



The Quinte Naturalist

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

September



Passenger Pigeon Family. Painting by Louis Agassiz Fuytes (1874 – 1927)

September 1 was the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Martha, the last known living passenger pigeon. She has become the symbol of the ability of one species, *homo sapiens*, to drive another into extinction in a single generation. See the story on page 3.

Outing – Saturday, October 4

Breakfast in the Park

Join us for a simple breakfast of orange juice, muffins and sausages or cheese at our campsite in Sandbanks Provincial Park. After breakfast we'll walk park trails looking for avian visitors from the north. Bring a lunch. In the afternoon we'll look for waterfowl such as red-necked grebes and red-throated loons in Athol Bay. Point Petre is worth a visit to look for soaring raptors. Rareties like rough-legged hawks, peregrine falcons and golden eagles are possibilities. Who knows what else we will find? **Remember that you need a park pass.** Breakfast at 8:30. The hike begins at 9:30. See Page 6 for directions.

Please let us know if you plan to attend so that we can stock the larder. **Bring a mug.**

Phone: 613-962-9337

Email: sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com

QFN Events

OUR PROGRAM FOR 2014-15

Monday, Sept. 22, 1914 - Our September Meeting

Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre

Sue Meech, RN turned wildlife rehabilitator, founded Sandy Pines 20 years ago. Last year 2,500 injured birds and mammals were treated at the Centre. Sue will discuss the current construction of a new hospital to meet the ever-growing need.

Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church (60 Bridge St. East, Belleville) at 7:00 p.m.

Oct. 27 Climate Change in Central Ontario

Drew Monkman, Past President of the Peterborough Field Naturalists and author of *Nature's Year: Changing Seasons in Central and Eastern Ontario*, will look at how climate change has already affected local flora and fauna and what the future holds.

Nov. 24 Close Encounters with Damsels & Darners

Retired Wildlife Biologist, Robert Ferguson, will illustrate the beauty and diversity of the dragonflies of Hastings County, as captured in his stunning digital photographs.

Jan. 26 A Walk on the Wet Side

The benefits and inhabitants of wetlands will be explored on a virtual hike with Pamela Stagg, Naturalist and radio host of The County, Naturally.

Feb. 23 Natural Wonders of the Trent River Valley

What are they? Where are they? Discover these areas off the beaten path with Ewa Bednarczuk, Lower Trent Conservation, Ecology and Stewardship Specialist.

Mar. 23 Saving Our Living Dinosaurs

Turtles are among the oldest living creatures on Earth but today 7 of Ontario's 8 turtle species are at risk. Find out how the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre works to heal and protect our living dinosaurs.

Apr. 22 Reflections in Retirement on a Career in "Nature Stuff"

Annual Dinner

St. Mark's United Church, Cannifton, 6:00 p.m.

Terry Sprague, pied piper of Nature from Kingston to Cobourg, has enjoyed almost 40 years as a Naturalist. Over his long career he has introduced scores of people to the joys and mysteries of the natural world through weekly newspaper articles, presentations, tours and hikes. In 2011, Watershed Magazine selected Terry as one of only ten "Home Town Heroes," for his passion and dedication to "Nature stuff". Now entertaining thoughts of retirement, Terry will look back on his career and share some of the stories and misadventures he has collected during his years on the trail.

THE LESSON OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON

About 1860 an observer near Niagara-on-the Lake reported a flock of passenger pigeons at least a kilometer and a half wide. It took 14 hours to pass overhead. Passenger pigeons were extremely fast, probably moving at speeds of at least ninety kilometres an hour. Such a flock would have been about 500 kilometres long. Remnants of the flock continued to fly over for the next few days. Recent calculations suggest that the flock contained 3 and one half billion birds. Forty years later the last known wild passenger pigeon was shot by a boy with a BB gun.

My first reaction to this report was incredulity. However, reports of such numbers stretch over three centuries from numerous observers with varied backgrounds. Even allowing for a certain amount of hyperbole we have to admit that passenger pigeon numbers were beyond anything we now experience. The corollary of that admission is that we must also admit the thoughtless slaughter required to achieve the extinction of the passenger pigeon.

Once we accept the numbers involved many other questions arise. In a recent book, *A Feathered River across the Sky* Joel Greenberg describes the role of the passenger pigeon in the ecology of eastern North America and the culture of Indians and European settlers. Many other authors have speculated on specific aspects of these roles.

Pigeons influenced the composition of forests. Their weight broke large branches and toppled trees. Their excrement killed much of the understory and changed the composition of the soil. The result was that shade intolerant species like oaks prospered. Pigeons preferred the acorns of red oaks so white oaks became predominant. With the forest floor exposed it dried out more quickly resulting in frequent fires so thick-barked species like white oaks and burr oaks did well. With pigeons gone shade tolerant species like maple and beech gradually began to dominant Great Lakes forests.

