day to cut down Scots Pine trees in the meadow. Three guys with proper gear, a tractor and chipper removed some of the larger mature trees. It was really exciting to see the level of enthusiasm and commitment to the Countryside Preserve.

The Scots Pines are still there and the job isn't over. However, next spring rays of sunlight will fall on more of the meadow grasses and on the wildlife that love those open areas of the Uxbridge Countryside Preserve.

Nature Nut

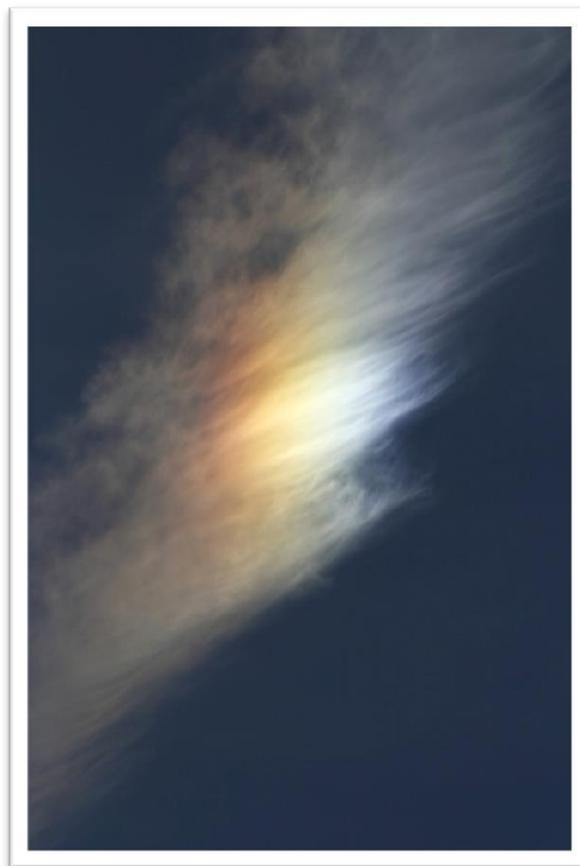
Sundogs and Halos

by Nancy Melcher

images by CanStock Photos

The recent mild weather has brought plenty of cloudy days. That's fine for those who don't like snow, but the crisp, cold days of winter can bring beautiful sights in the

daytime sky. Since the winter sun sits lower in the sky, it's the perfect time to look for parhelia (*para-*: beside + *helios*: sun), or "sundogs" as they're more commonly called and halos around the sun.



Sundogs are bright spots in the sky appearing on either side of the sun. They're formed by the refraction of sunlight through ice crystals high in the atmosphere. These crystals are hexagonal plates, each floating in the air like tiny six-sided stop signs. Air resistance makes the plates orient horizontally, so the large flat surface is parallel to the earth. They fall gently much the same as leaves drift down from trees in the autumn.

The crystals act as prisms, bending the light rays passing through them the same way raindrops make rainbows. They can be quite variable. Sometimes sundogs are

coloured a bit like a rainbow. The part



closest to the sun is reddish, the centre is yellow, and the side farthest from the sun is blue. Sometimes the sundog may appear to have a “tail” extending outwards farther away from the sun.

