

The Quinte Naturalist

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



Quinte Field Naturalists

Speaker Presentation

Monday, Feb 27, 2023

7:00 p.m.

**Centennial Secondary School
160 Palmer Road, Belleville, ON**

“Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre: Cultivating Empathy and Compassion for Wildlife”

Jess Pelow is a Certified Teacher with a Masters in Environmental Education. She has worked as an outdoor educator for over a decade and became Education Coordinator at Sandy Pines in 2019.



Sandy Pines does even more than care for injured wildlife! Join Jess and find out about their innovative education programs for children and adults that aim to cultivate empathy and compassion for wildlife and ultimately reduce the number of patients admitted to SPWC due to human activity.

CLUB NEWS

Membership

We hope that you are well and were able to enjoy events over the holidays despite the weather. We wish you the very best in the year ahead.

Thanks to all of you who renewed memberships in 2022; we very much appreciate your ongoing support. You will know from our newsletters that QFN has remained active during the past few Covid years by advocating, organizing, participating and supporting many issues and initiatives.



Enjoy and conserve nature. Join QFN.

We are now conducting the 2023 membership drive.

If you are a NEW member who paid dues in the fall of 2022, you are covered for 2023.

For all others, 2023 membership renewals are due now. A big “Thank You” to all who have already renewed.

Cost remains at: \$25 Single, \$40 family

Methods of payment are as follows: Remember to include your contact information.

1. By e-transfer to: qfnnature@gmail.com
2. By mail: cheque made payable to Quinte Field Naturalists. Send to Michael Shaw, 377 Dufferin Avenue, Belleville, ON K8N 3X9
3. By cash or cheque brought to our next meeting, Monday, February 27th.

Remember to let us know of any change to home or email addresses.

If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please feel welcome to contact me by email or phone 613-922-9566. I would be happy to hear from you.

Nancy Stevenson, Membership Secretary

Annual General Meeting

Our January meeting with speaker, Kyle Blaney was also our annual general meeting.

We made minor changes in our by-laws. Our board will now be made up of 5 officers and 6 conveners with the possibility of adding others. The offices of President and Vice-president are vacant. Elected officers are Mike Shaw as Treasurer, Elizabeth Churcher as Corresponding Secretary and Sharron Blaney as Recording Secretary.

Under the amended by-law we will now have seven conveners for Program, Newsletter, Membership, Social, Environment, Outings and Marketing and Promotions. Introduced as conveners were Bernd and Catherine Baier, Lori Borthwick, John Lowry, Nancy Stevenson, George Thomson, Denise Wilkins, Robert Ormston and John Blaney. At the next board meeting elected conveners will be assigned to the positions. Members will be informed of the assignments.

Our bank account is in good shape with about \$9000 because we had so few meetings. There are upcoming expenses for insurance and meetings in 2023 but we will be able to resume projects and donations to local organizations.



Mark this on your calendar and record your sightings in eBird. It's not just for your backyard it for anywhere you happen to be. You're at the mall and you see 5 ring-billed gull and a crow. Report them. Ebird is to record numbers to see just how common common birds are as well as what birds are in our area.

BELLEVILLE CBC

27 DECEMBER 2022

Submitted by Tom Wheatley, Compiler



Crystal Kirkman added ruddy duck to the 20 year total of species found on the Belleville CBC. She photographed this male in full breeding plumage last May in a local sewage lagoon.

A group of 18 birders and 3 feeder watchers had relatively calm weather conditions for the 20th Belleville CBC after experiencing stormy weather in the days leading up to the December 27th Count Day. They recorded 56 species on Count day (average 54), with 4 additional Count Week species (American Coot, Peregrine Falcon, American Kestrel and Song Sparrow) for a total of 60 species (about average). Cold temperatures and high wind chill values in the days leading up to the CBC kept much of the Bay of Quinte frozen for Count Day, but there were still a number of waterfowl in the remaining open water. Less open water than last

year may have resulted in Bald Eagle numbers being back down to an average of 3, after last year's record 10.

Total individuals were 6777 (Average 7000/ Max 12,768 in 2011). Five species not native to Ontario accounted for 35% of the total numbers; Mute Swan 71 (1%), Rock Pigeon 494 (7%), House Sparrow 164 (2.5%), House Finch 59 (0.9%) and European Starling 1594 (23.5%).

