Birdathon 2018

I will be running my 2018 Birdathon in support of NDN and Bird Studies Canada again this year. Please consider supporting me in this ongoing worthwhile cause.

To make an online donation, please visit my personal Birdathon donation link at:

https://www.canadahelps.org/me/6Dd6MYs

Thank-you to all in advance of your kind donation!

Secret Garden (revisited)

The Goodwood Tract

A Secret Garden
Recreation and Conservation, can they coexist in a secret garden?

Text by Derek Connelly
White Admiral photo by James Kamstra
Veery by Geoff Carpentier

The Goodwood TRCA (Toronto Region Conservation Authority) tract covers about 128 hectares and lies between the second and third concession north of Webb Road just south of Secord Pond and the York-Durham Heritage Railway line and just northeast of Stouffville. For many years, a number of sensitive plant communities,

ground-nesting birds, amphibians, and mammals enjoyed a relatively quiet life.

I say "relative" because there were the occasional dog walkers, horse riders and ORTA (Oak Ridges' Trail Association) hikers doing their annual trail hike. I say "quiet" because, while TRCA has monitored the steady (in urban areas fast) decline in biodiversity of native species in all its properties over the last ten years, the Goodwood Tract has not shown the same negative impact. Indeed the flora shows signs of increase and the fauna is holding its own. This quiet life however is about to change.

A new trail system is proposed by TRCA, ORTA, Green Durham Association (GDA) and the Parks Canada to open up the forest and wetland and create a link south to the

Rouge Urban National Park. A trail planning committee had been struck on which Mark Stabb, acting as our NDN representative, raised concerns about the trail planning which appeared not to include the sensitive environment in its decision making. Trail user groups (e.g. ORTA, GDA, Durham Mountain Bike Association, and Uxbridge Trails Committee) are keen to get a trail approved and secure this link connecting and opening up recreational trails between these two large greenbelt areas. A public meeting was held in March to allow the public to learn more about the property, the proposed trail options, development plans and provide feedback on the options. The final draft of an updated Terrestrial Biological Assessment was presented raising the conservation flag against some of the options.

This area has been known for decades as a Provincially Significant Wetland containing sensitive flora and fauna. TRCA's own assessments in 2005 and 2017 again emphasized the concern that increased use would have on the natural area. More people would create more trampling of the soil and plants, rare plants may be illegally collected, off leash dogs will scare off the ground-nesting birds, night riders might reduce the success of frogs crossing trails to ponds, invasive plants will follow the new corridors and outcompete the native plants, and the integrity of the interior forest would be lost. Red -shouldered Hawk and Northern Goshawk have nested in the forest but both are sensitive to human disturbances and have not been seen in this area since before 2007. The challenges of increased use are huge, yet the importance of protecting the lands from other development is also real. Of the three trail options presented however only the first choice (Option A) does not open up the forest and wetland interior. This first option has already been created in use by ORTA and available for public use. All the options however will still require work to reach multi-recreational standards including new bridges, new surfaces, new signs, and more trail grading work to make them sustainable. All these details are found on the TRCA website for Goodwood.

The unique features of this Provincially Significant Wetland include a Tamarack & White Cedar fen and marsh wetland along with numerous sensitive plants. In all, over one hundred native vascular plants occur, of which twelve are regionally rare including Bicknell's Cranebill and Showy Lady Slipper. In the unique interior forests, we find eighty-five species of birds with twenty-nine considered of regional concern, and of which sixteen are ground-nesting. The ovenbird is a highlight with higher numbers here than anywhere on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Veery, Mourning Warbler and Ruffed Grouse are also well represented here. Three frogs of regional concern were recorded including Spring

Peeper, Wood Frog and the Grey Tree Frog. The March 2017 assessment is very detailed outlining TRCA's conservation objectives and lists all the species found here. I have added my comments to the survey and response forms indicating my concerns and emphasized my preference for option A. I recommend others do too. The deadline is April 15 for feedback. After that we wait and see how TRCA decides to manage this important property.

Kid's Corner

by Cara Gregory

Spring time is here although our current temperatures wouldn't have you feeling like it has arrived. Regardless of the temperatures, the length of daylight has steadily increased, signalling early migratory birds on their journey to their spring nesting sites. These early migrants usually arrive in April, perform their individual courtship rituals, pair up, and begin the search for a good nesting spot, where they will craftily put together a nest, and lay their eggs.