With the pigeons gone the dynamics of not just tree species but populations of other plants and animals were changed also. Competitors such as deer and squirrels flourished on the nuts formerly consumed by pigeons. Predators like goshawks decreased in numbers. One author believes that the extinction of the passenger pigeon led to the extinction of Bachman's warblers and a great reduction in the number of Swainson's warblers. The canebrakes where these species lived in the southeastern United States grew on soil enriched by large amounts of pigeon excrement. With the pigeons gone the habitat these other two species required shrank significantly.

The story of the passenger pigeon is a striking reminder of US ecologist Barry Commoners' first law of ecology. *Everything is connected to everything else.* There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all.

Have we learned the lesson of the passenger pigeon? In 1985 I saw a flock of tree swallows on the wires along Huffs Island Road. There were so many birds that when they took off the utility poles swayed. Counting the birds on a single wire between two poles and doing simple multiplication I could tell that there were between 20,000 and 30,000 birds. The largest flock this year had fewer than 1,000 birds.

QFN MEMBER ALSO A HISTORIAN

Naturalists tend to have many interests and passions. QFN member Dr. George Pearce epitomizes that characteristic. With an interest in both history and medicine as well as nature George has spent time and money, even travelling to Alberta to gather information, about a little known Bellevillian, Dr. James Bertram Collip. The results of his efforts became evident this year. Ontario Heritage Trust placed a plaque honouring Dr. Collip in front of the Belleville Public Library and city council declared November 20 to be Dr. James B. Collip Day in Belleville.

George provided the spark which ignited the campaign to recognize Dr. Collip. He did the original research which convinced others to join him on a committee. In addition to George the members of the committee were Hastings County Historical Society-President Richard Hughes; Writer Lindi Pierce; Stanley Jones-President Heritage Belleville; Kay Manderville - former City Councillor, and Past President of Heritage Belleville; Rosalie Spargo-Canadian Diabetes Association; Joyce Wardle-Nurse Diabetes Educator (Treasurer); Diane Sule-Member Historical Society (secretary).

Dr. Collip's family had a market garden in Thurlow Township north of the east end of Belleville. He graduated from Belleville high school at the age of fifteen. The text on the plaque tells the rest of his story.



Hastings County Historical Society Photo

George has a right to look pleased. He has made a major contribution to the public recognition of the accomplishments of a doctor and scientist who got his start in Belleville.

JAMES BERTRAM COLLIP 1892-1965

A co-discoverer of insulin, J.B. (Bert) Collip was one of Canada's most prolific medical researchers in the first half of the 20th century. Born and raised in Belleville, Collip received a PhD in biochemistry from the University of Toronto in 1916. There, on leave from the University of Alberta in 1921, Professor J.J.R. Macleod invited him to work with Frederick Banting and Charles Best on a substance they hoped could treat diabetes. In 1922, Collip produced the first insulin suitable for use on human beings, an essential contribution to a treatment that has since saved millions of lives. In 1923, Collip received from Macleod a share of the Nobel Prize money awarded to Banting and Macleod for the discovery of insulin. In Alberta and then at McGill University, Collip became internationally known for his leadership in endocrinology. From 1941 to 1945, he headed Canada's wartime medical research. He finished his career as Dean of Medicine at the University of Western Ontario (1947-61), and died in London, Ontario in 1965.

FASHIONABLE TO SUPPORT EDUCATION

Like George Pearce (see previous page) QFN corresponding secretary, Elizabeth Churcher, has wide interests. She is an active member of the Lambda Chapter of Alpha Delta Kappa which is an organization of women educators who raise money for projects in education such as student scholarships. To raise funds they have organized a fashion show.

A Fashion Harvest

Gerry Masterson Community Centre

516 Harmony Road, Belleville

Thursday, 2 October 2014

\$15 – Call Carolyn at 613-968-4820 for tickets and information

Desserts, Tea, & Coffee: 6:30-7:15 P.M.

Fashion Show: 7:15 P.M.



DIRECTIONS TO SANDBANKS (and breakfast)

Drive south on Highway 62 to Bloomfield. Before you get to downtown Bloomfield you will see a sign directing you to turn right for Sandbanks. This is County Road 12. Follow it to West Lake. There will be a sign at a white church directing you to turn left. Follow the signs from there. After passing through the entrance gate turn left and watch for **Woodlands Campground**. Drive in, ignore all turns and watch for a red jeep. The red x marks the approximate location of our campsite. We don't yet know the number. **Bring your own mug for coffee and juice.**





25th ANNUAL TRENTON WOODLOT CONFERENCE

When: Friday, November 21, 2014 from 8 AM to 4:30 PM
Where: Knights of Columbus Hall, [57 Stella Crescent, Trenton, ON](#)
Excitement is brewing over the 25th annual [Trenton Woodlot Conference](#). The event is hosted by the [Hastings Stewardship Council](#). Lower Trent Conservation is an organizing partner.

