



# The Quinte Naturalist

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is affiliated with Ontario Nature, a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research.

## March

*“You can see a lot by just looking. Yogi Berra*



Yogi Berra is beloved for two reasons. He was one of the greatest baseball players of all time and he can be depended upon to mangle the English language with apparently nonsensical pronouncements. Yogi did claim that “I really didn’t say everything I said,” but the stories are too good to give up. Even if Yogi did say all these things is he really mangling the English language? Possibly unintentionally Yogi often says something fairly profound. As naturalists we should listen to Yogi.

We’ll start with the picture above. Feederwatchers in Wisconsin saw this bird while they were at home just looking. Can you identify it? See page 8 for the answer. Don’t be deceived. It is not a goldfinch. It’s an unusual winter bird for Wisconsin and for Quinte but it is a regular nester in both areas.

Lately of necessity much of my birding has involved sitting and looking. The results have been better than I could have imagined. I saw things I never would have seen otherwise and learned things I never would have learned otherwise. Two articles describe incidents which have convinced me that Yogi was right. You don’t always have to hike or travel to exotic places to enjoy nature. Take some time to just look around you. You’ll see a lot.

**SEE CLUB NEWS ON PAGE 2**

## QUINTE FIELD NATURALISTS NEWS

### THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER

JOHN URQUHART/JAMES PATTERSON

ONTARIO REPTILE AND AMPHIBIAN ATLAS



*Photo by Joe Crowley, Ontario Nature*

Ontario's only lizard, the five-lined skink, lives in Hastings County. Come and hear how to find such "herps." Our speaker will explain how simple it is to participate in this project and add to the knowledge necessary if we are to protect them.

*The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an incorporated affiliate of Ontario Nature, is a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research. It was founded in 1949 and incorporated in 1990, and encompasses the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward. The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is legally entitled to hold real estate and accept benefits.*

*Quinte Field Naturalists meet on the fourth Monday of every month from September to March (except December), 7:30, Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, 60 Bridge Street East, Belleville. In April we hold our annual dinner at an alternate time and location. New members and guests are always welcome.*

*Bring a friend.*

**President Past President Vice-President Secretary**

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**Outings/Newsletter**

John Blaney - 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline - April 1, 2012

Please send submissions to [john.blaney@sympatico.ca](mailto:john.blaney@sympatico.ca)

# ANNUAL DINNER

Tuesday, April 17

**St. Columba Presbyterian Church**  
Corner of Bridge Street East and Farley Avenue

**ROAST BEEF DINNER**  
(Don't forget the pie)

**SPEAKERS**

**Martin and Kathy Parker**

**A Birder's Adventures in The Gambia -- West Africa -- Rollers,  
Bee-eaters and Walking Fish**



Martin and Kathy with their guide, YaYa Barry

Tickets for the dinner are \$25 and unfortunately have to be non-refundable. Please remember to pay by cheque. **Tickets must be purchased ahead of time.** If Norma does not have your money by **April 5** you will not be able to attend as we must let the church know how many dinners to prepare. If you are not at the March meeting you can mail your cheque to:

**Quinte Field Naturalists**  
**43 Parkdale Dr.**  
**Belleville, ON K8P 4M7**

Martin sent these photographs to give us just a taste of what they are going to talk about.



Green Vervet Monkey – Martin took this picture in the animal orphanage at the Abuko Nature Reserve. It is one of 7 national parks and nature reserves. The area has been protected since 1916 when the source of the Lamin Stream was fenced to form a water collection point. It became a nature reserve in 1968. It was increased from 188 to 259 acres in 1978. A 2.5 metre fence now encloses the area. According to government sources it attracts about 33,000 people a year and is now Gambia’s main tourist attraction.



Little Bee Eaters – These birds are one of the over 580 species which have been found in The Gambia. There is the odd species we share with this West African nation but even the names are unfamiliar to most of us. How could you not be fascinated by names like Pels’ fishing owl, red-rumped tinkerbird, Puvel’s illidopsis or red-cheeked cordon bleu? Martin and Kathy will share their adventures with West African wildlife like this.

### **BIRDING THE NET**

It would take more than the eight pages of this newsletter to outline the free services the Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers to birders so my advice is to visit the website - <http://www.birds.cornell.edu> . There are links galore.

At the top of the page is the highest quality nestcam feed I have ever seen. In this case it’s a close up of what’s going on in a red-tailed hawk’s nest. They named the female “Big Red” but you can participate in a poll to name the male. There’s also a whole series of easy to understand videos to help improve your birding skills. The featured video this month is called “Birding Warblers.” Two birders visit a small suburban woodlot and comment on how to find warblers. You can hear the sounds in the woods and actually see the warblers.

Don’t wait until you are convalescing from knee surgery to visit this site.

