

THE QUINTE NATURALIST

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

JANUARY



ZERO WASTE LIVING – FOR THE LOVE OF NATURE



Quinte Field Naturalists

Lecture Series



Monday, January 27, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Sills Auditorium

Bridge Street United Church, Belleville



Laura Nash, host and producer of *The Zero Waste Countdown*, the leading international podcast on sustainable living, will share insights on living more while consuming less from interviews with everyone from fashion designers to the federal Minister of Environment & Climate Change.



All welcome (donations appreciated) Refreshments are served

CLUB NEWS



It's Membership Month. QFN memberships run from January to January. They cost \$25 for a single membership and \$40 for a family. Your membership helps to pay for the meeting venue, speaker's honorarium, insurance, club projects and unexpected expenses. The more members we have the stronger our voice advocating for nature.



Annual Meeting Postponed. Mike Shaw, our treasurer, was elected at the November meeting. As one of the main business items at our annual meeting is passage of the budget the executive thought it wise to allow Mike time to examine the books. The executive is meeting on Feb. 10 to finalize a proposed budget and other business for the annual meeting. If you have any suggestions contact any of the executive listed in the green box on the last page.



Elections. The two-year term of our current executive ends at the annual meeting. Please speak to a current executive member if you would like to help by joining the 2020-22 executive. We are especially in need of a **vice-president**. The expectation is that the vice-president will become president in 2022. The two-year term gives the vice-president time to get to know other executive members and volunteers and to understand what the president does.



Volunteers are needed indeed. There are many club projects for those with particular interests. Examples include assisting with fund-raising projects, making arrangements to sponsor the student we support for Ontario Nature's Youth Summit (no fund-raising required), assisting the social convener at our meetings, managing our Facebook page, promoting our programs and projects in local media, using Mailchimp software for club emails, setting up the club message board at selected community events such as the Woodlot Conference and Docfest,

Heads Up!



Don't forget to bring a loonie or two for the monthly draw! This month's prizes are **amazing!**

Homemade Black Currant Jam
2020 Audubon Page -A -Day Nature Calendar
Set of four ON Nature magazines—Spring Summer Fall and Winter
Hand knitted socks
8" x 12" Canvas print of a Red Knot

Support QFN and take home something special!



Another Chance to Win

You are already a winner. At least you will be if you buy PEPtBO coffee. It's grrreat! Kathy and Mike will be selling this coffee at the January meeting. They will miss the February meeting so if you think you might run short get some now.



But wait. There's more. Profits from the coffee sales support PEPtBO. Their data assists researchers such as those who published the report discussed on page 6. The coffee is shade-grown on a small family plantation in Nicaragua. Shade-grown coffee provides winter habitat for warblers and other species in trouble. Loss of winter habitat is one of the main causes of the serious decline in bird populations.

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WHERE ARE THE BIRDS?

Whether you enjoy birds by photographing them, maintaining a bird feeder, walking in a local park, keeping a life list or just looking out the window you may be asking, "Where are the birds?" Many people are wondering the same thing.

Terry Sprague posted some of his thoughts on Facebook: (edited to fit available space)

December 9.

Not as many birds at my feeders so far. I have quite a few, but down in numbers. Well, Project FeederWatch, in which I have been participating annually since 1987 when it was first born as the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey, suggests we shouldn't worry.

Terry suggested several possible causes for the perceived lack of birds:

...changes in human behaviour - such as where, when, and how many people are feeding birds or reporting sightings through FeederWatch, shifts in bird distributions, or something else other than an actual drop in bird population size. Overall, FeederWatchers last winter averaged 39 individual birds per count, down from a long-term average of 48. This is from over 160,000 bird checklists last winter. To that I can add, we don't expect an irruption winter this year with those colourful boreal finches that we always like to see. Too much wild food where they breed in the north and no need to shuffle down our way. Same is actually true here with our resident birds - lots of wild food out



Pine Grosbeak is one of the boreal finches which you shouldn't expect to see this winter. In fact during the first 3 weeks of January birders posted only 2 sightings of the species to ebird in all of central and southern Ontario - one bird seen near Kingston and two in Muskoka. Photo by Bryan Calk in ebird.

there yet and no need for birds to seek out our feeders. Not enough snow yet either to lure them to our menus. ...Presence of persistent predators like hawks and cats. Any of these changes can have an impact on numbers and visitation.

