

# *The Quinte Naturalist*

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

## *June/July*

*June and July News of Interest to Quinte Naturalists*



**A MILESTONE IN BELLEVILLE'S BELL CREEK WATERSHED  
SEE PAGE 2**

## *Bell Creek Watershed*

For some time John Lowry has advocated for the preservation of the area known locally as Hanley Park in Belleville's east end. It's part of the provincially significant wetland in the Bell Creek watershed. He was happy to announce that the total number of species identified within the Bell Creek iNaturalist Project had reached the 600 mark.

The 600<sup>th</sup> species was the clearwing hummingbird moth seen on the previous page. (Photo by John Lowry) Notice how in the moth's shadow you can see that the light passes right through the panes in the moth's wings. With its wings spanning 2 inches and beating rapidly as it hovers to gather a flower's nectar the insect can easily be mistaken for the bird. Watch for the clearwing hummingbird moth in local second growth forests, meadows and your flower gardens. It's more common than you might think.

I don't want to rain on John's parade but 600 is just a very good start to identifying the species resident in the Bell Creek watershed. It's a challenge to all of us to photograph and add species to iNaturalist, John has inspired me and made me feel a little guilty. As the peak nesting season for birds ends in a couple of weeks I will wrap up the third year of volunteering for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas and get busy in the Bell Creek watershed.

Scattered through this newsletter you will find pictures of some of the species found in this ecological gem.



***Ebony Jewelwing. A damselfly found in our wooded streams and rivers. Photo: John Lowry***



***The great egret is not yet known to nest in the Bell Creek watershed but it is expanding its range from the south. Photo: Lori Borthwick***

## *Hospice Serenity Garden Becomes Pollinator Habitat too!*

QFN owes a vote of thanks to Denice Wilkins for the idea, the article, the pictures and all the hard work she put into making this project happen.

Last year a Heart of Hastings Hospice newsletter announced that they were planning a



“Serenity Garden” for the backyard of their Hospice House in Madoc. That gave past QFN board member Denice Wilkins an idea. She contacted Heidi Griffith, Hospice Executive Director, with the idea of having their “Serenity Garden” not only be a serene and beautiful oasis, but also a native plant garden that would enhance biodiversity by providing food and habitat for pollinator species and a whole host of other wildlife.

Heidi enthusiastically embraced the idea and with that the project became a great collaborative effort. Bea Heissler, owner of Natural Themes Native Plant Nursery in Frankford, and Jennifer Shea, volunteer with the David Suzuki Butterflyway Project, were delighted to get on board.



After months of emails, phone calls and site visits, on Sunday morning, July 23, 13 wonderful volunteers from QFN and Hospice took up shovels and watering cans to plant 58 native trees and shrubs and 127 perennial plants. Among the mix of plants were Carolinian species like Tulip trees, Sycamore and Redbud and pollinator superstars like Milkweed, Coneflowers and Bergamot (a full list can be provided to anyone interested). All the plants were selected and given to Hospice at wholesale costs by Bea at Natural Themes Nursery. <http://www.naturalthemes.com/>

***Bea both provided the plants at reduced cost and came out to help with the planting.***



More planting is yet to be done along the new pathway and gazebo at the house but in the meantime it will be exciting to watch everything grow, see how beautiful it will become and listen to the buzz of pollinator activity that will ensue! It is also hoped that it will inspire others to plant native pollinator gardens in their yards!

QFN is exceedingly grateful to Bea and Jennifer for their time, expert advice and support, to all the volunteers who helped with the planting and to Heidi, for putting her complete trust in the three of us to create the Heart of Hastings Hospice “Serenity Garden”.