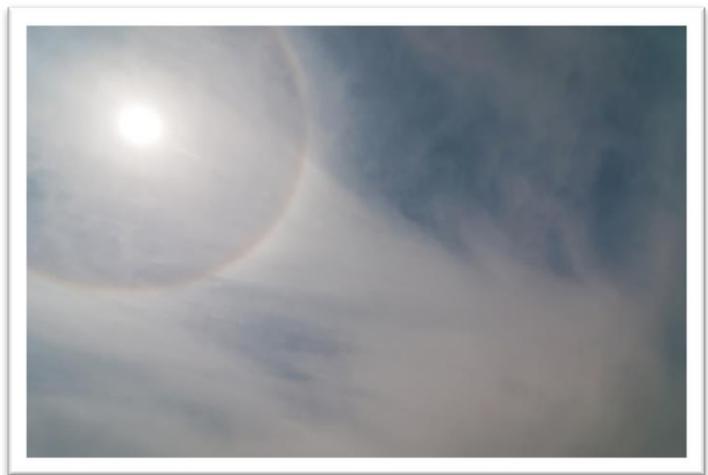
Sundogs can form at any time of the year, anywhere on the planet. All it takes is the low sun shining through cirrus clouds. These wispy clouds form high in the atmosphere and are made of tiny ice crystals, unlike the stratus clouds we’ve seen so much of this fall. Stratus clouds are made of water droplets and are present much lower in the atmosphere: they often bring rain or snow.

Sundogs may have changed the course of British history. In 1461, during the War of the Roses, dawn broke on Feb. 2 with two sundogs present. This was the prelude to the Battle of Mortimer’s Cross. This sight of three “suns” frightened the troops, but Edward of York convinced his soldiers that it represented the Holy Trinity and showed that God was on their side. They scored a decisive victory in that battle.

Halos are more common than sundogs, but they are more difficult to see. They form in

cirrostratus clouds: thin, milky sheets that veil the sky. They are also made of hexagonal ice crystals, but these are randomly oriented in the cloud. Some are plate shaped, and others are columnar like short pencils. Rays of sun passing through the crystals bend by 22 degrees, making a bright halo form. Some of the sun’s light is reflected off the surfaces of the crystals too. Because of the optical properties of the crystals, no light is reflected towards the inner halo, making it appear darker than the surrounding sky. It’s as if there’s a hole in the sky around the sun!

Look carefully for sundogs or halos next time the sky is clear and there are high wispy clouds. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times for sundogs, when the sun is low in the sky. Perhaps seeing one will bring you good luck too. Halos may appear at any time, even around the moon. At least it means it’s not snowing, yet!



Secret Garden

The Goodwood Tract – just down the road from Schitt’s Creek!

by Mark Stabb

North Durham neighborhoods have been transformed with sparkling Christmas lights to remind us of the season, despite the lack of snow. The Village of Goodwood is no exception. But Goodwood undergoes another periodic makeover – every once in a while it is turned into “Schitt’s Creek” – the setting for a CBC sitcom about a formerly rich family that settles in a “backwoods” town that they bought years before.

I’m not sure what the good people of Goodwood think of the show, but it has put the town on the map in a way. To me one of the village’s great features is a very fine bakery and coffee shop that I visit following trips to one of my favourite “secret gardens” just to the south – the Goodwood Tract.



The “Goodwood Resource Management Tract” is a 128 hectare block of forest, plantation, field and wetland perched on the Oak Ridges Moraine in the upper reaches of the West Duffins (*not* Schitt’s) Creek

watershed. It is owned and managed by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and is traversed by both the main Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) Trail and a more recently created ORM side trail that connects to emerging trail systems heading to points south.

The Goodwood Tract is a property in transition. It is mostly forested, but much of this is coniferous plantation in various stages of development. Current thinking has those planted stands being managed to



eventually become natural hardwood and mixed forest. As they stand now, they create a large tract of woods that supports deep-woods bird species such as Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Goshawk and Scarlet Tanager. However, the amount of actual forest interior – the true “deep woods” – is rather limited due to the numerous breaks between plantations. This will change as forest grows towards an older-growth state.

Birders will enjoy the variety of habitats on the property – which sustains more than 70 breeding bird species. This includes interesting and uncommon species such as the Black-and-White Warbler, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Hermit Thrush.

The clean, clear, cold West Duffins Creek weaves through the property and sustains coldwater species such as brook trout. If you walk the main Oak Ridges Moraine Trail across the northern portion of the property you will cross this creek valley on boardwalk and bridge. River Otter have been known to inhabit and feed in this creek system. You will also enjoy seeing a fine number of stately maples and other large tree specimens along this property boundary.