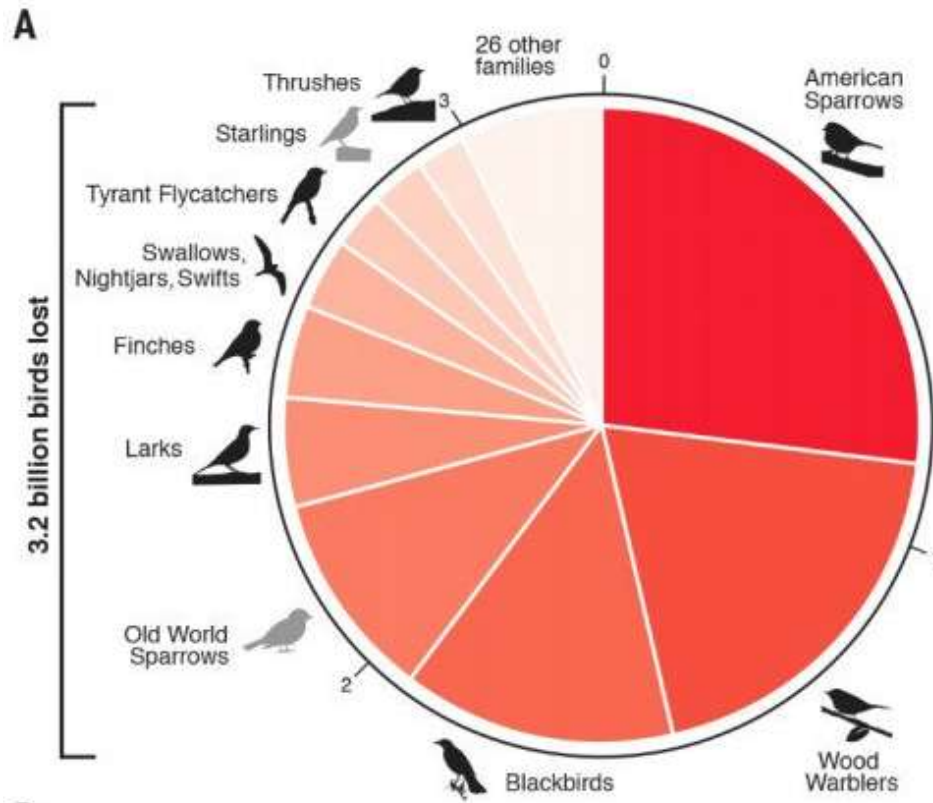
Interesting results though from last winter's counts. Black-capped Chickadees visited almost 100% of surveyed feeders in all provinces, except B.C. where it held third place, surpassed by juncos and flickers. And, nowhere did the one-time ubiquitous House Sparrow make the Top Ten list. That's quite a change from a few decades ago. So, if birds are a little thin in their visits this winter, don't worry. Next winter could be an irruption year with numbers returning to normal. Be patient. You're probably doing nothing wrong. Just stay away from budget feeds from big box stores! Budget feeds are worthless.

On January 12 the situation at Terry's feeders changed:



It's interesting how the population and make-up of bird species can change from week to week. This past week, I have been bombarded by House Finches, American Goldfinches and Tree Sparrows. A week earlier, I had next to none. This is a platform feeder that I constructed right outside my office window. It complements about 25-30 other feeders I have just out beyond it. And, as I write this, my Yellow-bellied Sapsucker returned for an encore after an absence of about a week. It has been a good day.

THERE'S STILL A PROBLEM



Of course just because the birds have returned to some feeders in expected numbers it doesn't mean that there is no problem. There was much publicity about an article published in the magazine *Science* last October which clearly showed that there is a problem, a very big problem. The article was the result of the collective efforts of 11 researchers from universities and research centres in the United States and Canada. They discovered that since 1970 we have lost about 30% of North America's bird population or close to three billion individual birds. Close to one-third of that loss was from various species of American sparrows. Wood warblers and blackbirds made up a further third.

The lead author, Ken Rosenberg from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, noted that birds are important for pollination, pest control and the dispersal of the seeds of native plants. He went on to say that if birds are in decline, "We can be pretty sure that other parts of the ecosystem are also in decline and degradation."

HOW DO YOU COUNT BIRDS?

How do you count birds from 1970 to 2017, the period covered by the study? You recruit tens of thousands of people and pay them nothing to do the job. Sounds ridiculous but that's exactly what happened. Citizen science projects such as the Christmas Bird Count and the North American Breeding Bird Survey provided the data.