More from the Bell Creek Watershed – From the left Perplexing Bumble Bee (that is the real name of this species. photo by Lori Borthwick), Beaverpond Baskettail (John Lowry), Common Eastern Bumble Bee (John Lowry)

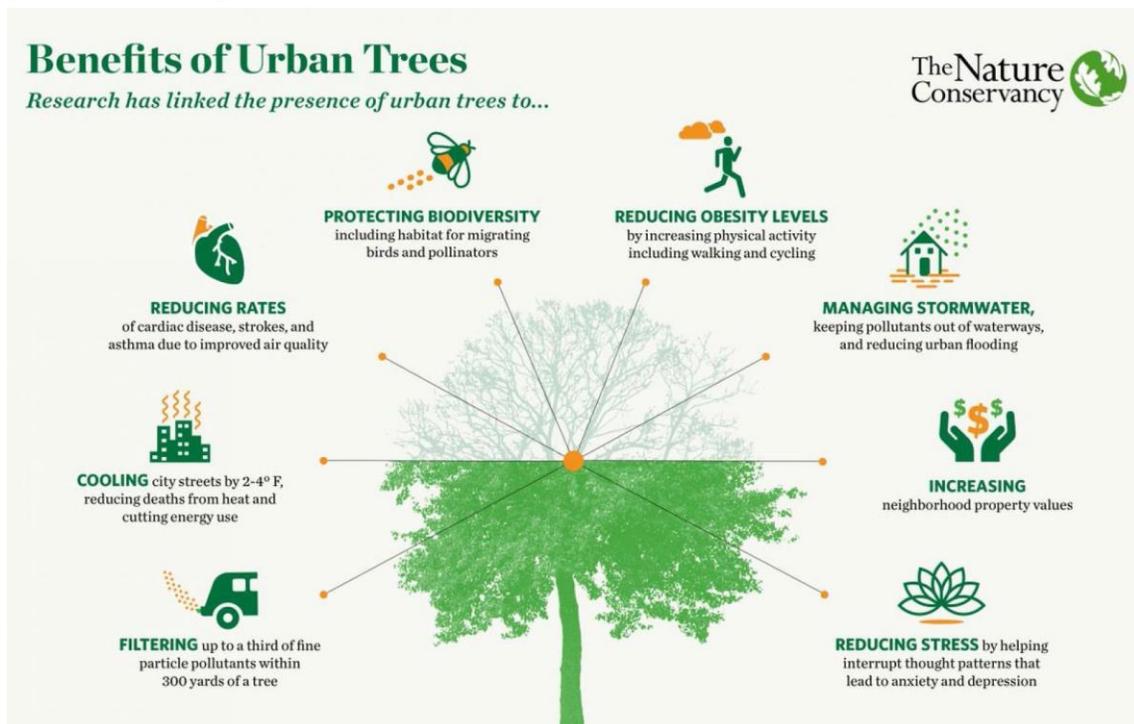
## Executive Board News

The QFN Executive Board met on June 5 via Zoom. Here is a brief summary of a few of the reports and decisions:

**Fund Raising Dinner.** The dinner was a sold-out success. Speaker Marilyn Simonds gave an excellent presentation about her meetings with Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and the resulting book. De Kiriline Lawrence led a fascinating life. Born in Sweden, she served as a Red Cross nurse during World War I, married a Russian officer who died during the revolution and moved to Canada where she became the head nurse for the Dionne quintuplets. She left this position and had a cabin built on Pimisi Bay on the Matawa River. Here she studied the neighbourhood birds, particularly red-eyed vireos, and earned the respect of many in a male-dominated profession.

Marilyn stressed the contributions that De Kiriline Lawrence and other female ornithologists made to science, often without receiving their due recognition.

**Plant Sale.** The plant sale was also a success raising about \$4400. Greg Parsons and Dan Guenther headed this project. This money is earmarked to work with the City of Belleville to enhance the urban forest by planting trees. Dan and Greg have prepared a very detailed proposal for implementing this project. You will hear more about this later. They will be looking for volunteers.



**Tweed Post Office Pollinator Garden.** On Saturday, May 27th, 6 volunteers (5 QFN members - Denice, Catherine, Bernd, Elizabeth and Barbara Goode and 1 non-member - Heide Elliott) planted additional perennials and 24 annual zinnias in the raised beds plus 3 bushes on the ground. Much weeding and cleaning up around the building was also accomplished. Denice continues to work on the signage for the project.