One of my favourite features is a magnificent beaver-sculpted wetland and meadow system that borders West Duffins Creek as it flows south. Here the creek meanders like a snake through silt and sediment from old beaver ponds that once filled the creek valley. Wetlands on the Oak Ridges Moraine are not very common – and I have seen few beaver-managed systems at this scale in the area. You can view the meadow, scrub and wetland

habitat from the southern trail – which skirts the wetland boundary. As you traverse the feature from top to bottom you come across a number of historical beaver dams that would have created flooded swamps and large ponds in the past. Beaver are still present, but the young poplar food supply may not be sufficient to sustain a large colony. As the forest grows and meadows and gaps fill with deciduous trees this may change over time.

The Goodwood Tract remains one of the quieter spots to visit and enjoy natural history. However there are discussions regarding additional trails in the area. The TRCA has an excellent detailed biological inventory report on the property: <http://trca.on.ca/dotAsset/186180.pdf>, which speaks to this: “The high quality forest fauna and flora communities are best protected by setting aside large areas of the property where trail access is completely restricted, allowing such areas to provide multiple opportunities for sensitive species

to



flourish, potentially acting as source populations for the wider local landscape.” Presumably this advice will help keep this property’s wild setting, well, wild.

Directions

The Goodwood Tract is located between the 2nd and 3rd Concession in Uxbridge Township, just south of Goodwood and northeast of Stouffville. You can enter the tract at the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail entrances off the 3rd Concession roughly 3 km south of Hwy 47 at Goodwood or off the 2nd Concession roughly 2.5 km south of Hwy 47.

Christmas Bird Counts

Bird Count for Kids

by Cara Gregory and Jay Thibert

The Christmas Bird Count for Kids (CBC4Kids) was established in 2007 in Sonoma Valley California, by Sonoma Birding and is now conducted annually across North America. Bird Studies Canada has been the Canadian partner in this Citizen Science program since 2010. North Durham Nature’s CBC4Kids was held at the Nonquon Environmental Education Centre on December 6th. Three families attended this year’s count, for a total of 9 participants. A short presentation was given on how to identify different winter birds by their field marks and young participants were introduced to binocular use. A hike through this wetland property resulted in 10 species being counted: Blue Jay (3), Black-capped Chickadee (28), Downy Woodpecker (4), Hairy Woodpecker (2), Brown Creeper (1), Cedar Waxwing (30), American Goldfinch (3), American Crow (1), White-breasted Nuthatch (3) and Northern Cardinal (1).

These results have been submitted to eBird Canada and shared with the CBC4Kids national database.

Chickadee feeding during the hike was a highlight for all participating in this event. A cup of hot chocolate finished off the day for these new young birders.

Uxbridge Christmas Bird Count

Derek Connelly compiler

Overall, the species numbers dropped as warm weather dispersed birds.

Another mild Christmas this year but this time over a longer time period had an influence on the 49 species of birds that showed up on feeders, fields, forests and ponds of Uxbridge and Scugog townships.

Open water provided habitat for an influx of ducks adding a number of new species to our count including Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler and Green-winged Teal. Canada Geese maintained their high numbers (over 2400) and kept us guessing if we had counted a flock more than once or not as they flew around. The total individual count of all birds was comparable to last year’s count of over 8800 birds.

Another treat was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at the forest edge at the Nonquon sewage lagoons, a summer bird that should have been long gone. Missing on this count were owls although the effort was reduced slightly because of freezing rain the night before. Hawks were also missed and only Sharp-shinned, Northern Harrier and Red-tailed Hawk were observed.

In terms of effort, the number of feeder watchers was down to 11 from 19 last year - perhaps they also migrated south. Field

observers were up by 6 persons to 35 from last year with new birders, both young and old, added to the mix. Visiting birders came from British Columbia, Bruce peninsula and Ajax. The distance and time spent in the field was similar to last year with a slight increase in distance walked as town trail walkers joined the effort. The visibility was good for most of the day and participants had a comfortable day of it compared to other years where freezing rain or wind has been the norm all day.