Despite their bright colours Baltimore orioles are members of the blackbird family. One particularly disturbing aspect of the study is that birds we consider fairly common and part of our natural heritage, like orioles, are in serious decline. Photo by Tony deGroot

The other major source of data came from 143 weather stations. During migration flocks are large and dense enough that they show up on weather radar. Using images from the radar the researchers were able to estimate the biomass of birds on the wing. There is no accurate way to identify the migrants to species in this way but between 2007 and 2018 the total mass of all migrants declined by 14%.

GOOD NEWS FROM THE REPORT

Three groups of birds, vireos, raptors and waterfowl showed an increase in numbers.

The reason for the increase in vireo numbers is not known. My own very amateur and uneducated guess is that it may be related to increasing habitat as pioneer tree species have provided more nesting sites.

The increase in raptors like bald eagles is because of legislation protecting them. The banning of DDT was at least partially due to Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring*.

The reason for the increase in waterfowl numbers is a challenge to naturalists. "It's because of the strong constituency of recreational waterfowl hunters who raised their voice, put money where their mouths are and saw to it that conservation programs and policies were put in place," Rosenberg says.

AN IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE

Ontario Nature has issued an alert and a request to members of QFN and all naturalists in the province.

*The Government of Ontario's latest proposal is paving the way for sweeping changes to the laws and policies that protect our public forests and the plants and animals that live there. Among other lowlights, Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy aspires to **double the amount of logging in the province from 15 million to 30 million cubic metres of wood per year, with no commitments to set aside more forests to support wildlife conservation.***

The government's plan is described in a 32-page document called *A Blueprint for Success* found on the MNR website at <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-0880>. It is a truly disheartening document in which a forest is seen as nothing but trees to be exploited for their economic value. No mention of habitat for caribou, birds or any other animal or plant species. In fact no evidence of any understanding of a forest as an important ecosystem and provider of services important to the economy and our very existence.



Cape May Warbler, Canada Warbler and Northern Parula are three wood warblers which nest in Ontario's forests. They belong to the wood warbler group which has suffered such devastating losses. Photos by Ian Dickinson, Dan Vickers (eBird) and Kyle Blaney (eBird).

Ontario Nature has established a process to enable you to send an email to the government through the ON website. If you don't wish to write one yourself all you have to do is sign and send the one they provide. For all the information you need follow this link <https://ontarionature.good.do/shareontariosforests/Sign/>. You must send the email before midnight on **February 5**.

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Friday, December 27

The weather for the 18th Belleville CBC was mostly foggy and dark, and most species numbers were generally lower. However, high numbers of Canada geese were seen in the open waters of the Moira river, and so the total number of individuals (6139) for the count was about 10 % below average.



Twenty-three birders counted 50 species plus 5 count week species (Iceland Gull, Great black backed gull, Common merganser, Swamp Sparrow, and Winter Wren). Notable misses were Red-breasted nuthatch, Purple Finch, Belted kingfisher, Sharp shinned Hawk and Snow bunting. Red winged blackbird and Great Blue heron were seen just outside count week.

A highlight was a Gray catbird seen on Philburn Rd, the 100th overall species in the Belleville CBC history. Other highlights included 1 of 2 wintering Peregrine Falcons that are either found on the Quinte Courthouse or the Bay bridge, an immature Northern Goshawk (possibly 2), Chipping Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and a smart looking leucistic (80% white plumage) Red-tailed Hawk that flew before a photo could be snapped by the compiler. This bird may be wintering in the area. Thanks to everyone who participated.



Tom is an avid ebirder and volunteer at the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory. He ranks number 1 all time for the number of species recorded in Hastings County on ebird.

Tom Wheatley
Belleville CBC Compiler



Did you know that Terry Sprague archives our newsletter and advocacy items on his website? Go to <http://naturestuff.net/site/> and click on "Organizations." You can also read the hundreds of columns Terry has written over the years, check local bird sighting and browse galleries by local photographers.



The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an 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), 7:00 pm, 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 George Thomson 613-478-3205	Past President Wendy Turner	Vice-President
Recording Secretary Nancy Stevenson 613-779-9407		Corresponding Secretary Elizabeth Churcher 613-478-3205
Treasurer Mike Shaw 613-967-1055	Publicity/Environmental Officer Denice Wilkins 613-478-5070	Membership John Blaney 613-962-9337
Newsletter John Blaney 613-962-9337	Outings John Lowry 613-962-5232	Social Convener Sharron Blaney 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – February 15, 2020

Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com