## TERRY HAS AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE ABOUT OUR CLUB

QFN members may not be aware that the club has had a webpage for about a decade now, which is carried on the NatureStuff website. The page is updated regularly with notices about upcoming meetings, executive and membership information, past and present projects. I try to keep this page vibrant with new content as I receive it, but there is so much more that we can be advertising to the general public about who we are and what we do. The website is now carrying the monthly newsletter as another means to get the word out to the general public and prospective members. I am starting to build up a small photo library documenting QFN activities and events and would welcome any additional photos, if members should happen to have any. If there is anything that you would like to see added to the website, please let me know. The webpage can be accessed by going into my personal website at [www.naturestuff.net](http://www.naturestuff.net) and clicking on ORGANIZATIONS from the menu at the top of the page. You will see QFN listed among the various subject options.

Terry Sprague  
tsprague@kos.net

## AN ALGONQUIN ENCOUNTER



*This leucistic black-capped chickadee has been enjoying the free food on the Opeongo Road all winter.*

If you visit Algonquin Park in the winter you expect to find colourful winter birds seldom seen in the Quinte area. You also know that there are specific areas of the park where you should look for them. Gray jays, crossbills, grosbeaks and boreal chickadees are only some of the birds on the target list. The Opeongo Road, the Spruce Bog Trail and the Visitor Centre feeders are the hotspots to check.

On Friday, March 9 Sharron and I decided to trek off to the park for two days. For accommodation we chose the Couples Resort which was offering a great pre-March-Break special, \$69 per person including dinner, breakfast and a room with a Jacuzzi and a fireplace. The food is great. If you

remember my account of last year's visit to the Kettle Creek Inn you may notice a theme.

It was chilly when we left Belleville but the snow was gone and spring was close. Algonquin provided a different sight. Our first stop was the end of the ploughed section of the Opeongo Road. It had been a winter with little snow but what had fallen still covered the ground.

Chickadees and blue jays were more than willing to accept the peanuts we threw in the snow. A small flock of pine siskins flew over and a lone evening grosbeak could be heard calling. This is the most reliable spot in the park for gray jays but there were none.

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## AMERICAN MARTEN

The American marten is sometimes called pine marten but that name more often refers to a similar European species. The species' range stretches across North America from the northern limit of the treeline to northern New Mexico in mature coniferous or mixed forests.

Martens are about the same size as minks but they do average just slightly larger. They have long silky hair which can range in colour from a pale buffy colour to almost black. The head is usually lighter than the body. Most individuals have a throat and chest bib which can be anything from a very pale yellow to bright orange.



I wandered off to talk to the only other birder in the area. As we stood chatting there was a movement on the edge of the woods. A rusty brown animal a little smaller than a house cat was racing around checking every crevice which might contain food - a marten. It disappeared and I started back to the car to tell Sharron what she had missed. She had already seen it. The marten had appeared in the open just a few feet from the car. As we both watched it came out again to eat some of the peanuts in the snow.

The marten and I quickly developed a rapport. I got out of the car and threw a dozen or so peanuts about 3 or 4 metres from the car and got back in the car. The marten came out of the woods, sat and ate the peanuts and returned to the woods. I got out of the car, etc. At one point Sharron closed her door because the marten was looking as though it knew where the peanuts came from and had decided to go directly to the source. Martens may be cute but they are members of the weasel family and have very sharp teeth.

When we tired of the game Sharron and I headed to the resort for dinner and the marten went about its business.

Dinner at the resort matched our expectations. I'm still not sure what a carpaccio purse is but I enjoyed it.

In the morning we could see that light snowfall had covered everything. Beautiful! Breakfast consisted of eggs Benedict on English muffins with bacon, dill cake and tomato salad. Also beautiful.

During the rest of the day we did find evening grosbeaks, gray jays and even another marten. This one was eating peanuts which visitors had placed on the top of the sign for the Spruce Bog Trail.

The trip had been planned as a birding trip but the two highlights had nothing to do with birds. I had always assumed that martens' main food was probably small mammals such as squirrels and voles but both of these animals made only token runs at red squirrels and certainly seemed to be enjoying the peanuts. What was the other highlight? You need to ask? It was the Couples Resort and the food of course.

## KAISER CROSSROAD



It doesn't look like much; it's just a flooded cornfield. To waterfowl and some shorebirds it couldn't look better. Over the migration season probably thousands of birds stop at this one field in Prince Edward County. Of course, birders flock there too.

