

THE BLUE HERON



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

Winter Issue 2014.

www.bfnclub.org

Volume 57, No. 3.

On a cold, cold January 2nd of this year, the Brereton Field Naturalists' Club joined forces with the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, Bird Studies Canada, The Couchiching Conservancy and the Bird House Nature Company to organize the first ever annual Christmas Bird Count for Kids at the Tiffin Centre.

Welcome to 2014! It's going to be a great year!

I like the cold white winter we are getting, as it literally takes my breath away with its' beauty. Yes, the season does, at times, resemble a yo-yo with its' temperature fluctuations and the natural world is struggling to adapt to seasons that seem out of whack at times and the bird count is down...But when I see the photos of the young people that came out to look at nature on one of the coldest days of the year, my heart is warmed and my anxiety is calmed.

They struggled to keep warm that day and struggled to see through the powerful binoculars at their disposal. But they persevered and with a little help from Brereton members, were able to see birds up close and personal in the trees. For some, it might have been the first time.

Chris Evans coordinated the Brereton part of this day and with a contingent of other club members, helped the event through its' frigid hours. It was unfortunate that it was so absolutely nasty cold out or I am sure more people probably would have come out. As it was, a great time was had by the durable snow suited bundles of joy that did endure the elements with their resilient parents. Great effort people!



Photo by
Ruth Noland-Flores

The 114th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season came and went across the country throughout the Americas. On December 21st the city's 42nd Annual Barrie CBC produced a variety of birds for this year's count. One can check out the lengthy list on our website to see the different types and numbers of birds that were enumerated.

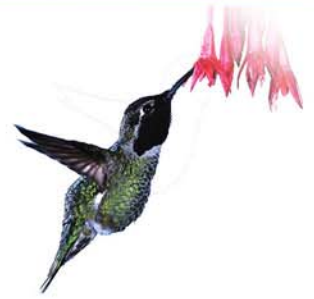
I am pleased that 4 definite sightings of Northern Shrike were seen across the search area. Ideally, I feel that it would be nice to have more predators as their presence has always been important in any ecological setting. Generally numbering far fewer than the vegetarians - they are the disproportionate counter weight to help balance nature out to allow it to continue on and prosper. In regards to other predators...2 bald eagles were also observed that day as well as Sharp-Shinned, Red-tailed, Rough-legged and Coopers' hawks.

I also saw on the list that one very, very hardy Yellow-rumped Warbler is overwintering in the Angus area. That was a good sighting.

I would like to give a high five to the intrepid souls who ventured out that day to do this count in the field. The weather was not, really frigid by any means, but also not... balmy.

Paul Forde- Editor

WALKS & TALKS



JOINT MEETING WITH THE BARRIE GARDEN CLUB

Tuesday February 4, 2014, 7:00pm - 9:00pm

THE SOUTH SHORE COMMUNITY CENTRE ON LAKESHORE DR.

Meeting starts at 7:00 pm.

I would encourage you to arrive a bit before that time in order that we can start on time at 7. Speaker is Kristen Martyn from Wild Birds Unlimited and she will be talking to us about hummingbirds.

MINESING RAPTORS EXCURSION

Saturday February 8, 2014, 8:30am - 1:30pm

Contact Jim Spruce 705-728-3884



Take a trip through the flats around Minesing, looking for Snowy Owls, Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Shrikes, and other raptors, as well as flocks of Snow Buntings. This is a driving excursion for the most part. Bring your own snacks and a thermos with something hot in it. Dress appropriately for winter as sometimes we will be getting out of the cars to look through spotting scopes. Bring your own binoculars though and perhaps cameras. There will be no hiking down any trails or across any fields. Driving outing usually ends by 1:30 pm.

CREEKS OF BARRIE TALK

Friday February 21, 2014, 7:30pm - 9:00pm

Andee Pelan is the Stewardship Technician for the Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority. At our regular monthly meeting, she will talk about the various creeks flowing through Barrie and the impact that they have on Lake Simcoe. This is timely considering all the work the City has been doing around and to many of our creeks, including the effect of developers building along their edges. This is a chance to learn about creeks you may never have known ran right by your doorstep.

Lovers Creek,
Barrie

Photo by
Paul Forde



WALKS & TALKS

HORNED LARKS AND PANCAKES

Saturday March 15, 2014, 8:30am - 2:00pm
 Kitchen-A, McNair, 705-737-3388
 Linda Crome 705-302-2075
 Trip Guide - Brian Gibbon 705-721-4599

Horned Larks are the first songbirds to return to Simcoe County in spring. We will search the Minesing Flats for them and other late winter birds - (perhaps a Snowy Owl and Snow Buntings, etc.).