Early migratory birds that can be found in North Durham, in April, include the Red-winged Blackbird, Song Sparrow, Tree Swallow, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Bluebird, Killdeer, American Robin, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Woodcock, Hooded Merganser, and the Sandhill Crane. The Red-winged Blackbird males are the first to return to the wetland in the spring, stake out their territories, and then the females arrive 2-3 weeks later. I saw the first Red-winged Blackbirds arrive in the local Nonquon wetlands (Port Perry) this year in mid-March! The Sandhill Crane is another bird that usually stops to rest and refuel in North Durham wetlands. There are several pairs that have been nesting the past few years in Scugog.

Each species of bird chooses to nest in a very selective habitat and under specific sets of conditions. They also choose specific materials to build their nests. The size of the nest built depends on the size of the bird. With a variety of local habitats shrinking and in some cases disappearing, it can be hard for certain birds to find the nesting conditions they need, but you can help.

Bird Houses

The Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows are early migrants that are cavity nesters. This means that they like to nest in a hole in a tree, usually excavated by a woodpecker. In 1984, the Eastern Bluebird was designated by COSEWIC as a species of *Special Concern*, but in 1996 its status had changed to being *Not at Risk*. The increase in this

bird's success has been partly attributed to the creation of man-made bird boxes for them to nest in. The Black-capped Chickadee, although not an early migrant, is another cavity nester that builds its nest in April.

Putting up a bird house on your property can be a great experience for you to share

with the young people in your lives. Building a bird house with them is just part of the fun! Watching the birds inspect your birdhouse, and then enter with nesting material can be exciting to watch from a distance, and with a pair of binoculars for better viewing. Once the eggs have hatched, the parents can be observed going back and forth to the nest with food for their young. Watching the young birds open squawking beaks, eagerly awaiting the food is a thrill to see. Fledglings, hopping out of the birdhouse, in an effort to make their first flight can be entertaining. Just be careful not to get too close to the birdhouse when you are observing it, so that you don't stress the parents out. They will actively defend their nest if they feel it's necessary!

Creating a Bird House

There is a lot to take into consideration when building a birdhouse. Different cavity nesters have different sized holes they prefer to use, and have different space requirements. The materials you use need to be durable, so they can withstand a variety of weather. It is a good idea to add some type of predator guard as well, to keep the eggs from being eaten.

Visiting the following websites is a good place to start to give you some ideas for building the bird houses for early migrant cavity nesters like the Eastern Bluebird and the Tree Swallow.

http://www.audubon.org/news/diy-build-bluebird-box

http://www.hww.ca/en/things-you-can-do/action-and-awareness/birds/construct-and-maintain.html

http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw/?targetpg=nestboxes

The American Robin, also an early migrant, is not a cavity nester, and requires a platform on which to nest.

https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/birds/american-robin/

The placement of the birdhouse is important as well. It needs to be located in the right habitat, placed at the right height, and if you are putting up more than one, they need to be spaced properly. The following website will help you out with this.

https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/nest-box-placement/

If you don't feel that you have the time or the skills needed to put together a bird

house. They can be purchased at most hardware stores, feed stores, and specialty bird stores. If you have wetland habitat on your property, Wood Ducks and Eastern Screech-owls are cavity nesters, and Ducks Unlimited offers Wood Duck boxes. North Durham Nature also has a unique and successful bird box design for purchase. For more information on the purchase of our boxes please visit our website www.northdurhamnature.com.

Putting a nest box up on your property can provide your family with years of enjoyment. It can help to foster an appreciation for birds in the young people in your life, and give them a better understanding of the specific requirements of different birds, their biology, and identification. Each year, the nest from the previous year must be cleaned out before April, and your bird box watching can be enjoyed again the following spring!

Photo Inspiration

Photo Inspiration # 4
Capture Cuba

Text and photos by Jay Thibert

I will admit that I cannot help myself from writing this installment of "Photo Inspiration" about Cuba. I know that it is self-indulgent and that you are a captive audience, but I am still burning with excitement about Cuba and the photographs that I took during my two week stay. I planned before my departure to make bird photography the main focus of my trip. I knew that Cuba had potential, with over 20 endemic species and many other winter residents, to reveal some great shooting opportunities.

