



The Quinte Naturalist

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



PROJECT FEEDERWATCH

Project Feederwatch started on November 14. It's the easiest and most flexible of all the citizen science projects. You simply count the birds at your feeders at a time of your choosing and submit your data to Bird Studies weekly. If you see a bird you can't identify you can get help from more knowledgeable local birders, from the feederwatch website or any of a dozen or more websites specifically designed for the purpose. Still can't identify it? Don't report it. So simple a child could do it. In fact many do.

It's the fifteenth feederwatch season at our house. Over that period we've recorded 33 species although 20 is the highest count for any one season and the usual total is around 15 species.

Every year we do see 9 of the 10 most common species in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States. Not surprisingly chickadees were most common, found at 97% of the feeders, closely followed by juncos, downy woodpeckers, mourning doves, cardinals and blue jays. Red-bellied woodpecker was the only one of the top ten we missed but it does visit other feeders in the Quinte area.



Officially the winter birding season starts on December 1. To get you started try our quiz.

This picture was taken by a Tennessee feederwatcher. What species is it? You have probably seen it at your feeder, particularly if you offer nyger seeds. The rest of the quiz is on page 5. Answers are on page 6. Don't cheat.

See page 8 for details about this month's program.

Last year we had our most unusual bird, a Cape May warbler. As far as I know it was only one of two reported to Project Feederwatch in Ontario. It visited our feeders every day from November 22 to December 31. Unfortunately the winds, snow and bitter cold on New Year's Eve probably caused its demise as that was the last we saw of it.



Photo by Kyle Blaney

Winter Cape May Warbler

We've had one rare bird at our feeders in 14 years. Why do we continue to take part in Feederwatch only to report birds like chickadees which occur at 97% of all feeders and juncos which occur at 95%. Surely researchers don't want more of this boring data.

British ornithologists answered this question in a 2004 article. In the past few years house sparrows have declined dramatically in the United Kingdom. In the middle of last century however they were regarded as a pest. To avoid the hassle of recording such a numerous species from 1962 to 1974 The British Trust for Ornithology asked its volunteers not to include the species in their counts. The 2004 article concluded with these words, "What fools we were! We lost valuable information at a stage when they were doing well, leaving a big gap in our knowledge. The lesson is surely that we need to monitor all our wildlife, particularly the common species. It is these common and widespread species that are perhaps the best barometers of the health of our own environment, as we, too, are a very common and widespread species."



Obviously an escaped bird, a "budgie" like this appeared at our feeders to be counted in 2003.



Photo by John Blaney

Blue jays love these wreathe feeders. The problem is that they just cache the peanuts so it can get expensive. I filled this feeder at 10:a.m. By noon three blue jays had emptied it.

Of course for public consumption we make high-minded comments about contributing to science. The real reason for participation is quite selfish. The winter morning ritual of watching birds at our feeders is a very pleasant way to start a cold day.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By George Thomson & Elizabeth Churcher

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What is the name of that butterfly that is still fluttering about on November 4th? Picture yourself walking along a trail through the woods with us. It could be the Trans-Canada Trail through Tweed, a beautiful picturesque pathway that surrounds you with a huge number of living things. You might venture down the same route a week or even months from now and encounter a number of different species. Of course, some of the individuals, like various kinds of trees, would be there every time. They are the conspicuous members in the structure of the woodland ecosystem and are dominant players affecting the lives of many other organisms. As the seasons change, their appearance may be altered, but they remain steadfast while other participants come and go. During our walk, we naturally want to know the names of the different mushrooms, plants and animals that we meet. This curiosity about the natural world is a large part of being human. We love to categorize and name things, from car and truck makes and models, to clothing styles, to the trees and birds that capture our attention in the forest as we stroll along.

In 2015, we are well equipped with numerous devices to help us as we explore our natural world. We have the benefit of field guides, hand lenses, binoculars, I-phones and tablets. --- But imagine yourself walking down the same trail in the year 1900. You would have none of these aids to assist itemizing your discoveries common words such as woodpecker. --- And you internet for more detailed restrictions, however, did not and animals. The universal name, prevailed and it "common names" for living process, the same species of several common names, labels in distant locations.