Thanks to Kim Adams for entering data during the final evening tally, Mark Stabb for hosting our pot-luck and of course the many birders and the people who opened their gates to let us count their birds.

For a complete list of species visit our website.



A small number of the Trumpeters seen at Nonquon lagoons

Beaverton Christmas Bird Count

by John McLean

We anticipated that our mild weather would result in open water especially on Lake Simcoe and therefore large numbers of

waterfowl. What we didn't expect (but should have) was that a timely snowfall would cause birds to congregate and concentrate on seeking their food at feeders. The ultimate result was a record 59 species for the count.

Four new species were added to the count's historical list including Trumpeter Swan and Redhead (Geoff Carpentier), Savannah Sparrow (Dave Martland) and Sandhill Crane (Paul Wigglesworth). Others identified on the day but seen rarely in the previous 40 years include Snow Goose, Greater Scaup, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon and Bonaparte Gull. The numbers of some of these species were incredibly high and Geoff Carpentier, in particular, was kept busy counting 2057 (not 2056 or 2058) Common Mergansers, over 860 Greater Scaup and 575 Redhead. Other record numbers included over 2000 Canada Geese, 4 Bald Eagles, 7 Northern Harriers and 10 Red-bellied Woodpeckers.



Gulls mergansers and golden-eye on Lake Simcoe

All groups were busy counting solid numbers of all species including 4 kinds of gulls and 5 hawk species. We do not have all the numbers from Feeder Watchers or Count Week observers but at time of writing, there are some hoped for birds missing including Great Blue Heron, Snowy Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Brown Creeper, White-throated Sparrow and Common Redpoll – not that we want to be greedy. Thanks to the happy North Durham Nature counters which include Carol Apperson, Geoff Carpentier, Derek Connelly, Mark Dorriesfield, Barb Glass and Gary Patterson.

Club Outings & Events

James Kamstra has taken over the task of managing our trips and indoor program. Here's his first report.

Upcoming North Durham Nature Events February to April 2016

SPEAKERS

Michael Measure, Executive director of the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP)

Title of Presentation: "Your Pane is Their Pain"

Thursday February 25, 2016 – Port Perry Public Library

Since founding the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) organization in 1993, Michael Measure has spearheaded the

efforts in Canada to preserve migrating birds from injurious and fatal collisions with man-made structures. FLAP engages a group of volunteers to rescue birds that have collided with buildings, educates the public and works with municipalities on developing bird friendly buildings. Michael will be speaking on buildings and how they are affecting migratory birds and about solutions to this issue.

Geoff Carpentier, North Durham Nature
Title of Presentation: "Birding in Colombia"

Thursday March 25, 2016 – Uxbridge Senior's Centre

Colombia has more species of birds than any country in the world so it is a must see destination for the globe-trotting birder. Geoff has just returned from leading his first trip to this land that until recently was too dangerous to visit. He will show images of some of the remarkable species and fill us with yarns of his adventures.

Mike Bender (Toronto Region Conservation Authority) and Richard Scott (Parks Canada)

Title of Presentation: "Rouge River, Canada First Urban National Park"

Thursday April 28, 2016 – Port Perry Public Library

The Rouge River forms a great valley on the east and northeast side of Toronto that has remained remarkably wild given its location. It was protected and managed by the TRCA until recently, but has been transferred to Parks Canada and will become an Urban National Park, a different concept of park. Get insights into some of the unique features and how this new park will be managed.

