# THE BLUE HERON



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BRERETON FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB OF BARRIE

Summer Issue 2013.

www.bfnclub.org

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# **The Simmer**

and the

Summer

of 2013



Summer. Yes, it was overall enjoyable, enthralling and busy as well as being astoundingly hot, hot, hot at times.

This summer, some members of the Breretons did different birding field research in the province while others made sure they enjoyed the weather at their cottage or explored distant lands at the ends of long and busy roads. I am sure everyone was noticing the natural world where ever they were. As naturalists, budding naturalists or what have you, we tend to notice things other people do not. We look a little bit harder. We might see a tree growing alongside a road. The tree might appear to be old to us and then we might see the hollow in the tree and we wonder what could be in the hollow and when might be the best time of day to be here to see something come in or out of that hollow.

We wonder whether we should tell someone else about our observation or perhaps, in the interest of maintaining the natural environment and ecological quiet...not tell anyone else about it.

A busier autumn is now upon us and more enlightening nature is in store for us to enjoy. The club is definately growing with new people and the executives are working diligently behind the scenes on different projects that help us as a club maintain our mandate. I am looking forward to some of the trips out in the nearby area that are planned for this fall and hope we will see even more new members this year than last on these outings.

This summer, our webmaster Bruce Wilson was in the Carden Alvar with the ever industrious Nigel Shaw working on a study of grassland sparrows. You can read more of his study further in the newsletter on page 8. Phyllis Tremblay was quite busy with the Swift Watch study which had her and Lyn Pope driving around the province to different Chimney Swift-friendly spots to do this research for Bird Studies Canada.

Phyllis found that volunteering for BSC Marsh Monitoring Program did have its rewards for her as she noticed 2 species at risk back on May 29. Read about this amazing sighting on page 9.

Our club president, Dave Lord has written a worthy article on birding on sea cruises which I found most insightful and starts on page 7. He confirmed with me that he has some first-hand knowledge of these types of trips and has been onboard some such ships. Page 10 gives you David's interesting local area nature sightings.

While cottaging at Little Whitefish Lake near Parry Sound, my wife and I enjoyed the company of a male and female Redstart that were grabbing the bugs in amongst the nearby bushes. Upon returning home to Barrie we were happily surprised to see our first ever visit from a Hummingbird Clearwing moth. This is one amazing moth as it so closely resembles a large bee or small juvenile hummingbird, that one can be easily confused. I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the fall meetings, hearing stories of nature and ecology and listening to their stories of what they saw over the summer months.

# WALKS & TALKS

### **LACKIES BUSH WALK**

Sept. 14/13 Sat.
Depart 8:45 am from Lit

Depart 8:45 am from Little Lake Parking Lot (LLPL)

Contact Win Bowser - 705-726-2000

Lackie's Bush is a 54 acre natural park within Barrie's city limits. Enjoy an early fall walk along Whiskey Creek as it winds through the woodland, where birds, flowers, and ferns can be found. Long pants are recommended as there is some poison ivy. Moderate walk, ends by 1:00pm. Bring water & a light snack.

### NORTH SIMCOE RAIL TRAIL WALK

Sunday October 6
Depart 8:30 am from Little Lake Parking Lot (LLPL)
Contact Brian & Lynne Gibbon - 705-721-4599

Let's see what mid autumn has to offer in flora and fauna along a favourite section of the rail trail near Mayer's Marsh. Sparrows and other hardy migrants will still be in the area including, possibly, Rusty Blackbirds. Easy walk. Bring water & a light snack. Walk ends by 1:00 pm.





# WALKS & TALKS

### JOINT MEETING WITH OTHER CLUBS

Sept. 20/13. Fri., 7:00 pm North West Barrie United Church





This year it is the turn of The Brereton Field Naturalists' Club to host this interclub meeting; a good turnout would be appreciated. The participating clubs this year will be The Carden Field Naturalists, The Orillia Field Naturalists, The Midland Field Naturalists and ourselves.

**Peter Mills**, an interpretive Naturalist at Algonquin Park for 6 years, shares his lifelong passion through a virtual tour of reptiles and amphibians throughout the year.

Highlights include: a video of breeding amphibians, pictures of a frozen-solid wood frog that is still living, along with pictures and anecdotes of Peter's adventures.

If you have ever wondered how to safely move a snapping turtle across a road, don't miss this talk.



Peter is a passionate communicator of the natural world. He has conducted biological field studies and guided in Costa Rica, as well as traveled widely across North America. He currently holds the perhaps bizarre distinction of having seen the highest number of dragonfly and damselfly species in Algonquin Park!