Keynote speakers

- Diana Beresford-Kroeger: A Woodland World: Bowing to Nature. Renowned scientist & author of the award-winning, 'Arboretum America: A Philosophy of the Forest'.
- Peter Hynard: Shaping our Forests. Expert in forest management /planning. How geology, glacial-geology, natural disturbances, and man-made forces affect our forests.
-

Afternoon speakers

- Murray Marsh: Amazon of the Trent River Valley - Ewa Bednarczuk, ecologist and stewardship specialist at Lower Trent Conservation
- Small Scale Forest Operations, and Harvesting Sustainably for Firewood & Forest Health - David Smallwood, Quinte Conservation forestry and field operations manager
- Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program - Robert Spence, Registered Professional Forester & MNRF
-

Field trip to Frink Centre with guided walks:

- Tree ID with Twigs and Bark - Tim Trustham, Quinte Conservation Ecologist & Planner
- History of the Frink Centre - Maya Navrot, Conservation Education Coordinator
- Emerald Ash Borer - Martin Straite, MNRF
- Benthic & Riparian Forest Healthy - Vicky Wolfrey, Crowe Valley Conservation Authority
-

Admission is \$30.00 and includes a locally catered roast beef & pork lunch plus bus transport for the field trip. To register by Nov. 7, please contact [Matt Caruana](#), Hastings Stewardship Council Coordinator, at 613 391 9034 or by email at info@hastingsstewardship.ca.

HAS A QFN MEMBER SOLVED A MYSTERY?



Photo by Kyle Blaney

Don't worry if you can't identify the bird in this picture. It's not in any field guide. In fact field guide author David Sibley was only one of many experts unable to name the species. No wonder QFN member Kyle Blaney asked for help when he took pictures of this bird near the PEPtBO banding station last May. The answers he got were intriguing.

Birders are familiar with the work of John James Audubon. His book *Birds of America* contained paintings of 497 species. He was working during the infancy of North American ornithology. New species were being discovered. Females, young and birds in basic (non-breeding) plumage of known species were being misidentified as new species. Among Audubon's paintings are five "mystery birds," birds that have not been seen since the early 1800s and which modern ornithologists cannot identify.

In May 1833, almost 181 years to the day before Kyle photographed his bird, John Kirk Townsend collected a bird which he gave to his friend, Audubon. Audubon painted the bird and called it Townsend's bunting in honour of its finder. It's one of the mystery birds. What does that have to do with a bird seen at Prince Edward Point? After detailed consideration Denis Lepage, senior scientist at Bird Studies Canada, among others noticed great similarities between Townsend's bunting and Kyle's bird.



"Townsend's Bunting" by John James Audubon



Adult female dickcissel

That's only half the answer. Even if the bird is Audubon's long lost Townsend's bunting what species is it? There was much speculation. Experts considered various hybrid combinations. Nothing quite fit. Kyle explained the conclusion in his blog.

I posted the images to whatbird.com and asked for assistance. Lots of possibilities were suggested - a vagrant sparrow, a sparrow/junco hybrid, an aberrant dickcissel, a dickcissel hybrid. Dickcissels breed in South America so that led to lots of interesting hybrid theories. Eventually Alan Wormington reached out and posted my images to the [ABA ID Frontiers mailing list](mailto:ABA_ID_Frontiers_mailing_list). There, bird experts like David Sibley and Peter Pyle got involved. I was fascinated! Famous birders were discussing my bird!

Nothing like a Townsend's bunting has been seen since the 1830s. Could I possibly have seen a species not recorded since then? Alas, almost definitely not. We'll never know for sure what it was, but the general consensus is that it was an aberrant dickcissel with a number of pigment abnormalities. Any dickcissel is rare in Prince Edward County so I'm happy.

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), 7:00, 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 Phil Martin 613-395-3246
Recording Sect'y Bernadette Hymus 613-962-7926	Corresponding Sect'y Elizabeth Churcher 613-478-3205	
Treasurer Doug Newfield 613-477-3066	Environmental Officer Denice Wilkins 613-478-5070	Membership/Mailing Marjorie Fisher 613-968-3277
Outings/Newsletter John Blaney 613-962-9337		Refreshments Sharron Blaney 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – October 10, 2014
Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com