Noteworthy species seen on Count Day include a Ruddy Duck (1st record), 4 Trumpeter Swans (1st record), 2 Horned Grebes (2nd record, 2002) and a Double-crested Cormorant (4th record).

Pleasant predawn conditions resulted in Owers locating 2 Eastern Screech Owls, 2 Barred Owls and 7 Great Horned Owls (record 8 in 2014).



With her group Crystal Kirkman also added trumpeter swan to the 20-year list of CBC species. A few pairs now nest in the Quinte area. Every winter local nesters are joined by visitors. All spend the season in open water. Crystal photographed this bird in 2021 in Cobourg harbour, outside the CBC area. It shows the profile which allows us to distinguish it from from the tundra swan and the invasive mute swan. Bill black, not orange so not a mute swan. Lores (area between bill and eye) as wide as the eye where it meets the eye, not pointed as in the tundra swan. The profile of the bill is fairly flat, not concave as it is in a tundra swan.

Notable New high counts (New/Previous); Horned Grebe (2/1), Wild Turkey (74/69), Red-bellied Woodpecker (9/7), Common Raven (30, tied with 2021) and Northern Cardinal (120/83).

New low counts; Rock Pigeon 494 (average 1000, highest 1492 in 2010), American Black Duck 1 (tied, highest 41 in 2015), Northern Shrike 1 (tied),

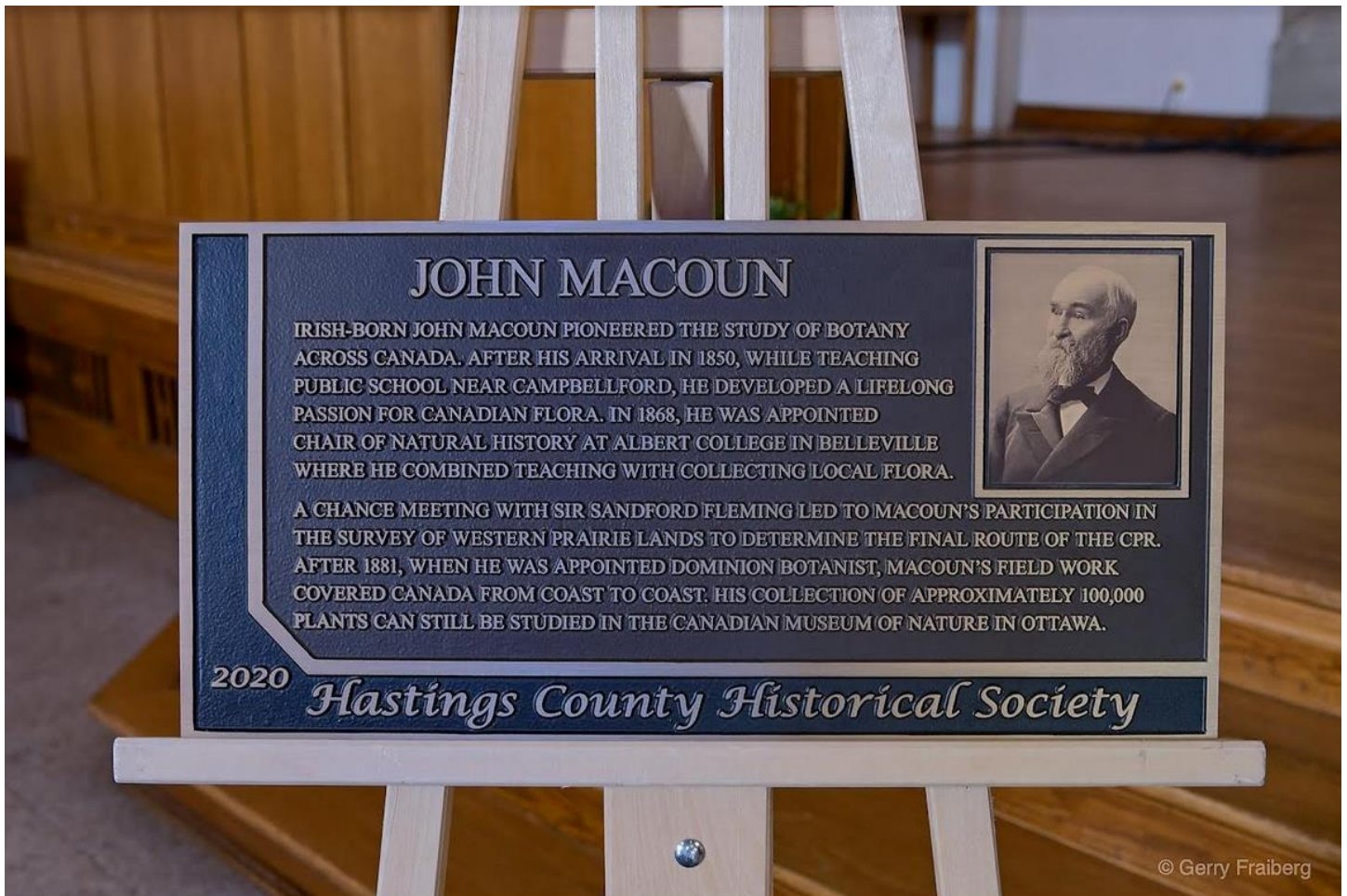
The addition of Ruddy Duck and Trumpeter Swan to the cumulative species list of 20 years of Belleville CBC's since 2002 (No Count in 2020 due to Covid) brings the total to 104.