We will then go to Tiffin Conservation Area for pancakes and sausages for lunch.

Driving outing, at Tiffin for lunch, ends 2:00 pm

Remember to bring your own dishes and cutlery and there is a small charge to defray costs.



Photo courtesy of www.ohio-nature.com

INSECT LIFE CYCLES AND HOW THEY SURVIVE THE WINTER TALK

Friday March 21, 2014, 7:30pm - 9:00pm

Come celebrate the first day of spring with us.

James Kamstra will explore a range of insect life cycles and how this helps them deal with the long dormant winter



All insects go through distinct life stages as they develop from egg to adult. The diversity of insects is remarkable with many thousands of species in Ontario alone. As a result there are many variations on life cycles between different orders and sometimes between closely related species.

Insects are cold-blooded and therefore cannot remain active in subzero temperatures. As a result they have had to coordinate their life cycles to survive in a cold climate.

SPRING BIRDS IN THE MINESING FLOODLANDS EXCURSION

Saturday April 12 2014, 8:00am - 2:00pm
 Jim Spruce 705-728-3884.

Second Meeting Place: At Tim Horton's in Angus at 8:30 am. BRING RUBBER BOOTS

The Minesing Wetlands are a great basin into which melted snow flows each spring. Forests are inundated, as are many of the farms located around the perimeter of the swamp. This is a magnet for thousands of migrating waterfowl. Northern Pintail, Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes are likely sights, and perhaps a few early songbirds too, such as Tree Swallows.

Driving outing, ends 1-2:00 pm. Please dress appropriately for this as some walking around outside is done. Spotting scopes will be set up when possible but you should bring your own binoculars and cameras.

It is wise to bring your own snacks and warm drinks.



Photos by Chris Evans



Lackies' Bush Field Trip

September 14, 2013

Trip Leader- Win Bowser

We had eight people on the walk with three of them newcomers. The morning was cool but sunny with a temperature of 1 degree celsius with very little wind. The day warmed up to 16 degrees by noon.

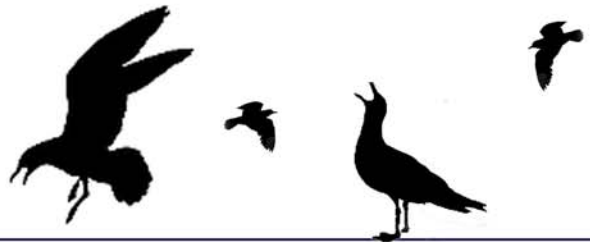
We entered Lackies' Bush from the Bayview Street entrance and followed the path along Whiskey Creek and then crossed the creek and climbed the hill to the top and into an open field. The water level in the creek was surprisingly low, given the amount of rain we had had lately.

Plants enjoyed on the walk were: Yellow & Gold Touch Me Not, Herb Robert, Purple Stemmed Aster, Fleabane Daisy, Goldenrods, False Solomon Seal, Bracken and Sensitive Ferns, Obedience Plant (False Dragon Head), Chicory, Queen Anne's Lace, Clover, Common Mullein, Wild Grape, some interesting & colourful Fungi and Dog Strangling Vine. (Although a number of people spent a day in the summer pulling the Dog Strangling Vine out, there is still a patch that has now gone to seed.)

Some of the trees found in Lackies' Bush are: Tamarac, Red Pine, White Pine, Scotch Pine, Balsam Fir, Sugar Maple Oak, Poplar, Beach, Ash & Sumac. Birds seen and heard were: Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker, Chickadee, Blue Jay, Canada Geese, Phoebe and Cedar Wax Wing.



Photo by Paul Forde



Lake Simcoe Migrants Field Trip

November 9 2013

Leader- Chris Evans

It was great weather for ducks that morning! It was generally overcast, 0 to 1C, winds were S 9km/h shifting to SSE 15km/h gusting to 28km/h with the occasional drizzle or flurry until about 08:30.