**Turtle ICUs.** Denice reported that 45 ICUs were delivered to the Kingston branch of the Metis Nation of Ontario. A few more were sold locally. Bernd and Catherine provided the winter storage space for ICUs built last year. It is encouraging to see the number of people interested in helping these at risk species.



Jason King recorded this snapping turtle living in Hanley Park in iNaturalist.

**Outings.** The scheduled outing to one of the Hastings Junction properties had to be postponed because it was inadvisable to hike in the heavily polluted air caused by wildfire smoke. The plan is to try again in September.

**Advocacy.** I hope you are all advocates for nature by responding to comments by family, friends and neighbours. Elizabeth Churcher is very active in her advocacy work. Here is her report on a long conversation with MPP Ric Bresee (Conservative, Hastings-Lennox and Addington):

*I finally had the opportunity to meet with MPP Ric Bresee on June 28 and I feel that it was a very positive experience. Through our 1.5 hour discussion, I feel that a channel was opened for QFN to have ongoing discussion with him as concerns arise. Ric told me that he was asked to run for both the Liberal and the Conservative Parties and chose the Conservative Party because he knew that he could win and have some influence in the government. I would say that he is a liberal Conservative. He has a strong focus on economics but he also has a very good understanding of environmental issues and did serve on a CA Board for a number of years. Ric does understand the value of wetlands and would like to see the province engage in round table discussions about any changes to the wetland evaluation system. He also admitted to the problems with offsetting and is not supportive of this practice.*

**More Advocacy.** For the last few months a subcommittee of QFN members has been working on the issue of beaver management in Belleville. They put countless hours into preparing for a meeting with The Green Task Force. The GTF is made up of Councillors Chris Malette (chair) and Barbara Enright-Miller and 6 Belleville residents. Over the years it has kept environmental concerns in front of council and has made several useful contributions to policies and events.

The work of the subcommittee resulted in the creation of a very high quality 28-page PowerPoint presentation. Catherine Baier's summary of the meeting was sent originally to the Executive Board so there have been some minor changes for clarification:



*On July 28, the QFN subcommittee on beaver management (Lori Borthwick, John Lowry, Bernd and Catherine Baier, and Doug Knutson who was unable to attend the meeting) presented a deputation to the Green Task Force on coexistence with wildlife. Our objective was to clarify QFN's position on the importance of coexistence with wildlife, especially beavers as they are critical for the maintenance of wetlands. Wetlands and their role in sustaining biodiversity are particularly important in the face of the current ongoing global massive extinction of species. At the same time coexistence will avoid the horrible suffering that beavers endure when trapped and killed.*

*We presented our recommendations for amending Belleville's Wildlife Conflict/Trapping Nuisance Animals Policy. A major component was the recommendation to acquire the*

*nonlethal mitigation practices. This would allow beavers to remain in place in a sustainable and cost/effective manner while minimizing any possible negative consequences of beaver activity.*

### *Background information*

*Because of citizen outrage in 2018 about the inhuman beaver management practice of drowning beavers in leg hold traps, Belleville Council agreed to have Skip Lisle, an internationally acclaimed beaver management mitigator, install two devices that are still successful in maintaining an acceptable water level and in preventing blockage of a culvert under Haig Street. The following year Covid happened and Skip was unable to return. Since then Belleville has returned to killing beavers.*

*We have included an attachment of Belleville's current policy which despite their stated goal of the importance of coexistence, focuses almost entirely on trapping and killing beavers. The policy includes a guideline for the use of a conibear trap which is known to be less than 40% successful in instantly killing the beaver, thus causing great suffering. Statistics also indicate that for every beaver killed in this trap, 2 other non-targeted animals are also killed.*

*In our presentation we made reference to the positive steps that council had taken in stating that coexistence was the main goal of their policy and by hiring a professional beaver management consultant in 2019 (which was very successful). In addition, after 2019 they attempted to implement some nonlethal mitigation measures on their own (which unfortunately were not successful). Twenty-eight beavers have been trapped and killed since 2020.*