Before the trip, preparations began with the purchase of a new lens. After hours of reading and agonizing I opened the bank account for a Nikon 300mm, f4 prime lens. Buyer's dissonance was in full exposure, for I already owned a 70 to 300mm lens. I had been very tempted with the Nikon 200 to 500mm and the similar offerings from Tamron and Sigma. In the end I could not envision carrying around 2300 grams of lens and finding a bag big enough to carry it. I added a 1.4 teleconverter weighing 190 grams to the new prime lens (weighing 755 grams) and I had a 420mm f5.6 lens packed for Cuba.

We saw approximately 130 bird species during our two week stay in Cuba. I feel good about the 3000 images that I captured and am culling to find the 75 that are worth keeping. Let me share some of my learning with you.

Tip #1 Decide what you are there to photograph. It is easy to be constantly pulled between the flora and fauna that you are seeing and the overall scenic opportunities in Cuba. My brain was constantly in conflict over which lens to have on the camera – the 420mm combination or the 24 to 120mm. My

composition possibilities really depended on which lens was on the one camera body I had with me. In the end I left the long lens on the camera whenever there was a chance to see birds. This meant missing many

scenic shots, but it also meant that when a bird came into view I was ready to shoot. Not changing lens often also reduced the danger of contaminating my sensor with dust. A very important issue in the final quality of a photo!

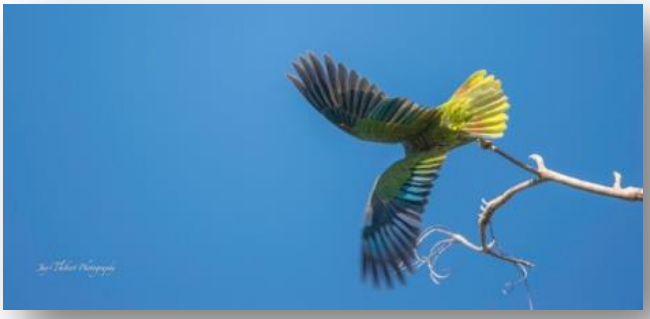
Tip #2 Shoot all your images in RAW format. This format gives you the most latitude to edit your photograph and it gives your image the optimal quality. Yes, I know it takes up more space on your SD card – that is the point – more data – greater detail in the image.

Tip # 3 Keep the shutter speed above 1/500th of a second. All of my shooting was done without a tripod. There just was not time to set up a tripod and get the shot. So, with handheld shooting you must practice holding the camera very steady. This means that the ISO must be set so that your shutter speed is 1/500th of a second or faster. Bright light is your friend for achieving this and freezing action. Brace the lens on a solid object whenever possible.

Tip # 4 Take many images of your subject. This increases the chance that you will capture the bird in an interesting pose. It also increases the chance of an image being in sharp focus. Yes, it means that you are downloading hundreds of images into Lightroom (or other organizing software) and having to sort through for the best. It will cost you time, but will result in better images.

Tip # 5 Know all your camera controls. Bird photography is very challenging and fast paced. In the field you often need to make changes to your camera settings for optimum results. You must know how to make these changes with your lens still on the bird. Your fingers need to know where the buttons are and what they do. Practice and know your camera!

Tip # 6 Try to take images of birds in flight. The colour and shape of bird wings are amazing. With practice, knowledge of bird behaviour and knowledge of your camera's focusing system, you can capture some novel images.



Tip # 7 Focus on the eye of your subject. In most cases it is critical to get the eye of your subject in sharp focus. Know how your camera's focusing system works and be prepared to go manual when plant material is in front of your subject.

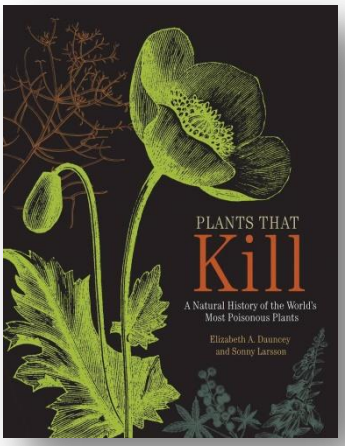
I had a great time trying to capture great bird pictures in Cuba. With spring in full swing the opportunities are many to capture the beauty you see. I also hope this will inspire you to be at our November meeting to see more Cuban birds and to learn about this fascinating country.