Great Black-billed Gull



Photo by John Warnica

We met at LLPL and left for Tyndale Park shortly after 8:00 am with 3 vehicles and 7 people, including Ken and Susan MacDonald representing the Midland - Penetanguishene Field Naturalists. On our arrival at Tyndale Park we were greeted by 12 more enthusiastic people, (11 BFNC members & a guest). Two more BFNC members joined us shortly for a total of 22 people. Our numbers began to dwindle as we reached the Spirit Catcher sculpture downtown due to the raw winds gusting from the SSE from which we had been relatively sheltered on our earlier stops along the south shore.

Lake Simcoe Migrants Field Trip - continued



Brereton Field Naturalists at Tyndale Park in Barrie Viewing out over Lake Simcoe

The large flocks of gulls, loons and cormorants of the preceding weeks were not in evidence as the large shoals of Emerald Shiners had subsided. I conducted a brief internet search on these widespread, abundant, 10cm long, North American freshwater minnows. It is reported these fish move to deeper water to overwinter. They are very adaptable to, and tolerant of, large water temperature changes. This adaptability is reportedly attributable to their short life span of 3 years.



Brereton Field Naturalists' club member Brian Gibbons using his spotting scope to zoom in on birds on Lake Simcoe. Other Breretons were allowed to share the view on his scope as the birds were a fair distance out.

Lake Simcoe Migrants Field Trip - continued

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Based on these reported facts, I speculate that the large shoals we see at the west end of Kempenfelt Bay in the fall are migrating from the shallower pelagic waters of Lake Simcoe and its tributary rivers and creeks, coming to the deeper waters of Kempenfelt Bay to winter.

I further speculate that they are at or near the surface when they first arrive, as this is where they normally feed in summer and fall. Thus, they initially provide abundant and accessible forage for the surface and shallow feeding gulls, as well as for the cormorants, loons, grebes and diving ducks. This may explain why the deeper diving cormorants, loons and grebes linger longer as they continue to enjoy this bounty as the shiners seek out the deeper water until the Bay freezes over.

The Little Gulls were along with a few Bonaparte's which were sparsely spread from Tyndale to the Spirit Catcher. The other gulls and cormorants were mainly concentrated from Minet's Point to the Spirit Catcher. Long-tailed Ducks at Minet's Point and Rock Pigeons were downtown. Goldeneye and Scaup were found from Tyndale to Tollendal. Black & Mallard were at Tyndale to Minet's. Cooper's Hawk caught a European Starling at Minet's Point Road and Lakeshore Drive while being harassed by some Crows.

Sightings:

All numbers are approximate.

25 Common Merganser,
100 Common Loon
50 Mallard,
500 Common Goldeneye,
30 Hooded Merganser,
10 Red-necked Grebe,
10 Horned Grebe,
2 Red-breasted Merganser,
50 Bufflehead,
40 Scaup (likely Lesser, perhaps a few Greater)
15 American Black Duck,
200 Ring-billed Gull,
15 Great Black-backed Gull,

Long-Tailed Ducks on Lakes Simcoe



Photo by Paul Forde

30 Herring Gull,
25 Bonaparte's Gull,
2 Little Gull,
1 Golden-crowned Kinglet,
25 Double-crested Cormorants,
5 Long-tailed Ducks,
1 Cooper's Hawk,
10 American Crow,
5 European Starling,
20 Canada Goose,

December 21st Christmas Bird Count

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

In spite of snowy and cold preceding weather and ominous freezing rain warnings, the local weather forecast was reasonable and the actual weather was very favourable for the day.

Throughout the search circle temperatures varied around 4 degrees C through the day. Snow depths averaged at minimums of 6cm with maximums averaging 22cm. Still water ranged from partly frozen (small, protected, spring fed) to frozen (Kempenfelt Bay, Little Lake) and moving water ranged from open to frozen. The sky was overcast with some rain in the late afternoon in Area 8 only. The wind was actually calm to light during the day.

There were 48 field observers (up from 36 in 2012) ranging in age from 4 to more than 80. There were 31 feeder watchers (up from 14 in 2012). Many thanks to all who came out and safely and effectively surveyed the circle and to those who watched feeders.

Waterfowl

Interestingly, while the Canada Goose numbers dropped from 2289 to 7, Common Goldeneye from 731 to 3, Bufflehead from 22 to 0, Hooded/Common/Red-breasted Mergansers respectively from 12/544/15 to 0, all as might be expected with Kempenfelt Bay and Little Lake frozen, the American Black Duck numbers were very stable with a modest increase from 121 to 127 and Mallards increased from 1619 to 2095. The Black & Mallards are apparently well adapted to finding open water.

Hawks

Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawk numbers were down dramatically on McKinnon Road without any obvious explanation.