*We also stressed to the GTF that we recognize that coexistence with wildlife, especially beavers, can be challenging and that amending the policy to include innovative mitigation measures can seem daunting. We have science-based wildlife management plans from other cities to guide this process and our recommendations are based upon environmental studies commissioned by other Canadian cities. We assured them that QFN is offering its help and look forward to continuing our partnership with them to protect nature.*

## Recommendations For an Amended Wildlife/Beaver Policy

- ▶ Relies on assessments and mitigation measures proposed by qualified wildlife professionals
- ▶ Focuses on proactive, non lethal strategies
- ▶ Utilizes language that presents wildlife as positive additions to the community
- ▶ Provides a beaver management plan with clear directives to allow beaver colonies to remain in place

*We were initially given 10 minutes, requested 10 more minutes and ended up getting 45 minutes. We had a lot to say. Special thanks go to Doug Knutson who provided us with realms of information, contacts and links to best practices in other Canadian cities. We now have a head start on becoming beaver management consultants. Just kidding. It is best left to the professionals.*

*The GTF has promised to get back to us directly but warned that it could take a few months.*



## Member Activities and Sightings



On July 10 Friends of Sandbanks Park held a beach cleanup along Lakeshore Beach in the park. QFN

members Lori Borthwick and John Lowry were happy participants in the activity. Just because you're picking up garbage it doesn't mean you can't enjoy nature. John photographed a beautiful example of beach pea.



Sometimes nature comes to you. Jonathon Balcombe photographed this troop of young striped skunks which visits their patio regularly. They'll work hard protecting the garden from rodents and grubs and other less desirable residents. When left alone skunks are inoffensive and quite willing to share their space.

## *Urban Birding in Belleville*



There may seem to be a contradiction between the picture and the title of this article. There is not. The picture shows a marsh very close to the intersection of College and North Front in Belleville. The vegetation is primarily non-native but it still manages to attract a variety of pollinators. The many red-winged blackbirds are in a constant uproar about anything that appears to be even the faintest threat to their homes. I am fortunate that this wetland which I call the Sarah Court Marsh is in the square I have been assigned for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

On the morning of July 5<sup>th</sup> I set my small stool on a concrete platform for a good view. The nesting season is winding down for the third year of the five-year atlas project. I still needed to find nesting soras and least bitterns. This looked perfect. I played the marsh monitoring tape of their calls a couple of times. No response. There are other birds which have already been found nesting elsewhere. In the dense vegetation a couple of catbirds chattered away. Someone had already found them nesting in the Potters Creek CA which is part of my assigned square. The Merlin app on my phone claimed to hear a peregrine. It's entirely possible but I can't verify it so I don't record it. Overhead a killdeer loudly

proclaimed its name. Nesting for that species was confirmed when Sharron and I saw tiny young skittering around the dusty lane into Grills Orchards just north of 401.

So, it's a pleasant but unproductive trip? Hold the phone. At that moment I am actually holding my phone to take the picture. A pair of green herons fly in and perch on a branch about 15 metres away. After a couple of minutes they fly off into a patch of large red cedars, perfect for a nest. My style of birding has become more and more sedentary as the years pass. A half hour later I am still on the same perch and the green herons repeat the performance. According to the atlas protocol they can be coded as AE, adults entering a probable nest site. I added Green Herons to the list of nesting species.

My career as a sedentary naturalist had officially begun. Some birders like to do a "big sit." There are even official rules. Record all the birds you can locate while staying within a 17-foot (5.18 m) circle for 24 hours. It can be an individual or group event. You can leave the circle for short breaks but can't count anything while on your break. For a group event leaving the circle may come with an expectation of returning with food and beer. I'm more of a "bit of a sit" guy, maybe for 30 minutes but certainly no more than an hour. I'm planning to be able to report on more "bit of a sit" results.