## THE ECONOMICS OF CARNIVOROUS PLANTS - Talk by Dr. Jim Karagatzides

Oct. 18/13, Fri., 7:30 pm North West Barrie United Church

Jim Karagatzides, Professor, School or Environmental Studies, Georgian College will talk about carnivorous plants and how they have "turned the tables" on animals through the evolution of elaborate traps to catch and process prey. This presentation will describe the costs to build snap-traps, sticky pads and pitfall traps. We will calculate the benefit obtained by carnivorous plants through the consumption of prey and then determine the amortization time to pay back the investment in elaborate traps – just as many of us have done for a mortgage.

Jim's research experience has been in a variety of environments ranging from the high Arctic to Belize and west to Clayoquot Sound. This research has focused largely on pollution concerns such as the effects of acid rain on sugar maple forests or on the growth of carnivorous plants. Recent research focuses on contaminants in First Nations communities - for example, the effects of spent lead shot-shell on the environment and human health in the Fort Albany First Nation of James Bay.

On the teaching side, Jim and his colleagues are keen to develop Georgian's 40 acres adjacent to the Minesing Wetlands (near the Snow Vallev Ski Resort) into an outdoor classroom and field station.



# T R I

R

T S

# Carden Alvar Field Trip Saturday June 8th. Trip Leader, Dave Lord



We met in the Little Lake parking Lot (LLPL) and 8 people drove to the Tim Horton's in Orillia and were joined by 2 more bringing our total to 10. We then drove to Carden with a couple of stops along the way to get the days count moving. We met Bruce and Jean Wilson in Kirkfield as they had been participating in a Point Count census on one of the ranches. After lunch Bruce took us in onto the Cameron Ranch.

Loggerhead Shrike

Weather – 7 am, heavy overcast, light winds out of the south-east, by lunch time sky had cleared and afternoon was sunny. Temperature 10C/50F at 7 am rising to 14C/58F by 11 am.

Birds – LLPL – Northern Cardinal, Red-eyed Vireo. Tim Horton's in Orillia – Turkey Vulture, Yellow Warbler (H), Rock Pigeon. On route to Carden – Amer. Kestrel, Common Yellow-throat Warbler, Song Sparrow, Alder Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Swamp Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Tree Swallow, Great Blue Heron, Ring-billed Gull, Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Barn Swallow, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Kingbird, Brown Thrasher, Field Sparrow.

Carden – Savannah Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Warbling Vireo, Upland Sandpiper, House Wren, Least Flycatcher, Swamp Sparrow, Wilson's Snipe, Gray Catbird, Eastern Phoebe, Rosebreasted Grosbeak, Great Crested Flycatcher, Grasshopper Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole & nest, Green Heron, American Redstart, Least Flycatcher, and Wood Ducks.

Windmill Ranch – Vesper Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Horned Lark, Indigo Bunting, Black and White warbler, Ovenbird, Amer. Kestrel, Killdeer, Osprey, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee.





Wilson's Snipe Barn Swallow

All photos taken by Don Downer. www.donsnaturephotography.com



# **ORO RAIL TRAIL**

# June 22nd. Trip Leaders, Brian Gibbons and Chris Evans

# TRIP

Weather, sunny with cloudy intervals light easterly breeze. Temperature 18 – 24C (66 – 78F)
Eight adults and one very junior member joined us for an enjoyable outing. We first stopped at the Heronry on the extension of Georgian Dr. There were no Great Blue Herons to be found but there is an Osprev nest-

Blue Herons to be found but there is an Osprey nesting in one of the old nests and we saw a Green Heron perched on another.

Damselflies- Ebony Jewelwing, Violet Dancer, Marsh-Bluet, Fragile Forktail, Eastern Forktail. Dragonflies, Common Green Darner, Delta-spotted-Spiketail, Prince Baskettail, Eastern Pondhawk, Chalkfronted, Dot-tailed Whiteface, Widow Skimmer, Common Whitetail.



Ebony Jewelwing By Paul Forde

REPOR



Indigo Bunting

-By Paul Forde

Butterflies, European Skipper,Long Dash Skipper, Hobomok Skipper, Mustard White, Cabbage White, Summer Azure, Northern Crescent, Mourning Cloak, White Admiral, Viceroy, Little Wood-Satyr), Common Ringlet. Moths-Virginia Ctenucha

Plants – Ox-eyed Daisy, Bladder Campion, Wild Mustard, Goats Beard, Vipers Bugloss, Deadly Night Shade, Potta Bilum, Time-leaved Sandwort, Virgins Bower, Clematis.