Photo ID: Bee Hummingbird, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon and Cuban Parrot.

Book Reviews

Plants That Kill - A Natural History of the World's Most Poisonous Plants.
Elizabeth Dauncey and Sonny Larsson. Princeton University Press. 2018. $29.95 USD. 224 pages. ISBN:978-0-691-17876-9

When I first saw this title, I wasn't sure what to expect as the scope seemed so broad. How could any author produce a book that was inclusive enough? Could you really list all the various poisonous plants in the world in 224 pages of text and photos?

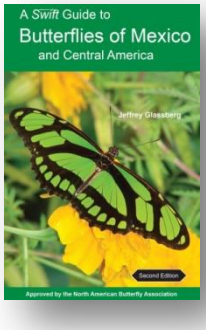


The approach by the authors was intriguing as it focused not so much on a composite listing but rather on the impacts and characteristics of the poisonous attributes and then coupled this with recognizable examples of species that caused these impacts. The preface to the book states in part " … explains how certain plants

evolved toxicity to deter herbivores and other threats … explores the various ways plant toxins can target the normal functioning of bodily systems in mammals, from the effects of Wolfsbane on the heart to toxins that cause a skin reaction when combined with the sun's rays." Individual chapters deal with why some plants are toxic, where they might target the body, and impacts on our hearts, neurological, epidural and muscular impacts. Later chapters speak about how early symptoms from plant exposure might indicate bigger problems down the road, that might arise in total organ failure or death. Gloomy as this sounds, the book finishes with a treatise of how poisons can be used to our benefit and lead to cures not pain and suffering. This is a must read for anyone who has an interest in plants and how they affect us and the environment – a great read!

A Swift Guide to Butterflies of Mexico and Central America. Jeffrey Glassberg. Princeton University Press. 2018. $39.95 USD. 304 pages. ISBN: 978-0-691-176482.

One of my personal greatest frustrations when travelling is seeing so many wonderful things and having little or no idea what they are! I don't mean that I don't recognize an insect as such or a fish, but often I don't know EXACTLY what it is. I strive to learn as much as I can as I travel the world or roam near home. Knowing it is a bat or a beetle is not enough. So too, I get frustrated when I see a beautiful butterfly and can't identify it to species. I love Central America and travel there frequently. Every time I've gone I've seen many exciting butterflies, but have seldom had easy access to a resource that will help me know what they are and what they do. Glassberg's book on butterflies is a resource I will cherish and use as it brings life to the unidentified photos of species I have taken over the years and to those I have yet to find!



Okay that said .. Is the book useful? Absolutely! I loved the photos albeit they were small but they were of good quality and clear. They showed the salient features to get me to where I could ID most of what I might see. I did not like the range maps. They were tiny and jammed into the corner of the page by each species account. I could barely tell where they were leading me. At first the "visual index" was distracting, but I quickly learned that although it wouldn't lead me to each ID immediately for many groups of similar species, it got me to the right part of the book quickly and I could work my way from there. So if you want to learn more about Central and Mexican American butterflies, this book will be very beneficial, and you should consider adding it to your library.

Bioblitzes 2018

Upcoming Bioblitzes in or near North Durham

Photos & Text by James Kamstra

Bioblitzes are events were a team goes out and attempts to identify all plant and animal species in a designated area in a set time period (usually 1 or 2 days). That means: birds, mammals, herptiles, insects, spiders, vascular plants, lichens, mosses - everything. Bioblitzs are lots of fun and a great opportunity to either put your ID skills to good use, or to learn by assisting an expert. Late spring and early summer are the best times when birds are on territory, insects are out in hoards and plants are in their full glory. Several bioblitzes are happening in the general vicinity so if interested you could sign up.

Heber Down Conservation Area – May 12 & 13 by Durham Region Field Naturalists. Contact Ontario Bioblitz at ontariobioblitz@gmail.com

Uxbridge Property – June 16 by Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. Register at http://oakridgesmoraine.org/action/

Ganaraska Forest – June 23 & 24 by Ganaraska Region. For more information see http://www.grca.on.ca/2018/03/27/bioblitz-with-us/

Additionally, Geoff Carpentier and Paul LaPorte will be leading a pre-bioblitz workshops on Monday April 23rd and May 15th from 7-9pm respectively at Uxbridge Public Library. Come on out to see what bioblitzes are all about and get ready to be part of one!