Notable misses: Wood duck, Bufflehead, Great Blue Heron, Ruffed grouse, Greater Black-backed Gull, Snowy owl, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks.

A big Thank you to everyone involved in making the 2022 Belleville CBC a success.



Great black-backed gull was one of the “notable misses” Tom mentioned. It’s more often found on Atlantic shores but there are generally a few on the Great Lakes. Its dark back and massive size make it unmistakable. Notice how it towers over the ring-billed gull in the foreground. Lately it’s been hard to find and researchers have suggested that it has been hit hard by botulism. Photo by Andrea Kingsley.



John Macoun, Quinte Native and Founder of Canada's National Herbarium Memorialized

Oct. 22, 2022, 11:00 am

Submitted by John Lowry

Members of the Quinte Field Naturalists and the Hastings County Historical Society gathered in the Chapel at Albert College today to commemorate John Macoun and unveil a plaque to honour his legacy..

Elizabeth did an amazing job describing the life of Canada's first national botanist in an inspirational speech to the gathered members. The plan is for the plaque to be situated in the gardens of the college (hopefully with a small garden plot of plants that bear Mr Macoun's name).

Photo by Gerry Fraiberg. Permission given to use photo.



Ca\$h for Trash

A message from John Lowry

Having set an original goal of \$1,000 I was very pleased to see the final tally for our beer can/alcohol container collection

With the help of many we collected

13,002 beer cans
978 alcohol bottles
10,512 pop cans

That's a whopping 24,492 containers!!

This raised \$1,512.40 which I topped up to **\$1,525.00** and

donated to the Nature Conservancy on Giving Tuesday with the stipulation that it be used in local properties like the Hastings Wildlife Junction, McMahan Bluff, Brighton Wetland etc.. That's means that we helped raise over \$3,000 -- not bad folks!

With many thanks to all those that contributed. I am already collecting for 2023.



Lori Borthwick photographed this white-breasted nuthatch in the Bell Creek watershed. It's a common year round resident of our woodlands or any part of the city with fairly mature trees.

They walk head down on trees probing in the bark for seeds and insects. They wedge seeds and nuts into crevices and whack them with their sharp beaks to open them. Food cached earlier ensures a steady supply

In winter they travel in mixed flocks usually with chickadees so predators will be easier to spot.

Honours for QFN Members



On Tuesday, January 31 Elizabeth Churcher was at Queen's Park to receive an Ontario Senior Achievement Award from Lieutenant-Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell. Elizabeth is seated third from the left beside the Lieutenant-Governor.

In honouring Elizabeth the Lieutenant-Governor stated:

Elizabeth Churcher of Tweed has many interests and accomplishments. After Elizabeth retired from being a schoolteacher and principal, she has devoted herself to volunteering with multiple organizations, including St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, The Tweed Horticultural Society, The Gateway Community Health Centre, the Hastings & Prince Edward District School Board, and the Municipality of Tweed. She has played a huge part in organizing and developing the community gardens. Through her dedication to nature and those around her, Elizabeth has enriched her community.

