



*Cultivating an appreciation of nature
through learning and action*

THE HERON

WINTER 2020

Newsletter of the
York Simcoe Nature Club



President's Message

By Jeanne Bénéteau

We are half-way through this year's season of the club. We have enjoyed many excellent and varied presentations by guest speakers. We have also enjoyed member socials and monthly nature walks. But we are only half done. Hurrah! As I write this, it is still January, in the middle of the January thaw. I'm longing for winter to come in full force since I haven't had my Holland River walk on the ice yet. Hopefully it is in the forecast for the February walk. More walks are planned in the coming months. We will also have our much-anticipated Wine and Cheese for members and spouses on Sat. Feb. 15.

For this next half of the year we have some exciting General Meetings lined up for you. First, in February, Ann and David Love will present "Birds of the Happy Valley Forest". Our March presentation will feature Tim Burrows, speaking on "The Electric Car". Just in time for our Spring walk, April's presentation will be on "Lyme Disease" by Andrew Peregrine. As a treat for May, we've decided on a "Members' Night", with the theme of trees. More details about this to come. Last, our June meeting will be on "Garden Habitat for Butterflies" with Maria de Costa.

I hope you enjoy reading *The Heron*. Please pay special attention to the article on the May election. It was written with you in mind. Thank you to all who have contributed to this edition.



Sandhill Cranes, Minesing, Nov. 20

Photo by David Eaton

Next Meetings

*Second Tuesday of the month, 7:30 p.m.
Queensville Holland Landing United Church*

- Tues. Feb. 11, 2020** "Birds of the Happy Valley Forest"
by Ann and David Love
- Tues. Mar. 10, 2020** "The Electric Car"
by Tim Burrows
- Tues. Apr. 14, 2020** "Lyme Disease"
by Andrew Peregrine
- Tues. May 12, 2020** "My Favourite Tree": Members Night
and Annual General Meeting
- Tues. June 9, 2020** "Garden Habitat for Butterflies"
by Maria de Costa

Club News

Election 2020

By Jeanne Bénéteau

Two executive positions will be available at the next Annual General Meeting on Tues. May 12. I will be stepping down from being the York Simcoe Nature Club President as of May 31, 2020 after four years in this position. It was an honour to have been the President in the last two terms. The position of Vice-President became vacant last Spring and has remained open to date.

Who is a possible candidate for these positions? A York Simcoe Nature Club member who is passionate about our York Simcoe Nature Club --- that is who. Someone who believes in the importance and the value our club brings to our catchment community and is proud and humbled to be part of it since it provides a service to the naturalist in all of us. As president, and head representative of the club, you have the opportunity of working with a dedicated and supportive team, fulfilling the club's mandate. As vice-president, you become part of this team, bringing your own strengths and self in the "behind the scenes" workings.

Why not join us at an executive meeting to see what it's all about? Our next executive meetings before the election are on Wed. Feb. 26, Mon. Mar. 23 and Wed. Apr. 29.

So please do not sell yourself short by thinking you are not the right person for the job. Everyone has something to offer and would be an asset to the club. Please let me know if you are interested in becoming part of the executive team as president or vice-president.

Membership Numbers

By Janet Thompson

Our membership totals for 2019-2020 are 37 memberships representing 53 people. We have 18 single memberships, 16 family memberships and 3 life memberships.

This is a decline since 2018-2019, when we had 45 memberships. The executive has calculated that we need about 44 annually paid memberships to cover non-discretionary costs such as hall rental, insurance and the speaker program.

Please invite your friends to join, even though they may not be able to attend all the meetings. Say hello to guests at the meetings and encourage them to join as well.

Thank you for helping us continue to meet together and talk about nature.