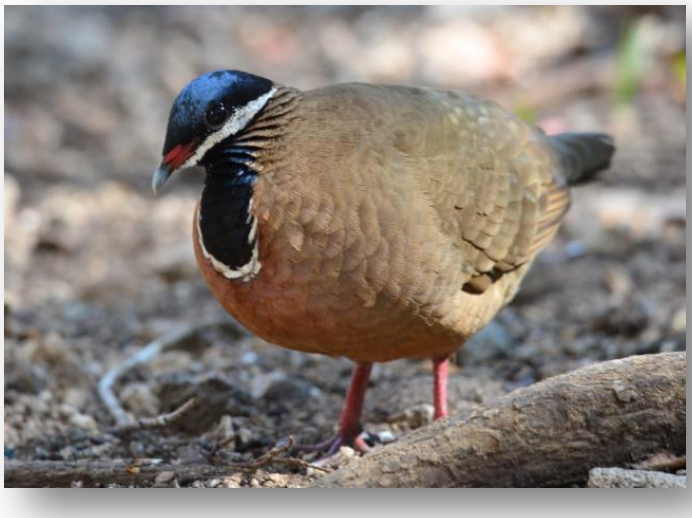
NDN's Cuba Trip!

Text and photos by James Kamstra

A special natural history tour to Cuba was organized by James Kamstra and offered to

members of North Durham Nature. Five other members of the club (Pat Asling, Derek Connelly, Jean Jacobs, Bev Thibert and Jay Thibert) signed up as well as five other participants. From February 25 to March 5 we visited many of the premier nature destinations in western Cuba including the unusual limestone mogotes of the Viñales Valley, the Escambray Mountains, La Guira National Park and the vast Zapata Swamp.

Many of the sought after endemic birds (i.e. those found only in Cuba) were found including the Cuban Trogon, Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-dove and Cuban Pygmy Owl. The tour also took



in such cultural highlights as historic Havana, Trinidad UNESCO site and the Che Guevara Monument. Come out to the November meeting to hear the details of this amazing trip.

Quiz

Am I a bug or a bird? I can hover like a bird but you can see through my wings. I know the words so I don't have to hum them !!?!!?

Not so Nifty Nature News

France's bird population collapses due to pesticides

Bird populations across the French countryside have fallen by a third over the last decade and a half, researchers report. Dozens of species have seen their numbers decline, in some cases by two-thirds, the scientists said in a pair of studies – one national in scope and the other covering a large agricultural region in central France.

"The situation is catastrophic," said Benoit Fontaine, a conservation biologist at France's National Museum of Natural History and co-author of one of the studies.

"Our countryside is in the process of becoming a veritable desert," he said in a communique released by the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), which also contributed to the findings.

The Common White-throat, the Ortolan Bunting, the Eurasian Skylark and other once ubiquitous species have all fallen off by at least a third, according to a detailed, annual census initiated at the start of the century. A migratory song bird, the Meadow Pipit, has declined by nearly 70%.

The museum described the pace and extent of the wipe-out as "a level approaching an ecological catastrophe".

The primary culprit, researchers speculate, is the intensive use of pesticides on vast tracts of monocultural crops, especially wheat and corn. The problem is not that birds are being poisoned, but that the insects on which they depend for food have disappeared. "There are hardly any insects left, that's the number one problem," said Vincent Bretagnolle, a CNRS ecologist at the Centre for Biological Studies in Chize. Recent research, he noted, has uncovered similar trends across Europe, estimating that flying insects have declined by 80%, and bird populations has dropped by more than 400 million birds in 30 years.

Despite a government plan to cut pesticide use in half by 2020, sales in France have climbed steadily, reaching more than 75,000 tonnes of active ingredient in 2014, according to European Union figures.

"What is really alarming is that all the birds in an agricultural setting are declining at the same speed, even 'generalist' birds," which also thrive in other settings such as wooded areas, said Bretagnolle.

"That shows that the overall quality of the agricultural eco-system is deteriorating."