### BIRDS -

Heronry- Osprey, Green Heron, Wood Duck, Black Duck, Virginia Rail, Northern Eastern Kingbird, Common Yellowthroat Warbler, Gray Catbird, Northern Flicker, Yellow Warbler, Tree Swallow, Pileated Woodpecker, Swamp Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Cedar Waxwing.

Railtrail- House Wren, Red-eyed Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird, Gray Catbird, Baltimore Oriole, Amer. Redstart, White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Alder Flycatcher, Swamp Sparrow, Mourning Warbler, Great-crested Flycatcher, Black-throated Green warbler, Red-tailed Hawk, Indigo Bunting.





# Sparrow Study at Carden Alvar Bruce Wilson and Nigel Shaw

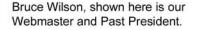
Nigel Shaw and I have been undertaking a study of grassland sparrows on the Carden Alvar. 2013 was the third year of this project. The sparrows are caught in mist nets and then banded with the regular CWS aluminum band and a plastic alphanumeric band that has black letters on a white background. The colour bands are easily read at a distance with binoculars or a spotting scope and show up well in photographs. The birds are aged, sexed, weighed, photographed and released unharmed.

One of the purposes of the study is to determine if sparrows are returning to the area and what site fidelity may be. In 2012 we retrapped a Grasshopper Sparrow at the exact same location as he was caught in 2011. This year we retrapped a Vesper Sparrow at a location within 10 metres of where we caught him in 2012.

The photos show this year's star A33 in 2012 and in 2013.







Member Bird Studies Canada Member Ontario Bird Banding Association

# Eastern Bluebird Report - Pat Duncan

Eastern Bluebirds are marvelous birds to capture in your binoculars or with your camera. Male Eastern Bluebirds have a brilliant royal blue on the back and head and chestnut brown on the breast. Females are less colorful, but have vibrant blue tinges on their wings. Eastern Bluebirds can be observed on wires or perched atop a nest box, calling out in a short, bubbly voice or abruptly dropping to the ground in pursuit of an insect.



The Bluebird population fell in the early 20th century for a number of reasons including the introduction of non-native bird species and loss of bluebird habitat. Two non-native species that have contributed to the decline in bluebird populations are the European Starling and House Sparrow. They are the bluebird's worst enemies as they compete fiercely for nesting cavities and will go as far as to kill adult and nestling bluebirds to take over nest cavities.





### Bluebird report continued....

It has become increasingly difficult for bluebirds to compete for natural nest cavities. Humans can help reverse the population decline and increase the availability of suitable nest cavities through the establishment of nest box trails.

### **BFNC Bluebird Nest Box Trail**

The 2013 Eastern Bluebird season was our fourth year of maintaining a nest box trail in the Simcoe County area. The year started with tremendous promise of success despite the cool and damp spring weather. We added an additional 10 nest boxes to a new trail, bringing our total number of nest boxes to 80.

In early spring Maurice Gervais, a BFNC member allowed us to set up new nest boxes on his property near Barrie Hill Farms, north-west of Barrie. Eastern Bluebirds have always nested in the area and for many years Mr. Gervais' father has tended to nest boxes surrounding the farm.



We identified several areas that were suitable for additional boxes and Mr. Gervais enthusiastically supported the establishment of the newest BFNC trail. The success of the Barrie Hill Farm trail was immediate; three of the new nest boxes produced 13 healthy fledglings. New trails often take time to become established and attract Bluebirds so, based on this first year, we are looking for great success in the future at Barrie Hill Farms.

The first Bluebird sighting on the BFNC trail was April 23rd and the first Tree Swallow sighting was April 16th – very unusual as Bluebirds are normally present and nesting well before the arrival of Tree Swallows. Bluebird nesting commenced a full month later than normal with the first nest observed on May 4th and the first egg laid on May 9th. There were no second broods laid in 2013 – a direct result of the later start to the breeding season.



In 2013 we had a total of 10 pairs of Bluebirds. 13 nests were constructed, but only 10 nests were used for laying eggs. The 10 nests produced 50 eggs of which 47 hatched. All hatchlings successfully fledged – a great success rate. Tree Swallows were active throughout the trail laying 122 eggs in 26 nest boxes. The success rate of Tree Swallows was not as high; from the 122 eggs, 98 hatched and only 84 successfully fledged. It appears that cool, damp weather, predators and late nestings were a factor.

Overall it was a very successful Bluebird season. We were surprised to realize that not only were we supplementing the

Bluebirds with a mealworm diet, we were also feeding the local Red Headed Woodpecker a tasty menu!