Bell Creek Watershed. Again – The word "elusive" could have been coined to describe the tiny sora (left). Kyle Blaney had to go to Texas to get this shot. Don't you love the long toes which help it walk on marsh edges? Keith Gregoire has heard it in the Stanley Park marsh but it hasn't been recorded in Hanley Park. I'm sure it's there; it's not particularly rare, just "elusive."

Green herons (right, photo by John Lowry) have been found in Hanley Park. This species puts the lie to the idea that birds don't use tools. Unlike the great blue heron which stalks prey or waits for its appearance a green heron will find a downy feather or other small floating object to attract fish within range. That's a cheap but effective fishing lure.

## *Aerial Foragers*

By Elizabeth Churcher and George Thomson

Reprinted with permission from the Tweed News, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017



The pleasures that Mother Nature offers are unending. One of the great joys of summer on our little farm is pausing to watch the marvelous flying skills of Barn (pictured) and Tree Swallows as they pursue their food. The operative and very relevant term here is “pursue” --- the pursuit is a very energetic and vigorous one. Swallows are members of a group of birds that chase their food through the air: they are aerial foragers. Insects in their flight path are consumed for lunch and provide them with the energy they require to continue flying and carrying out the daily tasks of life.

Swallows are not alone in their ability to eat “on the fly”. The body of aerial foragers comprises the members of three major groups, or orders, of birds --- the Swifts, the Nightjars and the Swallows and Martins. Hummingbirds are in the same order as the

Swifts but have evolved a different feeding style. We have to give a nod here to the Flycatchers as well, who are in another order, the Songbirds. Our Flycatchers also capture insects in the air but do so by flying out from a perch to which they will return after they have been successful. While resting on a tree branch or the old Cedar rail fence, they enjoy their tasty catch. As dextrous and wonderful as their manoeuvres are, the Flycatchers don't fly continuously, capturing and eating insects on the wing as do the Swallows and their aerial foraging friends.



**Great Crested Flycatcher.**  
**Photo in the Bell Creek watershed by Keith Greoire**

Our hearts dance with excitement as we watch the Swallows swoop up and down, twist and turn on a dime, all at high speeds. One minute, they are flying low over the meadows or hayfields, tracking back and forth, barely above the tops of the grasses --- the next they are



**Tree Swallow. Photo on Wyman Rd., Tyendinaga Twp. By Crystal Kirkman**

scouring the sky high above us. Of course, they keep moving to locations that have the highest concentrations of insects. We've all seen Swallows flying behind farm equipment as the farmer cuts or bales the hay --- they are capturing the insects that have been disturbed by the machinery. Our skilful Swallows also drink while flying, touching their bills into the still water of a pond, lake or stream.

Swallows, Martins and Swifts are diurnal foragers: they chase their insect prey throughout the day, continuing into the early evening. If there are young ones to

be fed, the parent birds periodically return to the nest to transfer insect fare to their young. We love to watch the Tree Swallows return to the nest box. After a quick entry, there is a crescendo of excited voices inside and then Mom or Dad exits in a burst of speed --- the transfer of food is made in a twinkling.

The Chimney Swift is the only Swift that breeds in Ontario and you can observe them right over the streets of Tweed! As soon as you hear rapid chattering calls above the sounds of the town, look up and see the small, dark, cigar-shaped birds with sickle-curved



***Chimney Swift. Photo on Catherine St., Belleville by Crystal Kirkman***

wings. Their wing motion seems stiff: their wings move rapidly, almost seeming to stay in one place. These little birds spend much of their time in flight. Indeed, a relative of the Chimney Swift, the Common Swift of Eurasia and North Africa, is believed to fly continuously from the time of leaving the nest until the age of 2 to 4 years! They feed on wing, drink on wing and can even sleep while flying. When they decide to have a family, they gather nesting materials while flying and may even mate on the wing! That's superb adaptation!

The third group of aerial foragers, the Nightjars, includes the Nighthawks, Whip-poor-wills and Poor-wills. Our species in southern Ontario --- and in the Tweed area --- are the Common Nighthawk and the Whip-Poor-Will. These birds add one more incredible facet to catching insects on the wing. They are able to accomplish this feat at night, resting during the day!