Gulls

All were down in numbers, as to be expected with the lack of open water on Kempenfelt Bay and Little Lake. Exciting was a report of a possible Thayer's Gull which later proved to be an unusual Herring Gull.

Shrikes

Initially two Loggerhead Shrikes were reported, an adult and a juvenile. Through later discussion and consideration, the observer concluded the juvenile observed was in fact a Northern Shrike. However, the observer remained convinced of his adult Loggerhead Shrike identification. This identification could not be verified. Thus, in accordance with CBC protocol in these circumstances, it is recorded as Shrike species.



Juvenile Red tail Hawk

Photo by Paul Forde

December 21st Christmas Bird Count

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Nuthatches and Creepers

While Red-breasted Nuthatch numbers were unchanged at 40, White-breasted were over double at 94 from 43 and Brown Creepers were up from 0 to 8. Perhaps the excellent cone crop kept the Red-breasted numbers stable (most observations were associated with feeders). The White-breasted Nuthatch numbers may have been up due to the lack of accessible nuts due to snow and ice, thus concentrating their numbers at feeders.

Finches

The nomadic finches were all down in numbers as expected, and the resident finches were all up in numbers, suggesting the feeders were more attractive and natural foraging more difficult along with there being less competition at feeders from the nomadic finches.

Woodpeckers

Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers were both up significantly from 50 and 25 to 87 and 49 respectively.

Rarities

American Wigeon, Northern Flicker (Yellow Shafted), Hermit Thrush and Eastern Towhee each showed up as solo representatives of their species.

The Potluck afterwards was beautiful and scrumptious thanks to Linda Crome, her helpers and the many contributors.



Photo by Paul Forde

Yellow Shafted Flicker

Thank you to all of the enthusiastic volunteer surveyors, feeder watchers and feeder fillers and the local media, Barrie Examiner, Barrie Advance and CTV for coverage and promotion.

A huge thank you to all of the dedicated and reliable Area Leaders and their recorders! Area Leaders this year were 1 Dave Lord, 2 Phyllis Tremblay, 3 Al McNair, 4 Chris Evans (That's me!), 5 Don Scanlan, 6 Dave Fewster, 7 Jim Spruce (Welcome back!), 8 Burke Korol and 9 Nigel Shaw.

Chris Evans
2013 Barrie Christmas Bird Count Compiler
Vice President – Breton Field Naturalists' Club

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First Annual Kids Christmas Bird Count

The 2014-01-02 1st Annual Barrie CBC for Kids hosted by the NVCA at the Tiffin Centre for Conservation was a great success. The weather did not cooperate, being bitterly cold and windy. However, the kids and parents did brave the cold and were rewarded by sights and sounds of a few hardy Red-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, Mourning Doves and an American Crow. The highlights were the Hot Chocolate provided by the NVCA and the blazing fireplace tended by Bruce Wilson.

Many thanks to:
 NVCA's Kyra Howes and Naomi Saunders for hosting,
 BFNC Volunteers Chris Evans, Ruth Noland-Flores, Bruce Wilson, Jean Wilson, Ian Cook, Phyllis Tremblay, Dorothy McKeown, PJ Jaeger and David Walsh
 Sponsors Couchiching Conservancy, The Bird House and Bird Studies Canada



*Photos by
 Ruth Noland-Flores
 and
 Clare Holden*



Submissions Requested

Submissions from members about birds, animals, ecology, local natural events, excursions of a naturalist orientation, jokes, cartoons, illustrations and or photos of nature are actively appreciated and requested by the Blue Heron.

Email submissions to :

pforde@fordesigns.ca

Put "**Blue Heron**" as Subject

ON THE WILD SIDE

I have found that the website *Lumosity* has an interesting and relatively fun bird observing game. *Lumosity* is famous for challenging your brain with scientifically designed training.

If you look at - <http://games.lumosity.com/birdwatching.html> - you will find their game called **Birdwatching** with links to how to play. There is sound with this game as well that adds to it, so if you have speakers, I highly advise you turn them on.

The game is designed to improve test your brain power as well and does get more challenging as you go along. It is quite easy to play and you will learn about birds and perhaps, just perhaps...your bird observation skills will get better and better.

On the lighter side of the wild side....

Burkett's laws of birding

The First Law of Birding: The greater the time spent searching for a rarity, the greater the chances it will be sitting on your car when you return to the parking lot.

-- by Cody Burkett

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 !