More Conservation Heroes

Two QFN members have been declared to be local conservation heroes by the Nature Conservancy of Canada.



John (left) and Amanda Tracey of NCC

In addition to his work for QFN, the South Shore Joint Initiative, the Friends of Sandbanks Park and advocacy for the preservation of the Bell Creek watershed **John Lowry** has participated in ten conservation volunteer events for NCC since 2018. See page 7 for another of John's projects supporting NCC. There could not be a more obvious Conservation Hero.



Richard (right) and Ali Giroux, formerly of NCC installing the sign for NCC's McMahon Bluff Nature Reserve.

Richard Bird has observed and enjoyed nature for his whole life. For ten years he was vice-president of the Hastings Prince Edward Land Trust. He has supported the observatory by constructing several showpiece cedar strip canoes for fund-raising raffles. He now shares his lifetime of experiences with nature as a member of the board of the South Shore Joint Initiative.



Cheryl at an NCC garlic mustard pull volunteer event.

The third local conservation hero is not a member of QFN but is well known to most of us. Since her arrival in PEC in 2003 **Cheryl Anderson** has taken a leading role in stopping a wind farm development in a very important bird migration route as well as in organizations such as PECFN, PEPtBO and SSJI.

It is thanks to the efforts of conservation heroes like these four people, all recently honoured, that there can be hope that our local ecosystems can be conserved and enhanced.

Requiem for Quinte's Wetlands

QFN member and president of the Bay of Quinte Green Party organized a requiem for Quinte's wetlands threatened by the passage of Bill 23 now known as the More Homes Built Faster Act. With assistance from John Lowry Lori made arrangements for a candlelight procession on Dec. 10, 2022.

We gathered in Market Square to hear from speakers including Lori and member of Belleville Council Chris Malette who is also chair of the Green Task Force. Soon the group reassembled in the parking lot opposite city hall where 99 of us held signs, each naming one of the threatened wetlands.



It was hard to tell how many people attended because others walking the Riverfront Trail joined in when they hear the reason for the protest. Most estimates were in the 200 range.

Thanks to Doug Knutson of Windswept Productions we have these excellent shots of the Requiem.



The group proceeded to the new footbridge for another aerial photo by Doug Knutson. I, with my sign mourning the possible loss of the Northport wetland was located to the right of this drone view with several others.

Later the realistic coffin was filled to overflowing with the signs naming the wetlands. The message was clear. Bill 23 threatens death to important wetlands.

Protests against 23 were not over . On February 8 another event opposed the outrageous law. There will a report on it in the next newsletter. Spoiler alert: It was very successful.

WINTER FINCH FORECAST

By Elizabeth Churcher and George Thomson

Reprinted with permission from the Tweed News, November 30, 2022

Every autumn an expert birder polls naturalists all over Ontario to get information for a Winter Finch Forecast. It requires hours of work by several dozen people with the compiler especially burdened. We can only conclude that it is a labour of love. Using reports and pictures from eBird let's see if the birds cooperate. Note: Elizabeth and George bear no responsibility for the forecast. They are merely reporting the content.

Every year, in early Autumn, we google "Winter Finch Forecast", anxiously searching for clues about which species might visit our feeders during the cold Winter months. Steeped in excitement after reading Forecaster Tyler Hoar's report, we watch and wait, always presenting a fine arrangement of gourmet food for guests who may honour us with a short visit or a prolonged stay. Daily in late November, our own breakfast preparations are interrupted by our urge to check the birds arriving at the feeders. Will a new arrival confirm one of the predictions in the "Finch Forecast"? The area covered by Hoar's information is so large and the tree seed crops are so variable across the region that it is not easy to predict which Finches will appear in our area.

Most Winters, at least some members of the Finch family visit the Tweed area. Finches are sparrow-like birds of varying sizes, with stout, conical bills adapted for cracking the tough coats of seeds and extracting the edible part of the seed. This tasty 'meat' of the seed is comprised of the embryo plant & the enclosed food supply. A nutritious snack!



Depending upon your expertise you will notice something about this picture. I might as well admit that I have lost my focus already. This is a snow bunting and snow buntings are not finches. Still it is one of the winter birds eagerly sought by birders. The sight of hundreds of snow buntings rolling wave-like across snowy fields is unforgettable. There have been several reports from Prince Edward County.