We would like to extend our appreciation to the BFNC volunteers who assisted with monitoring and record-keeping throughout the season.



An interesting Eastern Bluebird fact is that they can live up to 6 to 10 years in the wild. - Editor





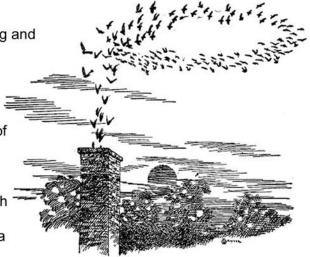
# 2013 Chimney Swift Project Report By Phyllis Tremblay

For the past 4 years, the Brereton Field Naturalists' Club (BFNC) volunteers have partnered with Bird Studies Canada (BSC) in the Ontario SwiftWatch Project. This year, chimney swifts were first observed in Barrie on May 2. A total of 33 active chimneys have been identified since our surveys commenced in 2010.

To inform and guide conservation efforts in 2013, Bird Studies Canada's (BSC) priority was to locate new chimney swift nesting and roosting sites; 20 dedicated Barrie SwiftWatchers located 5 additional chimneys this season. The new sites were located on Dunlop, Sandford, Toronto, Worsley and Collier Streets,

BFNC volunteers participated in 3 counts at 4 roosts in Barrie's downtown core for the National Spring Migration Blitz. On one of these evenings, Barrie SwiftWatchers were rewarded with a spectacular descent of 158 chimney swifts into a major roost!

To help raise public awareness regarding chimney swifts, (which are a threatened species both Provincially and Federally), biologist Kristyn Richardson, of BSC helped our Club organize a "Swift Night Out" on June 5; the event attracted 38 participants.



BFNC volunteers also promoted SwiftWatch as part of our club displays at the Tiffin Centre For Conservation's Spring Tonic, Celebrate Barrie, Friends of Milligan's Pond Event, and the Barrie Farmers' Market. The July/August 2013 issue of Lake Simcoe Living magazine featured an article by Ron Fleming about BFNC's chimney swift activities in its "Wingbeat" column.

All 2013 data collected by BFNC volunteers will be submitted to BSC; photographs and spreadsheets will be retained for the club files.

# "Cruising for the Birds" By Dave Lord



This brief article outlines some ideas for birding while on a cruise. There are two aspects to birding while on a cruise. One is birding at sea, and the other on land.



Let's deal with the sea first. Here the main items of interest are pelagic birds and the number and species of birds vary greatly depending on where you are cruising. In northern and southern latitudes the birding tends to be better than in temperate areas such as the Caribbean. A bird guide for the areas being visited should be taken.

Pack lightly. Anything more powerful than a pair of binoculars at sea is not recommended. The wider the field of view-the better. Often the best location to see the birds is near the bow of the ship as the birds like to take advantage of the flow created by the ship's passage. Close scrutiny of the birds is required as with shearwaters, petrels, etc. there are a lot of "look-alikes".

-continued on page 9



# "Cruising for the Birds"...continued from page 8

On most cruises where birds are to be expected there is usually a naturalist on board, and it is obviously a good idea to consult with him to see what birds can be expected, as you cruise through various areas. For serious birding I suggest you avoid most land excursions.

Research beforehand guides that are available in the various ports. A good way to start preparation for this is through a website such as birdingpal.org. Here guides are listed for various places around the world. You can select a guide for many of the ports. They will meet you at the ship, provide transportation, lunch, water, and take you to some key birding areas, all within the time frame available, and return you to the ship. These arrangements should be made well in advance as obviously the services of the better guides are in very high demand!

(The cost for this private and personalized service is often less than the cost for some of the so called "ecology tours" that the ship offers, which in my opinion, are a waste of time and money for the serious birder)

Binoculars should be sufficient. The better guides have telescopes.

If you decide to engage the services of a local guide, do some research about some of the birding areas and species that you'd like to see so that his efforts can be concentrated on areas of interest that can be covered in the time available (usually less than 8 hours total). Also recognize that a lot of the birding will not be done at the best time of day since debarkation doesn't take place at the break of dawn.

Depending on the type and length of cruise you may have a complete day (two nights on the ship) in port. This could be a great opportunity to see more birds as you can leave early in the morning during the full day in port. Also depending on the location there may be a scheduled bird outing by a local group which you can join. These groups love welcoming visitors and will go out of their way to show you some of the local specialties. So, if you decide to go on a cruise, by all means, enhance the experience, by doing some birding!!!!