FIELD OUTINGS

Sunday February 7, 2016 – *Snow Shoeing and Winter Botany at Nonquon Education Centre*

10:00 am Nonquon Ed. Centre, Pheasant Pen, Old Simcoe St., N of Scugog Line 10

Snowshoeing over a frozen snow-covered wetland gives the winter visitor easy access to places that are nearly inaccessible in summer. This is a family event with snowshoes provided so this is the opportunity to try out this fun activity. We will look for animal tracks and many of the plants that can still be identified at this time of year. In the event of no snow or questionable ice conditions we will still lead a hike to search for evidence of the diverse plant life to be found in the fields and wetland. Led by Cara Gregory and James Kamstra

Sunday March 20, 2016 – *Signs of Spring Hike at Goodwood Tract Conservation Area*

9:30 am meet at Walmart Parking (next to Coles in Uxbridge) or 10:00 am at Goodwood Trailhead

Several trails wind through field and forest of this Duffins Creek headwater that contains a mix of forest, plantation, field and wetland making it a perfect place for an early spring walk. We will look for early bird migrants and other signs of life now that winter is finally over. Led by Mark Stabb.

Saturday April 2, 2016 – *Waterfowl at Durham's Lake Ontario Marshes*

8:30 am meet at Walmart Parking (next to Coles in Uxbridge)

Once the ice leaves the wetlands, large numbers of migratory waterfowl suddenly appear and stage for a few weeks before

moving on to their breeding grounds. The marshes on Lake Ontario in southern Durham are excellent places. Geoff Carpentier will lead this trip to see what has arrived at several locations that may include Cranberry Marsh, Duffin's Creek Marsh and Oshawa Second Marsh.

Saturday April 23, 2016 – *Amphibians in Crow's Pass Conservation Area*

7:30 pm meet at corner of Middlemarch Road and Ashburn Road

Spring Peepers and Wood Frogs are the first species to sing in the early spring wetlands. The little known Crow's Pass CA on the Oak Ridges Moraine contains kettle ponds that are the breeding sites for these frogs as well as newts and Spotted Salamanders. We will listen for frogs and dip net for salamanders with herpetologist James Kamstra.

We are alas considering a trip to Amherst Island to look for wintering owls in late February if the weather and owls cooperate. Stay tuned for more details on that adventure.

And finally – our next indoor meeting: Thursday January 28 – **Members' Night**

Many of our NDN members are nature experts and world travellers in their own right. "Member's Night" is the opportunity where members can show off their photography, nature-related hobbies or expertise. So far we have short slide presentations on exotic destinations ranging from Belize, the High Arctic, Thunder Cape and Queen Elizabeth II Wildlands. We are still open for other short (10 minute) presentations, or maybe you have an unusual collection to show. Contact James Kamstra at

james.kamstra@aecom.com or otherwise just show up.

Hayden DeBarros – the Reptile Man!

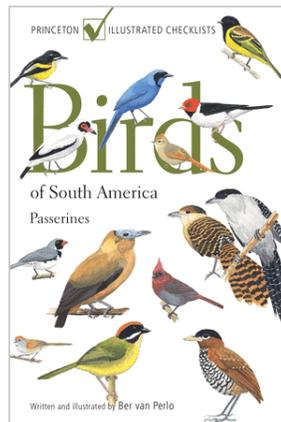
Fourteen year old Hayden gave us a great and informative talk recently at our November meeting. It is so refreshing to see our youth so engaged and so professional. We learned a great deal about reptiles and amphibians from this young man. His enthusiasm and caring for all wildlife is a message to all of us who care. Change begins with you.



Thanks Hayden!

Book Announcement

Several NDNers will be in Colombia when you read this newsletter enjoying the many and varied birds, mammals and insects that frequent that part of the world. Princeton has just published Volume 1 of their new Birds of South America – Passerines. It



covers an astounding 1952 species found south of Panama! 192 colour plates illustrate all the species covered and provide details about identification, habitat, songs and calls. I'll be bringing my copy with me on the trip and will have an opportunity to field test it. So far it looks amazing – Clear and clean plates, lots of details, range maps and tons of information!