Social Activities

By Jeanne Bénéteau

On Nov. 29, the club was invited by members John Blaise and Helene Van Houten to their home for an afternoon viewing of the art of fellow member George Keltika. John and Helene, being both naturalists and artists themselves, showcased their work along with George's paintings of natural landscapes and *plein air* sketches from local areas and canoeing/camping trips. After the viewing, some of the members decided to go on a walk, led by Cathryn Rees, in the forest at the back of the property which connects to the mixed forest on Cathryn's and Bill Cormode's property. It was a lovely walk that led us into the early dusk. The setting was quite magical. Thank you John and Helene for hosting this outing!



To put us all in the holiday spirit, members Jeanne Bénéteau and George Keltika hosted the 3rd annual "Caroling in the Elements" in their backyard on Dec. 14. About 12 members gathered by the fire near the small marsh along the Holland River shoreline. It turned out to be rather festive with large wet snowflakes falling on the carollers. The members were able to warm themselves in the wood stove heated cabin where holiday treats abounded. To complete the tableau of carollers, curious mourning doves perched themselves in a nearby tree to listen to our merry voices.



Nature Walks

By Doug Jagger

In the spring of 2016, the club initiated the monthly nature walk program to provide an opportunity for members to learn about various aspects of nature through observation along various footpaths in our general area. Typically 4 to 8 members attend the walks which occur regardless of the weather. Over the years we have seen and learned much about the nature in our area. Normally no walks are scheduled for July and August. Following the summer of 2019, walks were conducted from September through to January 2020.

In September, 13 members enjoyed the walk at **McKenzie Marsh** in Aurora. It was a sunny warm day. We were treated to great views of Monarch and White Cabbage butterflies. There were many fall flowers in bloom including Goldenrod and Asters, and a good variety of birds. The best bird sightings were of Great Egret and Great Blue Heron.

The October walk was along a trail through mixed hardwood forest within **Pangman Springs Conservation Area**. The fall colours were absolutely splendid. Species which we observed and discussed included Staghorn Sumac, Wood Sorrel and Goldenrod Gall. Birds were scarce in this forest setting, although a Hermit Thrush was spotted.

Winter had arrived early and the November walk in **Whitchurch Conservation Area** was through snow with below-freezing temperatures. On this walk more time was spent on trees which included discussion on Ironwood, American Beech, European Larch and Black Cherry. There were a few winter birds around including Black-capped Chickadee and Dark-eyed Junco.



Whitchurch Conservation Area

Photo by Rick Berry

For the December walk, the trail which we followed in **Scanlon Creek Conservation Area** was snow covered in parts and icy. There were 6 members who braved the elements. Beneath the snow, we found a Christmas Fern which was still green. Someone identified a Blue Beech which is actually a tree in the Birch family. One of the highlights was hand-feeding Chickadees.



David Eaton 2019

Photo by David Eaton

The January walk was held on the morning of the day for which a major winter storm was forecast. Despite the forecast, 6 members came for the walk along the Nokiidaa Trail from Green Lane towards 2nd Concession. The snow started as we were walking back to the parking lot. We were surprised to see a flock of around 20 American Robins but also enjoyed views of Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet along with Chickadees, Woodpeckers and Cardinal.

The nature walk program will continue from February to June. Please check your emails for announcements. We hope that you can join us on the walks.

Your Executive for 2019-2020

Elected Positions

- President.....**Jeanne Bénéteau**
- Vice President.....Vacant
- Treasurer.....**Linda Gilkes**
(and archives)
- Membership Secretary.....**Janet Thompson**
(and newsletter editor)
- Recording Secretary.....**Sylvia Bowman**
(and conservation, speakers, and Ontario Nature liaison)
- Past President.....**Doug Jagger**

Appointed Volunteer Positions

- Executive at Large.....**Rick Berry**
(and Stewardship Coordinator)
- Internet Director.....**Jay Gutteridge**
- Refreshments.....**Flo Sparling**

Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve

Stewardship Report

By Rick Berry

The stewardship team of York Simcoe Nature Club has gone into sleep mode for the winter season but will resume active duties in the spring, beginning with the spring periwinkle-pull in April. Stay tuned for announcements in this regard.