Northern finches are often somewhat nomadic. They must travel over large distances to find sufficient seed supplies to sustain them for the cold weather. The size of the seed crops of deciduous & evergreen trees in various vast areas of our province determine where the flocks of finches will spend the Winter months. If the tree seed crops are insufficient or are used up too quickly by the flocks of finches, the birds will travel onwards to new areas, sometimes in southern parts of the province. While we realize that their presence with us is the result of a food shortage elsewhere, we always are thrilled to report their arrival.

Presently, people are starting to see Evening Grosbeaks in flocks of varying sizes. On several days throughout November, we have stood, absorbing the beauty of four of these individuals at our feeders. The colourful, charismatic Evening Grosbeak seems to be on the move this year. Their population is increasing in eastern Canada due to increasing outbreaks of spruce budworm in Northeastern Ontario and



Evening grosbeaks devouring all the black oil sunflower seeds a homeowner is willing to provide. Photo by Anne Burnette.

Quebec. After their breeding season, when temperatures drop and the spruce budworm supply decreases, we can expect flights of this picturesque bird into southern Ontario. Their possible presence is good reason for George to scatter Black Oil Sunflower seeds over our platform feeders. He knows how to please these fine guests! These Grosbeaks also love the Maple and Ash seeds dangling from the trees that are growing in our yard. Interestingly, the seeds of our very large Manitoba Maple which borders the west field, is a delicacy relished by this species. A good reason for us to love Manitoba Maples, too!

Who else might come our way this Winter? According to the report, there is potential for a moderate to good flight of Common & Hoary Redpolls, south out of the Boreal Forest. Elizabeth cheered as she read this fact. The absence of the Common Redpoll (pictured on next page) last Winter has stirred in her a longing to host these friends again. We are

watching for them in Birch trees and weedy fields and topping up our feeders with Nyjer and Black Oil Sunflower seeds, two of their favourites.



Common redpolls at Elizabeth and George's feeder. There have been some reports but the flight qualifies as "moderate," as predicted.



This pair of purple finches was found by Tom Wheatley in Lennox and Addington. The prediction for this species was quite accurate. There are a few around but most reports are from south of the Great Lakes.

David Sibley has written an article to help distinguish purple finch from our resident house finches.

<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/birds/david-sibley-id-toolkit/david-sibley-purple-finch-house-finch/>

And what about the Pine Siskins that did not stop by last year? It appears that we may see them, too. The Eastern White Cedar crops in the eastern Boreal Forest may have enough seed for a few to remain but it is likely that many will fly southward in search of food. Another purpose for keeping your silo feeders well stocked with Nyjer seed!

The colourful, cheery Purple Finches who filled our hearts with joy last Winter are showing promise of a return to our midst. Having benefitted from the Spruce Budworm outbreaks during their breeding season, some will remain in the Eastern Boreal Forest to harvest seeds from the Ash trees. Many, however, likely will fly south travelling as far as the north-eastern states.

Other species that we typically do not see at our feeders may visit this area. As Winter progresses, White-winged Crossbills may pay us a visit when they discover a shortage of Spruce seeds in the Boreal Forest, east of Lake Superior. If you have Spruce trees laden



There have been several reports of pine grosbeaks on the edges of the Canadian Shield. Photo by Kyle Blaney.

with seeds, keep a close watch on them. You may be honoured with a surprise visit by these glorious, fascinating birds. And Pine Grosbeaks may make a grand appearance in your yard if you have a Mountain Ash well endowed with fruit. There seems to be a shortage of this food choice from Lake Superior eastward.

Our overnight accommodation is prepared. The breakfast tray is fully stocked, ready to serve

any avian guest who chooses to visit. We do not know who will arrive but we do know that Mother Nature always will give us reason to rejoice. We thrive on the anticipation that some of the birds in the Winter Finch Forecast may join us. Each morning, we look out and celebrate the variety of birds who come to our feeders. We watch, we study, we learn. We give thanks for the Finches and all of our other avian friends!



Obviously not a bird but an interesting November 10 sighting by Robert Ormston. Witch-hazel is a shrub which blooms in the late fall/early winter. It has been long reputed to have medicinal qualities.