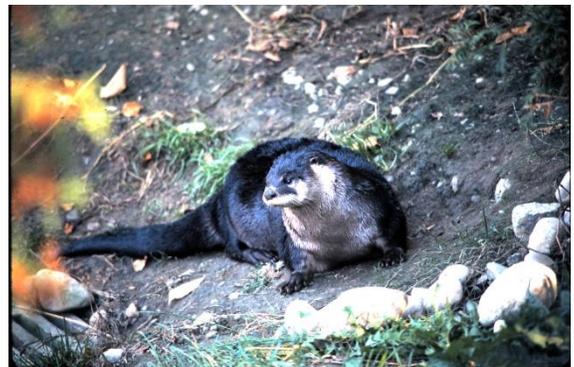
Here are the details; if you're interested:

Birds of South America: Passerines
by Ber van Perlo, Princeton University Press

Paperback | 2015 | **\$29.95** USD. ISBN: 9780691167961
464 pp. | 5 x 7 1/2 |

197 color plates. 1,952 maps.

Quiz: Who am I?



I love water, am a superb swimmer, catch fish with ease and am very playful.

Nifty Nature Notes

Turtles – Fun Facts

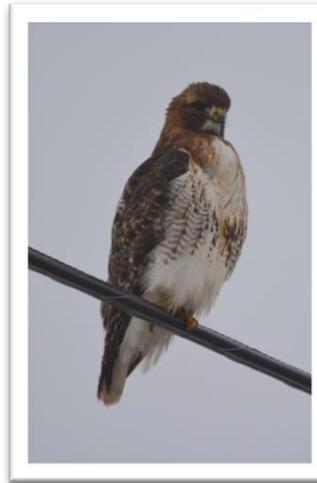
Did you know that:

- The earliest members of the turtle family date back 157 million years - older than snakes and crocodiles?
- The Alligator Snapping Turtle is the biggest freshwater turtle in the world and can grow to be $\frac{3}{4}$ meters long and weigh 90 kg?
- Turtles can vocalize by forcing air out of their lungs?
- The turtle shell originated from the rib cage and the spinal cord and is made up of about 50 different bones?



- Turtles can lay 24-100 eggs depending on the species?
- A turtle can bleed to death if the shell is damaged as it contains nerves and blood vessels?
- Turtles must lay their eggs on land even if they are totally aquatic species?
- The largest turtle on earth is the Leatherback which can weigh 900 kg and reach lengths of 2.3 meters?

Cranberry Hawk Watch - 2015



According to the compilers at the Toronto Ornithological Club and HMANA website, the Cranberry Hawk Watch recorded 8088 hawks this fall, including 73 Bald Eagles but only 224

Broad-winged Hawks. The latter usually come through in the 1000s, but at most counts this year they were almost absent. Somehow they bypassed us but 784,869 reached the Vera Cruz River of Raptors in Mexico and 472,276 got to Corpus Christi!

Niger Seed

According to Ontario Birding News, birds are pretty clever and they know how good and tasty or old and stinky your Niger is. Niger is prone to developing mould that makes it unpalatable to most finches. Even if fresh from the store it may already be impacted so if you have finches and they stop by but won't eat, it likely has started to turn. Fresh seed will be shiny and have few or no brown seeds. If it clumps in any way, it has already turned and should be discarded. In any case, you should never buy more than you can use in a month or two and seed in your feeder should be replaced every 3-4 weeks if not eaten. Make sure the feeders are kept dry, clean and mould free.

Answer to Quiz:

I am a River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*). I live in and around many of the lakes and ponds in Scugog, Brock and Uxbridge Townships. I hunt small and large fish, insects, tadpoles and just about anything else aquatic. I love to slide down snow banks but stay close to water most of the time as I travel my preferred routes throughout the year.



Red-tailed Hawk

For more information about NDN

Visit our website at:

www.northdurhamnature.com

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*Note: All photos and text in this newsletter
by Geoff Carpentier unless otherwise stated*

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