Construction crews have been hard at work on a major project to rehabilitate the former agricultural section of land in the northwest corner of the Reserve (see image). This section was used for raising crops and as a sod farm in the past. The current changes will create wetland ponds to further diversify the habitats at the Reserve. As a result, the west-side access off Dufferin Street is now permanently closed and the parking lot has been removed. This project is supported by Ontario Nature, Ontario Heritage Trust, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and York Region.



Location of wetland rehabilitation



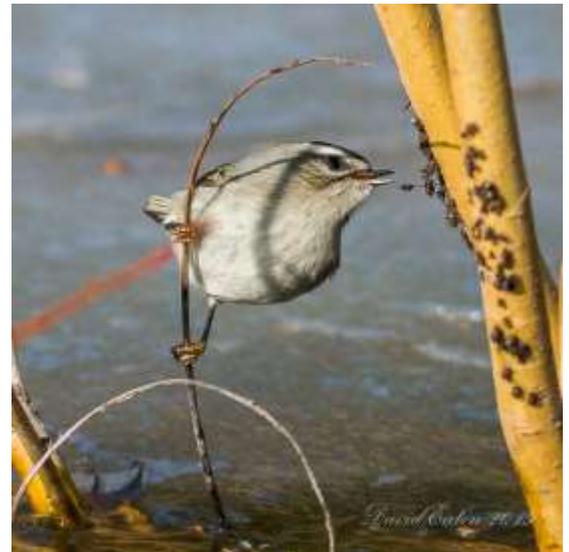
The west-side (Dufferin Street) parking lot is now gone

Late Fall at the Reserve

Photos by Dave Eaton



Beaver, Nov. 15



Golden-crowned Kinglet, Nov. 24



Winter Wren, Nov. 8

Conservation News

By Sylvia Bowman

We are all aware of the continued fires in Australia and the ongoing concerns everywhere about the climate crisis which had millions participating in the worldwide climate strike on Nov. 29, so I am not going to dwell on that (too much), important as it is. In our own backyard, our provincial government continues to make many puzzling policy changes, often buried in omnibus bills, that have serious implications for the environment.

Land Conservation News

In October and November the Ontario provincial government proposed amendments to several acts which will have far-reaching consequences. Unlike previous governments, it conducted very little consultation with stakeholders. Despite the concerns expressed by many environmental organizations such as Ontario Nature, Environmental Defence, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Gravel Watch and the Headwaters Institute, it passed the legislation virtually unchanged. Our club signed on to two letters, one joint submission by Ontario Nature and Environmental Defence on the *Aggregate Resources Act* (ARA), and one submission by the Headwaters Institute on the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).

Changes to Aggregate Resources Act Passed (Bill 132)

Some of the main concerns around the changes to the ARA include an amendment that permits aggregate extraction in all significant natural features currently protected under the PPS, such as provincially significant wetlands (except in southern Ontario), provincially significant woodlands, valley lands and wildlife habitat, significant Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, fish habitat and the habitat of threatened and endangered species. It applies across Ontario except in the Greenbelt. It allows aggregate extraction to override the protection of the significant and at-risk natural heritage features.

Another amendment to the ARA removes the ability of municipalities to manage, through zoning by-laws, where and how aggregate extraction occurs within the groundwater table or on Crown land. Making zoning by-laws inoperative in this manner weakens groundwater protection and unduly interferes with the municipalities' duty to identify and protect water resources in accordance with the PPS.

Changes to Provincial Policy Statement Proposed

Land Use: Proposed changes to the PPS will remove requirements intended to curb urban sprawl and support well-planned, efficient land use. The government is

proposing to remove the word "shall" and replace it with "should" -- eliminating any obligation for municipalities to implement these policies. Proposed amendments remove requirements to apply the policies of Section 2 (Wise Use and Management of Resources) and Section 3 (Protecting Public Health and Safety) when directing intensification and redevelopment and expanding settlement boundaries. All of these requirements supported consistent, province-wide approach to land use planning that prioritizes liveability, efficiency, affordability and environmental protection. They are crucial to directing development to suitable areas, away from natural areas and farmland. Removing them opens the door to poorly planned, inefficient development.