***Common nighthawk. Photo in Canniff Mills, Belleville by Kyle Blaney***

George fondly remembers hearing the “peent” cries of the relatively large Common Nighthawk (wingspan 24 inches) over the bright lights, noise and din of downtown Yonge Street in Toronto, many years ago. Looking up, he could see the distinctive white patches of the Nighthawks against the night sky. These birds nested on the gravelled flat roof of the buildings. Another memory of Nighthawks that George holds dear is of a large flock of migrating birds who flew around him at eye level while catching insects near the ground on a warm autumn evening. He could have reached out to touch the white wing patches that were flashing in the near darkness. Eerily, there was almost no sound.

While George was enjoying the Nighthawks in Toronto, Elizabeth was deriving pleasure from the Whip-poor-will's then familiar call. In her early years, she was awakened daily in warm weather by this cheery sound. With his return in Spring, Elizabeth's mother would always announce: “The Whip-poor-will” is back. It's time to plant the corn!”. --- And her cousins who visited from

Ottawa would love to sit out on the old farmhouse porch on warm, moonlit summer evenings listening to the “Whip-poor-will Serenade”. You can well imagine how overjoyed we both were to hear the haunting, evening strains of a Whip-poor-will at one of the stops on our Woodcock survey in North Hastings this May. It was the first time in the past seven years that we had heard this once familiar voice in that area.

**Several local birders have recorded the song locally. You can hear them by following the link below. The best recording is the second one in the second row recorded by Kyle Blaney on Enright Rd. in Tyendinaga Twp.**

<https://search.macaulaylibrary.org/catalog?taxonCode=easwpw1&regionCode=CA-ON-HS>

--- But the Whip-poor-will is not alone! Alas, the word “common” in the name of the Nighthawk is now rather misleading as the birds of all 3 of these groups, Swallows & Martins, Swifts and Nightjars, are in decline for various reasons. Chimney Swifts, for example, are suffering the loss of nesting sites as old brick chimneys are capped.

Aerial foragers are superbly adapted to their feeding style. The Chimney Swift is aerodynamically shaped, with a smooth, rounded head whose contour flows, seemingly with no neck, into the cigar-shaped body. They have little bristly feathers in front of their eyes that can be moved to form a sunscreen, to reduce glare when they are targeting an insect. The Swallows “swallow tail”, which is longest in the Barn Swallow, greatly aids manoeuvring as the bird twists and turns after her prey. The bills of the birds of all 3 groups are relatively small, but the gape is large, greatly aiding insect-catching. Indeed, the gape of the largest Nightjar in North America, the Chuck-wills-widow, can occasionally scoop up small birds, such as hummingbirds, swallows and warblers! --- And just in case you are wondering, Chuck-wills-widow and Whip-poor-will are real names, onomatopoeic in nature, which describe the songs of the birds. If you have heard a Whip-poor-will, you know what we mean.

When we think of aerial foragers, perhaps the most incredible fact of all is that they target and home in on individual insects. They don’t just fly into a cloud of insects with mouth agape, as Basking Sharks and Humpback Whales do with schools of fish. Can you imagine the coordination this takes between eye and brain? It’s mind-boggling!

Even though we have just skimmed the surface, it is time to leave the story of the aerial foraging birds for now but we will likely find an opportunity to continue sometime in the future. This fascinating group represents one more of the endless panoply of the wonders of Nature which have enriched our lives. They work so hard. They offer so much. They deserve our respect and care.

Sometimes in a movie review you will see a comment about gratuitous nudity which has nothing to do with the plot. Here's a gratuitous picture which has nothing to do with local nature. I just like it. Courtesy of iNaturalist.

For more information about local nature visit Terry Sprague's website: <https://naturestuff.net/web/>

**For more information about Quinte Field Naturalists visit our Facebook page or email <mailto:quintefn@gmail.com>.**



*Helmeted Iguana*