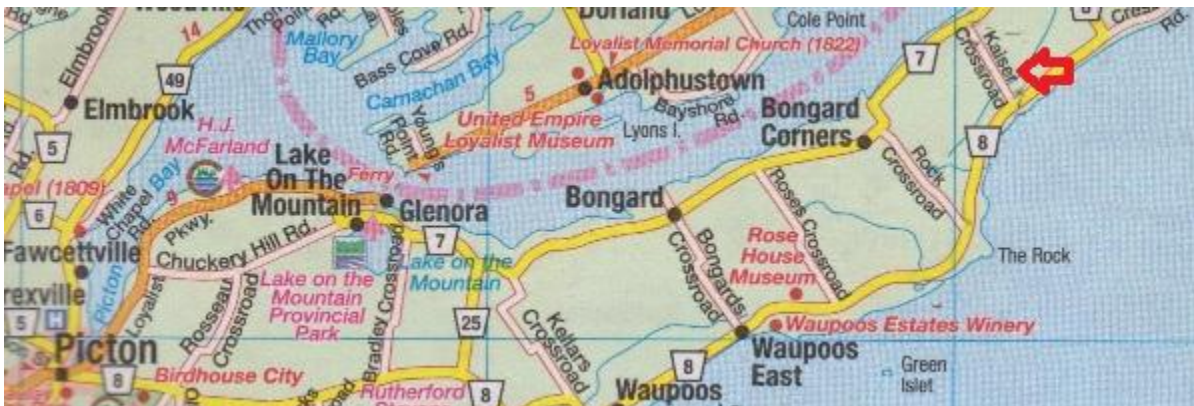
It's another place to wait and look for birds as Yogi might suggest. A scope is best for observation but binoculars will help you see what's in the field.

*Photo Courtesy Terry Sprague*

When Sharron and I visited there in mid-March our first impression was that there wasn't much there. Scanning the back of the field I found over 100 ring-necked ducks and 30 or so American wigeons. A few northern pintails and northern shovelers poked about. There was a mix of buffleheads, mallards, American black ducks, a redhead and a single male wood duck. In another pond south of the main field a few green-winged teal shared the available food with a flock of Canada geese. A pair of northern harriers coursed over the marsh behind the field and a horned lark sang its tinkling song behind us. In the distance a northern raven croaked, possibly considering nesting on a nearby cliff face.

Last year some lucky birders saw a flock of 600 to 800 snow geese there. Later in the season several of the common shorebirds such as semipalmated plovers, both species of yellowlegs, least sandpipers, dunlins and others all appeared. On birdathons your QFN team has added whimbrels and a red-necked phalarope from this location.

It's an excellent spot where you can see a lot by just looking. The red arrow marks the spot.





On a recent visit to Prince Edward Point as I was sitting and looking a beautiful pair of harlequin ducks like these slowly floated past, not more than 15 or 20 metres away. Harlequins appear almost annually at the point. They nest in two widely separate areas. One group nests on the west coast and the other on our east coast from the Gaspé north. Presumably the birds we see are from the eastern population.

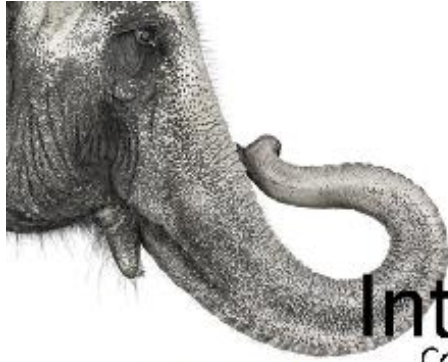
Garth Riley of Toronto kindly allowed use of this picture taken in a west metro park. It's obviously a hybrid. Can you tell what two species contributed their genes to this individual? Try to figure it out before looking at the answer below. (Photo by Garth Riley)



There's no doubt about the identity of this bird. It's a song sparrow. For sentimental reasons its song is one of my favourite spring sounds. When I was a boy we lived in the country and a song sparrow always nested by the pole at the end of my mother's clothesline. Now one nests every year near to or possibly even in our urban backyard. (Photo by Kyle Blaney)

Mystery Birds: The yellow colour, the wing bars, the faint streaks on the breast and the eye ring identify the bird on page 1 as a pine warbler. The front end of the mystery duck is obviously mainly mallard although the bill is the wrong colour. The grey body and long straight tail with no curly mallard feathers belong to a northern pintail. It's always worth analyzing a bird that doesn't look quite right.





At  
St. Lawrence  
College



# Interested in Wildlife?

Come join the Vet Assistants at St. Lawrence College

For the presentation of

**“The Bond Between Us, Perspectives On  
Humans & Other Animals”** Fundraiser

Presented By: ROB LAIDLAW author of  
Wild Animals in Captivity



**Tuesday March 27th, 2012**

Doors Open @ **6:30pm**, Talk Starts at  
7pm

SLC Lecture Theatre **Rm. 11710**

**\$10 At The Door ALL WELCOME**



All proceeds will go to helping  
the animals at the Sandy  
Pine's Wildlife Centre!