Wetlands: A new policy 2.1.10 is permissively and vaguely worded and invites an ad hoc approach to wetland management across the province. It says municipalities may choose to manage wetlands not subject to policy 2.1.4 and 2.1.5, in accordance with guidelines developed by the province. The PPS should provide clear direction regarding the protection and restoration of wetlands, in keeping with the Government of Ontario's stated intent to halt wetland loss and achieve a net gain in wetland area and function where wetland loss has been greatest. The vague wording "manage" is inappropriate. The policy is intended to open the door to wetland offsetting in wetlands that have not been deemed to be provincially significant. If that's the case, then the PPS must clearly state the purpose and parameters for this policy, including requirements to achieve net gain in wetland area, quality and function; set clear limits to offsetting, taking into account the type, location, vulnerability and irreplaceability of wetlands as well as their cultural significance to Indigenous peoples; and implement the mitigation sequence, which makes offsetting a last resort after first avoiding and then minimizing negative impacts.

Water-Taking Permit Moratorium Ended January 1

The Ontario moratorium on water-taking permits was put in place so that the province could conduct a scientific review of groundwater use before allowing more permits. But the moratorium has not been extended and the study has not been made public.

Land Conservation – Now the Good News

North Gwillimbury Forest Protected

Thanks to the tireless efforts of the North Gwillimbury Forest Alliance, an important wetland near Lake Simcoe is now permanently protected. In December, the

Local Planning Appeal Authority amended the Town of Georgina's Official Plan by designating the Maple Lake Estates (MLE) wetlands and woodlands as an "Environmental Protection Area". This new designation applies to 92% of the 200 hectare MLE property, located in Georgina. This was a result of the North Gwillimbury Forest Alliance's successful appeal of the Town's Official Plan, which had designated these ecologically significant lands as an appropriate location for a 1,073 unit subdivision. This is a huge victory as the alliance has fought for nearly a decade to protect these wetlands and woodlands.

New Ontario Nature Reserve Closer to Reality

Ontario Nature is raising funds to permanently protect 360 acres in eastern Ontario. This property is part of an ancient seam of granite known as the Frontenac Arch, extending from the Canadian Shield in Algonquin Provincial Park all the way south to the St. Lawrence River, and beyond to the United States and the Adirondack Mountains. This geological wonder supports some of the province's best remaining forest, shoreline and wetland habitat. They are well on their way to securing funds for their 26th nature reserve. See <https://ontarionature.org/land-before-time/>.

Federal Government Mandate Letters Show Commitment to the Environment

In December Prime Minister Justin Trudeau released the ministerial mandate letters, the official directions to ministers of this new government. Ministers are now committed to the biggest nature protection initiative in Canadian history: protecting 25% of land and oceans by 2025, and 30% by 2030. The mandate letters also commit Canada to being a global champion, encouraging countries around the world to adopt a target of 30% conservation by 2030. Beyond this, Canada will advance and promote nature-based climate solutions, including planting two billion trees and investing in our forests and wetlands! But they need to be adequately funded for plans to become a reality. Nature Canada and Ontario Nature and their supporters met in Ottawa on Feb. 4 with as many MPs as possible to try to ensure these promises become a reality.

DeBeers Victor Diamond Mine Case to Proceed

In December, the Ontario Court of Justice ruled in Ecojustice's favour when it ordered that charges against DeBeers Canada can proceed to a hearing. This means Ecojustice can move forward with their private prosecution of DeBeers over its alleged failure to adequately report on mercury pollution levels for the Victor Diamond Mine in northern Ontario. When it took more than 18 months to get the case to trial, as required by the Jordan principle set by the Supreme Court, the charges

were tossed out by a court in 2018 for taking too long to be heard. Ecojustice appealed that ruling in June 2019. Even though the Victor mine is no longer running, it is a case that presents a critical opportunity to set a precedent for how the province regulates mines in Ontario's so-called "Ring of Fire".