# Wild Things,.. I think I love you. By Paul Forde, Editor

One description of a naturalist I found online was, "A person who specializes in natural history, especially in the study of plants and animals in their natural surroundings." Yes, okay, I suppose that is correct to a point. However, I could not find the words, "absolutely loves to observe nature in it's natural habitats" anywhere online, but for me, this adds the important and anchoring emotional component to our membership. It keeps us at it!

On that note, I asked a few of the executives if they had any interesting nature or naturalist oriented sightings over the summer and recieved some interesting tidbits from them which I will share with you here.

Lynne Gibbons, spotted a weasel on their back deck in mid July. It scooted away and was not spotted again. However, over the next few days they noticed that there were fewer and fewer Red Squirrels around and the Chipmunk population seemed to be shrinking as well.



# Wild Things,.. continued

While Phyllis Tremblay was involved with the Breeding Bird Atlas Study and in her hometown of Richmond in Quebec over the summer she confirmed the existance of Chimney Swifts there. Please check out this amazing study at **www.birdsontario.org/atlas**. Back on May 29th while she was with the Bird Studies Canada Marsh Monitoring Program she noticed 2 species at risk and lucked out with seeing two Common Night- hawks overhead her and a Least Bittern in the cattails as well as the expected call back response from a Virginia Rail. A Black-billed Cuckoo in the dryer area behind her observation station at the 5/6 Sideroad area of Oro-Medonte was a bonus.

Dave Lord noticed a drop in sightings or reptiles cated very close to where the 45th parallel Bay. He did notice a decline also in two Nashville and Magnolia. Pine Warblers The large and striking Sandhill Cranes (shown wills could be heard most evenings.

Continuing to decline in numbers are Barn Swallows and Night Hawks as he only heard the latter on about three evenings, briefly, during the summer.

Pat Duncan and Rob were hiking at Kolapore Uplands near the Beaver Valley when they spotted a Black billed cuckcoo and some Rock Pigeons that were actually nesting in the rocks of the escarpment.

Their summer trip to Nova Scotia thrilled them with Humpback whales up close and personal. Then they added to the day with some Harbour and Leopard seals, 3 Puffins, a Greater Shearwater, Northern Gannet, multiple Bald Eagles and an Osprey.

Humpback Whale by Pat Duncan

Not a bad day at all!

Osprey

and amphibians while at his cottage. This is lointersects the eastern coastline of Georgian specific species of warblers which are the the are abundant and doing quite well there though. here) are increasing in numbers and Whip-poor-

Sandhill Cranes

Photography by Pat Duncan





# **Naturalists Notes**

Ontario Nature is saying that the new Reptile and Amphibain app. for Apple iPhones and Google Androids are available now. The idea is that with this app on your phone, if you need to identify such critters, the information provided by this app will assist you in the field. As well, I beleive you can send images directly through the app and thus add to the Reptile and Amphibian Atlas in Ontario. They use the wording..."citizen science ".

Read more about it at www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofaunal\_atlas.php

Ontario Nature is also asking people to sign up for their Nature Network News Community email blasts. In their words...Nature Network News (NNN) is an e-newsletter packed with current information on upcoming programs and events that all naturalists will enjoy reading. Please let your group know that NNN is available to all members, friends and family. Sign up today at naturenetwork@ontarionature.org

Ontario Nature Fall Huronia Regional Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, October 26, 2013 at Scanlon Creek.

Meanwhile. Down at the pond....

About two weeks ago the baby snapper turtles started coming out at Milligans Pond in Barrie.





Photo by Kevin Snelgrove, Friends of Milligans Pond.

At this time of the year, the snapping turtles are hatching from eggs deposited last spring.

This little hatchling was making his way from the nest site (65 - 125 days after the adult laid the eggs) to the water, in this case - Milligan's Pond. This photo was likely taken on the road (Perry Street) between the nest. & the water. I believe the nest was in someone's garden. The sad part of the story is most hatchlings were crushed by the street cleaning machine. 2 made it to the water, at least those that were observed.

# **Brereton Field Naturalists Club Membership**

## **Annual fees:**

Family - \$30 Individual - \$25 Student - \$10 Corresponding - \$15



Memberships run from January 1st to December 31st.

Members get into meetings at no charge, are eligible for discounts at local nature stores and have access to "Members Only" content of the web site.

To join the BFNC, please come to one of our meetings or complete downloadable application form from our website and send with your payment.

WWW. BFNCLUB.ORG

Visit us on our Facebook page!





# BRERETON FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

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# PREPARED WITHOUT AUDIT