



# The Quinte Naturalist

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



## October's Speaker – David Bree

**Mon., Oct. 23. 7: p.m. Sills Auditorium, Bridge St. United Church**



We tend to think of moths as dull brown creatures which fly mainly at night. In fact there are over 11,000 species in North America with a few thousand species just in the northeastern part of the continent. Not all are nocturnal. Some are as colourful as



butterflies. Even the “dull” brown ones show subtle tones which can be quite beautiful. David Bree, Head Naturalist at Presqu’ile Provincial Park, will introduce a few of the hundreds of moth species that can be discovered right in your backyard!

### **Next Month's Meeting**

#### **Bobcat and Lynx - A Tail of Two Ontario Wild Cats**

Senior Research Scientist with MNR Wildlife Research and Monitoring Section, Dr. Jeff Bowman, will share his findings from years of field studies on these two elusive felines. And, yes. “tail” is supposed to be spelled that way. Come to hear Dr. Bowman to find out why.

## CLUB NEWS

**HELP!** In January members will vote for a new executive. Some members of the current executive are willing to continue in their positions but there will also be some vacancies and some projects which require leaders. Please volunteer or give very serious consideration to any request for help.

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY** – This is a good way to get to know other club members. You maintain a list of club members and share it with the rest of the executive. Of course you need to attend meetings regularly. You should have some very basic computer skills and either be able to maintain a simple Excel spreadsheet or have access to someone who can do this. The program is simple enough that we can provide tech support. If you prefer different software chances are it is compatible with Excel.

**OUTINGS COORDINATOR** – This job doesn't require the ability to identify a lot of birds or wildflowers. If you do feel able to lead hikes yourself you can but I will supply a list of potential leaders. A special event such as the Presqu'île Waterfowl Festival also makes a good focus for a club outing. You will be responsible for making arrangements with the hike leader and informing club members at our monthly meeting. The two projects listed below are separate from this position.

**Christmas Bird Count** – This once-a-year event requires you to organize the counters and the count and submit the results to Bird Studies Canada. Most counters have participated in previous years and are anxious to take part again. If you don't feel comfortable taking charge of the compilation meeting some of the counters could handle the job capably.

**Birdathon** – Another once-a-year event, this time run in May. The birdathon can be as simple as gathering 2 or 3 other people, collecting pledges at the annual dinner or elsewhere and sending your results to Bird Studies Canada and PEPtBO. Recently this event has involved any club members who wanted to go birding in a group or on their own in Prince Edward County on the designated day. The important thing is that this is a fund raiser for PEPtBO, the QFN and Bird Studies Canada.

**OWLING** – Some owls are migrating but local resident birds are already looking ahead to the nesting season and claiming territories. There will be a club owling outing on **Sunday, Nov 19** to visit sites where owls have been found. There are a few cautions about owling expeditions. Please don't plan to take pictures. Flash photography confuses owls and leaves them virtually blind until their eyes can readjust to darkness. Successful owling is very weather dependent. Watch for a confirmation email the day before the outing. Owls are not always cooperative even when they are present so success is not guaranteed. Meet at the **Lowe's parking lot at 7:00 pm**. We will drive to several locations and finish by 10:00 pm.

## Making a Difference, One Bird at a Time

by Kathy Felkar

Slowly removing my head from my pillow in the dead dark of pre-dawn, I wonder what was I thinking when I agreed to volunteer every Friday at Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory (PEPtBO) for the next two and a half months. As I slowly put my arthritic feet to the floor, I remind myself that getting up this early has its benefits and I just have to get moving. My husband is already up and is brewing Peptbo's Shade Tree coffee, so, I pull on my oldest jeans, a warm sweater and quickly organize my life so I can get to the car and head to "The Point" for dawn Net Opening.

I ask Mike to drive as I am only half awake and he is better at dodging the flocks of sparrows, robins and thrushes that often dart out as we head south along County Road 13 towards Prince Edward Point. Making our way along the narrow, curvy road, we are often greeted with a glorious rose sunrise over Lake Ontario that rivals any art show, anywhere, anytime. Once we drive into the parking area at this southeastern tip of Prince Edward County, we see that the Bander's cottage, "The Obs" (Observatory) or "The Van Cott" (the cottage was named after an early occupant who was a commercial fisherman),

is just starting to wake up. Generally, two or three young biologists are staying at The Obs for the season, volunteering their time so that they can learn from our Head Bander, David Okines, everything one needs to know about identifying Canadian migratory species of birds. They are sleepily, getting their warm jackets and binoculars on, grabbing a piece of toast, and a mug of coffee and meet us in front of the Banding Lab.