Species Conservation News

New Provincial Animal Welfare Legislation Passed

Following a court order earlier in 2019, the Ontario government was tasked with putting new animal welfare legislation in place after the SPCA withdrew from its enforcement role in animal welfare earlier in the year leaving no one in charge of animal cruelty enforcement. The legislation passed in late November as the *Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act*, or PAWS Act. It introduced several measures that are a big improvement over the previous legislation. It gives inspectors necessary powers to help animals in distress and to hold owners accountable. It is one of the strongest acts in Canada.

Piping Plover Case Results in Conviction

In March 2018 the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry charged the Town of South Bruce Peninsula under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act* for bulldozing the plovers' habitat in 2017 and issued a Stop Work Order that the Town attempted to appeal. Ecojustice intervened on behalf of Ontario Nature and Environmental Defence to counter the Town's appeal. In October 2019, the Town of South Bruce Peninsula was convicted of two counts of damaging endangered piping plover habitat. This was a big win for the piping plovers and endangered species in Ontario.

Logging in Woodland Caribou Habitat Proposed to Double

The latest plan by the Ontario government to make Ontario more "open for business" is through their recently proposed Forest Sector Strategy. Their proposal seeks to double the amount of logging in the province from 15 to 30 million cubic metres of wood annually, even though due to market factors such as the high cost of hauling timber from remote northern locations to mills, only half of the forest currently available for logging is actually being cut.

Many species, such as the woodland caribou, in Ontario are already experiencing unprecedented habitat disruption and require more space to adapt to climate change, not less. The strategy also completely ignores the link between habitat fragmentation and species decline. In its proposal to further subsidize and expand the logging road network, it misses the opportunity to use those tax dollars to incentivize actions which better address the legacy of these roads, landings and slash

piles, and increase habitat restoration efforts. Subsidies to forestry companies for building and maintaining logging roads have been costing the public approximately \$60 million per year, totalling more than half a billion dollars between 2005 and 2015. The government boasts the length of these roads is enough to drive across Canada and back.

The way forward lies in sharing the forest, and there's room for that.

The Government of Ontario's new forest strategy has been portrayed as a gift to the people of northern and rural Ontario. It claims to herald a "better quality of life", secure "a prosperous future", and of course, "end unnecessary duplication". Instead, it's another bulldozer for the Premier to pave the way for sweeping changes to the laws and policies that govern and protect public forests. Intricately tied to the Forest Sector Strategy are substantive cuts and amendments to the *Crown Forest Sustainability Act*, the *Environmental Assessment Act*, and the Independent Forest Audit system, among others. These changes are being pushed through with little genuine public input.

Climate Change and Energy News

Ontario Green Energy Projects Cancelled

In 2019 the Ontario government spent \$231 million cancelling green energy projects. The Minister of Energy quoted from an infamous climate denial blog to defend his decision to tear down wind turbines. It's a blog that says global warming is a hoax and has nothing to do with carbon pollution. According to the Independent Electricity System Operator, Ontario's electricity-related greenhouse gas pollution will rise 300% between 2017 and 2025 as the province ramps up the output of gas plants to keep our lights on when the Pickering A and B Nuclear Stations close in 2022 and 2024 respectively. This is concerning given that Provincial Auditor Bonnie Lysak has found that the Ford Government's climate plan is full of holes and will not meet its already inadequate targets, a finding that comes on the heels of Energy Minister Greg Rickford claiming that tearing up 800 green energy contracts would not lead to increased use of gas generating plants.