Figures from the national survey – which relies on a network of hundreds of volunteer ornithologists – indicate the die-off gathered pace in 2016 and 2017.

Drivers of the drop in bird populations extend beyond the depletion of their main food source, the scientists said. Shrinking woodlands, the absence of the once common practice of letting fields lie fallow and especially rapidly expanding expanses of mono-crops have each played a role.

Slow Loris Traffickers Get Historic Sentences in Indonesia

Animal advocates are celebrating a landmark ruling against wildlife traffickers who were arrested last fall in Indonesia after they were caught in connection with a criminal network trading Slow Lorises. The operation, which was part of an effort to dismantle an illegal wildlife trafficking network that was using Facebook to sell wildlife, was carried out by a rapid response team from the Environment and Forestry Protection and Law Enforcement Agency, along with a team from International Animal Rescue (IAR).

Now, their rescuers are applauding officials for handing down an unusually harsh sentence for the individuals involved. The two will now serve three and a half years in jail, and they will each pay a fine of $7,260, or they'll spend an extra six months in jail.

"History has been made in terms of law enforcement against Slow Loris traders in Indonesia," said Tantyo Bangun, Chairperson of IAR Indonesia. "Previously, the perpetrators were only sentenced to 3-12 months in prison, even though some of them were suppliers and collectors arrested with evidence of dozens of Slow Lorises."

All species of Slow Loris are supposed to be protected by local laws and by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), but the demand for these adorable little creatures as pets is posing a growing problem, and it's being perpetuated by people sharing photos and videos of them on social media, which has continued to drive the market that's threatening their survival in the wild.

IAR has taken in over 800 Slow Lorises since 2008, and now estimates that an average of three of them are poached from the wild every single day, while one of those will die before they're even sold. Not only is the illegal trade in Slow Lorises putting them at an increasing risk of extinction, it's causing immeasurable suffering for these shy, nocturnal primates who suffer a number of heartbreaking abuses when they become victims of the trade.

Karmele L Sanchez, Program Director of IAR Indonesia, added in a statement that the outcome of this case shows the importance of severe penalties for wildlife crimes, adding that it's hoped that this case will serve as an example for others involving crimes against protected wildlife in other areas. Hopefully it will also raise awareness about the plight of Slow Lorises and the need to crack down on the illegal pet trade that continues to put them at risk.

Both articles originally published online by Focussing on Wildlife March 2018.

Answer to Quiz

Well clearly I am a bug and by the looks of my wing, either a fly or something similar. Presuming I live in Ontario (which I do), there are no flies that have red in their wings, so that is ruled out. But what about

all the other insects with see-through wings? Well, any of the wasps and allies should have thinner abdomens than I do, so I'm not one of them. Hornets and their kin are not as hairy as I am. And again the bees don't have red in their wings. Large insects like dobsonflies, dragonflies and the larvae of the aquatic insects have elongated wings and butterflies with see-through wings have different shaped wings as well. So what is left? Well - Clearwing moths. Now the tricky part is that there are two very similar species in Ontario. One Is the Hummingbird Clearwing and the other is the Snowberry (or Bumblebee) Clearwing. Telling them apart is complicated but James Kamstra provides this advice "Hummingbird Clearwing and Snowberry (or Bumblebee) Clearwing are quite similar. Hummingbird is larger and greener, while Snowberry is more yellow. It has a bit of a dorsal stripe on the abdomen and the outer edge of the 'clearwing' is straight so I this is a **Snowberry Clearwing** moth."

Wing Span: 1 1/4 - 2 inches (3.2 - 5 cm).

Life History: Adults fly swiftly during the day. Caterpillars pupate in cocoons spun in leaf litter on the ground.

Flight: Two broods from March-August.
Caterpillar Hosts: Snowberry (Symphoricarpos), Honeysuckle (Lonicera), Dogbane (Apocynum), and Dwarf Bush Honeysuckle (Diervilla lonicera).
Adult Food: Nectar from flowers including Lantana, Dwarf Bush Honeysuckle, Snowberry, Orange Hawkweed, thistles, Lilac, and Canada Violet.
Habitat: A wide variety of open habitats, streamsides, fields, gardens, and suburbs.
Range: East of the Continental Divide,

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