*The Lab*

The "Lab" is a small, wooden shack situated beside "The Obs" where trained banders (or "ringers" if you are from the UK) put an individual numbered band on every bird that we will catch in the mist nets and then release so they can continue their foraging before they migrate across Lake Ontario and much further south. We head out as a team, at sunrise to open the 19 nets that have been erected in strategically placed net lanes that have

been cut out of the undergrowth at Prince Edward Point. These lanes have been opened every spring and fall migration since 1994.

While we unfurl the nets, we can already hear many songbirds raising their voices to be part of the Morning Chorus and we hear little rustles of birds beginning their morning hunt for insects so they will have enough fat on their bodies to make the trip across the lake. The nets are specially made to capture birds without injury and as we open each net, we wonder what kind of morning it will be. Will we catch a new species? Will there be a fallout of birds and we will be incredibly busy extracting birds from the nets or will it be a slow day and as we walk the net lanes, we may only extract a few birds each trip?



***PEPtBO does not receive government support so major fund-raisers like the Birdathon are vital to its existence. For some of the teams the competition to find the most species can be fierce. Here Kathy presents the Laphroaig Trophy to David Okines, Bander-in Charge and member of the winning team in 2015. Laphroaig is a famous brand of Scotch whisky. Hmmm.***

Once all the nets are open, we return to the benches by the Banding Lab and wait for the Head Bander to return from his morning census. David will walk the trails and record all birds he sees and hears so that he can document what is flying about The Point. We do not catch every species that is migrating in the nets, so it is very important we have this data to monitor what is actually flying over and around the Observatory. For example, Golden Eagles in the fall fly over The Point but never come low enough to be actually caught in a net. That would be quite the day, if one did!

Chit-chatting about what was seen and banded the day before, we make sure our Data Binder is organized for the day so that we can record all the scientific information that is required. Every bird is recorded with its band number by species, sex, age, wing length, weight and fat content. After the bander has affixed the tiny band on the bird's leg with a pair of specialized pliers, he or she, then blows on the breast of the bird to see how big the fat patch is. It could be empty or on a scale of 1 to 6. Yellow fat will appear just under the transparent skin of the bird which helps indicate if the bird has eaten enough to power itself across the dangerous distance of Lake Ontario.

As soon as the Census taker returns, we head out to the nets for the first net round. We carry a satchel of clean, cotton bags that will carry the birds safely back to the banding lab. We begin extracting at net lane 8 and work back towards the lab. This way, no bird is trapped in the net for any length of time. We are delighted to see the birds are "moving" and in almost every net, there are tiny birds resting in the net pockets. It is interesting, that most birds do not struggle, once captured, but reserve their energy for their chance to escape. Trained volunteers and the Assistant Banders extract each bird gently, with great respect and skill so that few birds are ever injured. I am excited as I easily extract a Golden Crowned Kinglet who flashes his yellow and red crown as I tenderly place him in the cotton bag. We continue down each net lane until we are back at the lab where we hang our bags up on the wall so that the banding can begin. I, also, scribe the data from each bird in the binder so the six hours of "nets open" flies by.

I enjoy every bird as it is taken out of the bag. It feels a little bit like Christmas each time the bander, professionally takes a bird out for processing. We revel in the beauty of an American Redstart or the grand beak of a Northern Flicker. We learn so much about each bird as we look carefully at their wing growth or their feather colour to determine its age. As it is released through the window of the lab, it often flies to a nearby tree so we get one last glimpse of this beautiful bird before it continues on its way.



***The American redstart is a common nesting species in area woodlands. Photo by Ian Dickinson***

We walk the lanes every half hour, so not only is there some exercise involved but we get to see some of our favourite birds up close. If there is a bird that has been tangled in the nets, we call upon the experts to come and release the bird so that every bird is stressed as little as possible.

As the morning, wears on, friendly banter with like-minded people makes the getting-out-of-bed-at-a ridiculously- early- hour so worth it. We share our knowledge with visitors who have either come for the first time or drive down each migration to see incredible birds in the area. Photographers arrive as well to take pictures of the birds and the natural beauty of The Point. The old lighthouse at the very end of Point Traverse (the north corner of the property) may be decaying but it still holds photogenic interest to many.

Six hours later, our team goes out and ties up the nets for another day. Every bird is processed before anyone thinks of lunch and an afternoon nap. The banders work 7 days a week, up at dawn every morning and live in the cottage isolated from town, friends and family. Many come from England, and Europe but we have had Canadian students as well. We also have hosted overnight guests who help out banding and extracting as a "working holiday". In the fall, these young enthusiasts also are responsible for the Saw Whet owl banding that begins about 8pm and continues



***Banding of northern saw-whet owls continues until October 31 with the exception of October 28 . The nets are closed during windy or rainy conditions so check the website before making the drive. Photo by Tom Wheatley.***

for four hours! In other words, these young people work very hard for little recompense but leave with such a depth of knowledge, their experience at Peptbo is well worth it. They often use this experience to apply for great jobs in the scientific job market.