Renewable Energy Fun Facts

15.7 cents/kWh: The cost of solar energy in 2016

8.6 cents/kWh: The cost of wind energy in 2016

5 cents/kWh: The offer from Quebec for excess hydro power

2.1 cents/kWh: The cost of electricity conservation measures

Ecojustice Climate Change Lawsuit Against Ontario Government Announced

Twelve clients who range in age from 12 to 24 from across Ontario announced in November they are suing Premier Ford and his government for tearing up the province's climate laws and violating their Charter rights to life, liberty and security of the person. They expressed fear, anger and grief that the actions of governments today will force them — as well as their younger siblings, cousins and future children — to shoulder the oppressive weight of the climate crisis. Because of this, they say they have no choice but to take legal action against their own government to defend their right to a safe and just future. The case argues that Ontario's 2030 climate target — made weaker by the Ford government's *Cap and Trade Cancellation Act, 2018* — is inadequate and unconstitutional and must be struck down.

United Nations Climate Meeting in Madrid Shows Inadequate Progress

The 25th United Nations climate talks (COP25) in Madrid ended in December after three days of extended negotiations. In the end, the weakened text failed to curb the use of coal, oil and gas. Many big issues on how to implement the Paris Agreement were left until next year's conference, COP26 in Glasgow, despite the urgency to take action. A roster of new scientific reports is showing how inadequate progress towards Paris Agreement goals has been so far. One report from the UN Environment Programme and other groups looked at countries' current plans for coal, oil and gas. They found that the world is on track to produce 120% more fossil fuels than would be compatible with a 1.5°C world in 2030.



Owl wings meet mouse tracks

Photo by Al Bowman

Field Notes

Northern Hawk Owl Spotted in Region

Photos by David Eaton

The Northern Hawk Owl is a solitary, non-migratory bird of the boreal forest, but it sometimes moves south in the winter for food, so seeing one here is a treat. It looks like an owl but behaves like a hawk, in that it likes to perch atop solitary trees and hunts by daylight.



Dec. 12, Schomberg



Jan. 8, Schomberg

Trip to Galapagos Islands

Photos by Amy Wright



Blue-footed Booby



Nazca Booby (eastern Pacific var. of Masked Booby)



Swallow-tailed Gulls (endemic to Galapagos)

Our Southern Vacation

*Story and photos by
Sue Sherman and Don McCuaig*

We recently returned from an outstanding “expedition cruise” to Antarctica and South Georgia Island. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to set foot on the white continent and see for ourselves the abundant wildlife supported by trillions of krill in the southern ocean.

The trip originated in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where we saw lots of birds including some very noisy Monk Parakeets. We then flew to Ushuaia (on Tierra del Fuego) where we boarded our cruise ship for what turned out to be a very tame crossing of the Drake Passage.



Monk Parakeets nesting high in the trees near Buenos Aires

In Antarctica we saw hunting orcas; Weddell, leopard and fur seals; Gentoo, Chinstrap and Adelie penguins; and minke and humpback whales. We also saw glaciers, icebergs and beautiful ice formations at every turn. It is truly a majestic continent.



*Salisbury Plain on South Georgia Island,
home of 60,000 nesting pairs of King Penguins,
and a lot of elephant seals, fur seals and birds of prey*

On South Georgia Island, we saw the grave of Sir Ernest Shackleton in the old whaling station of Grytviken, walked on Salisbury Plain with an estimated 200,000 King Penguins plus lots of fur seals and elephant seals, and crept close to the rocks in zodiacs to see nesting Macaroni Penguins and albatrosses (Black-browed and Grey-headed). We also saw masses of petrels, Giant Petrels, prions, skuas, gulls and even a few Arctic Terns.



*Antarctic fur seals, once “economically extinct”,
now about 5 million strong*

Our cruise was also intended to stop in the Falkland Islands, but due to a near-hurricane weather system (Beaufort 11 with 12-13 m swells and occasional swells to 15m) we were unable to visit there. But we would be happy to show you pictures and talk about what it was like to be in a ship in that kind of weather!