On the drive home, I feel honoured to have made the acquaintance of these young people who care about birds and the natural world that they have inherited. They will spread the message that bird populations are being affected by climate change and a myriad of other practices that us, humans, have afflicted upon them. They know as I do, that the scientific data that we have helped collect will be sent to Bird Studies Canada and beyond so that our governments will make better decisions to protect our natural world. As Peptbo celebrates its 21st year of operation, I know that every early morning has made a difference and by volunteering my time I hope to leave this world a better place for my children.

At the end of this fall migration, we will hope to band at least 600 Northern Saw-whet Owls and 5600 passerines (smaller birds) and hawks. This would be an average year but as our climate changes, I am sure we will begin to see new trends that will dictate how we look at our bird species. Only time will tell.

For more information on Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory, please visit <http://www.peptbo.ca>. Or just come on down during the migration and say hello!

## BLEASDELL BOULDER CONSERVATION AREA

*This is one of a series describing short walks in the Quinte area to observe nature. They are intended to be introductions to these trails. Do your own walks to see what else you can find. I welcome information about your sightings and photographs or drawings of what you see.*

On Friday Sharron and I decided to take advantage of a warm late October morning to visit the Bleasdell Boulder Conservation Area just north of Trenton. We discovered that it's also a favourite place to exercise your dog or your toddler. The trail was well-used but not crowded or over-used. All dogs except one were on a leash and the one exception was so timid that it never strayed more than a metre from its owner. There was no conflict of interest. There was little or no litter. It's always good to see people using our trails as they are intended.

Exceptionally well-maintained, the 1.5 kilometre loop trail is an easy walk through woodlands and across two sturdy bridges over the creek which traverses the area on its way to the Trent River.

The boulder itself is the reason for the conservation area. In 1997 Paul and Maria Heissler purchased the property so the public could see it. In 2005 ownership was transferred to Lower Trent Conservation.



***If you look closely you can see Sharron standing in front of the boulder.***

If your interest is geology be sure to read the information on the sign nearby. Researchers used the composition of the boulder to determine that it originated about 40 kilometres north on the edge of the Canadian Shield. Glaciers carried its one-million-pound weight over the distance to deposit it here, a 2.3 billion year old anomaly not far from the Bay of Quinte. It's one of the largest glacial erratics in North America.

The rest of the area is typical of a Quinte woodlot. While nothing exceptional has been discovered there as far as I know it does offer an easily accessible opportunity to enjoy nature. According to ebird only 23 species have been recorded but that may be because birders have submitted only 8 checklists at various times of the year. Our list on this morning had only 8 species on it but I plan to make more trips in all seasons.

My botanical knowledge didn't enable me to identify more than a few of the wildflowers, ferns and trees but that's just an excuse for more visits with field guides. A bit of polypody

fern growing on the side of the rock will provide a point of interest during the winter as it is an evergreen species.

Chipmunks scolded some unseen intruder and red squirrels spent their time evicting each other from the territories they claimed. Undoubtedly other mammals are out and about when people are absent. Abundant shaggy mane and inky cap mushrooms around the parking lot represented the fungi. It's a perfect place to introduce a child to nature or to simply take a leisurely stroll in the woods.

The entrance to the area is easy to miss but it is located on highway 33 just south of the Glen Miller bridge, the first bridge north of 401.



Project Feederwatch starts on November 11. It's easy; if you can't identify a bird you don't report it. It's educational; kids can take part. It's important; researchers use the data to measure the status of our bird populations. Birds are important indicators of the health of our environment. You can register for the project, get information on types of feeders and what birds prefer what foods on the website <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/>.

Of course Terry Sprague has lots of local information also. Click on "Birding." [naturestuff.net](http://naturestuff.net)

*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, 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.*

<b>President</b> George Thomson 613-478-3205	<b>Past President</b> Wendy Turner	<b>Vice-President</b> Phil Martin 613-922-1174
<b>Recording Secretary</b> Nancy Stevenson 613-779-9407		<b>Corresponding Secretary</b> Elizabeth Churcher 613-478-3205
<b>Treasurer</b> Doug Newfield 613-477-3066	<b>Publicity/Environmental Officer</b> Denice Wilkins 613-478-5070	<b>Membership/Mailing</b> Karina Spence Unlisted
<b>Outings/Newsletter</b> John Blaney 613-962-9337		<b>Social Convener</b> Sharron Blaney 613-962-9337

Next Newsletter Deadline – November 10, 2017  
Please send submissions to [sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com](mailto:sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com)