Linnaeus

While attaching specific labels to specimens in the early 1900's was almost impossible, the process of naming had been initiated years before. A Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus, who lived from 1707 to 1778, invented the binomial, or two-name, system to ease the burden of differentiating one type of living thing from another. The first of the two words, the Genus name, is always capitalized and it gives a label to the grouping that includes two or more related species. It is somewhat like our last name that links us to



American Tree Sparrow - Photo submitted by George and Elizabeth

our aunts, uncles and cousins. Sometimes, the genus includes only one species, as in the group, *Homo sapiens*, to which we belong. The second word, never capitalized, is the species name which refers to a particular living organism such as a Beech Tree or a Red Fox. --- And in respect of all of you grammarians out there, we must mention that 'species' is both singular and plural.

The binomial names are derived from Greek and/or Latin and are

standardized across the world so that, when people at any location on our planet read or hear the binomial or scientific name of an organism, they know or can look up the individual species. Let's examine the names of two of our bird feeder visitors, the Tree Sparrow (shown in the picture) whom we enjoy in the winter months and the Chipping Sparrow who is a warm weather guest. The genus *Spizella*, derived from the Greek 'Spiza' or 'finch' and the Latin 'ella' or 'small', includes both of these lively feathered friends, telling us that they are closely related. The Tree Sparrow's second name is 'arborea' meaning 'tree' while the Chipping Sparrow's defining label is 'passerina' connoting 'little sparrow'. Now you have a choice! When you see that small, chestnut-capped bird perched in a tree in the winter, you can impress your friends with its official common name, American Tree Sparrow, or its scientific name, *Spizella arborea*. The option for the Chipping Sparrow, which is quite similar in appearance but resides with us only in warm weather, is *Spizella passerina*. Why bother with those Latin and Greek names which very few of us can remember? George scores high in this domain while Elizabeth drags her feet but makes no apologies! It's only the binomial or scientific name that shows the relationships between species and is sure to be known all over the world.

So, with aids in hand, we are stepping out into the treasured warmth of this beautiful November day to discover the name of that butterfly that is still searching for a tasty snack in the broccoli florets and those persistent Johnny Jump-up & *Lamium* flowers. Naming living things, of course, is only the first step: next comes more exacting knowledge about how they live and relate to others. These deeper understandings help us to develop an appreciation of them as fellow passengers on planet Earth --- an appreciation that is vitally important in these times of decreasing biodiversity. Let us continue to walk together and be intrigued by the beauty and value of what nature has to offer right here in the Tweed area.

FEEDERWATCH QUIZ

These pictures show birds which could appear at your feeders this winter. How many can you identify? The bird on page 1 is question 1.



ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. A few years ago I received a phone call from a neighbor asking about the little yellow birds at his feeder. Of course they were American goldfinches like this one. The only other possibility would have been pine siskins. Siskins have brown streaking on their breasts and backs.
2. Even when it flattens its crest a blue jay is unmistakable.
3. This has to be one of the most misnamed residents of the Quinte area. Why would you call this a red-bellied woodpecker? The red head tells you it's a male. On his mate the red is seen only on the nape. The top of the head is a greyish beige.
4. More than one birder has misidentified a red finch. The trick is not to worry about the shade of red. That can be dependent on diet. Concentrate on the amount of red and the streaking. A purple finch has red on the flanks and the streaking on the breast is red. The brown streaks on the breast identify this as a house finch. Like the bird in the top photo house finches have a brownish back with indistinct streaks. Purple finches have indistinct streaks on a red background as shown in the middle picture.
5. The black head, yellow beak and broken eye ring identify a robin. You can try pieces of apple or raisins if you have wintering robins in the neighbourhood but they will probably visit your yard regularly only if you have a heated bird bath.
6. The question is always is it a downy or a hairy woodpecker. The size of the bird can be deceptive. Downys, of course, have a smaller bill. The tuft at the base of the bill also tells you that this is a downy. Recently I became aware of another fieldmark. The red on a downy's head is continuous. The hairy's red patch has a black stripe down the middle.
7. The crest may not be visible but the pinkish beak and the hint of a black face mask tell you that this is a female northern cardinal.
8. Now this is really confusing. If you read the answer to number 1 you might think that this is a pine siskin but a pine siskin has a very small bill and the brown stripes are very clear. The clue is actually in the answer to number 4. House finch colour and the amount of colour vary greatly. This is a house finch.



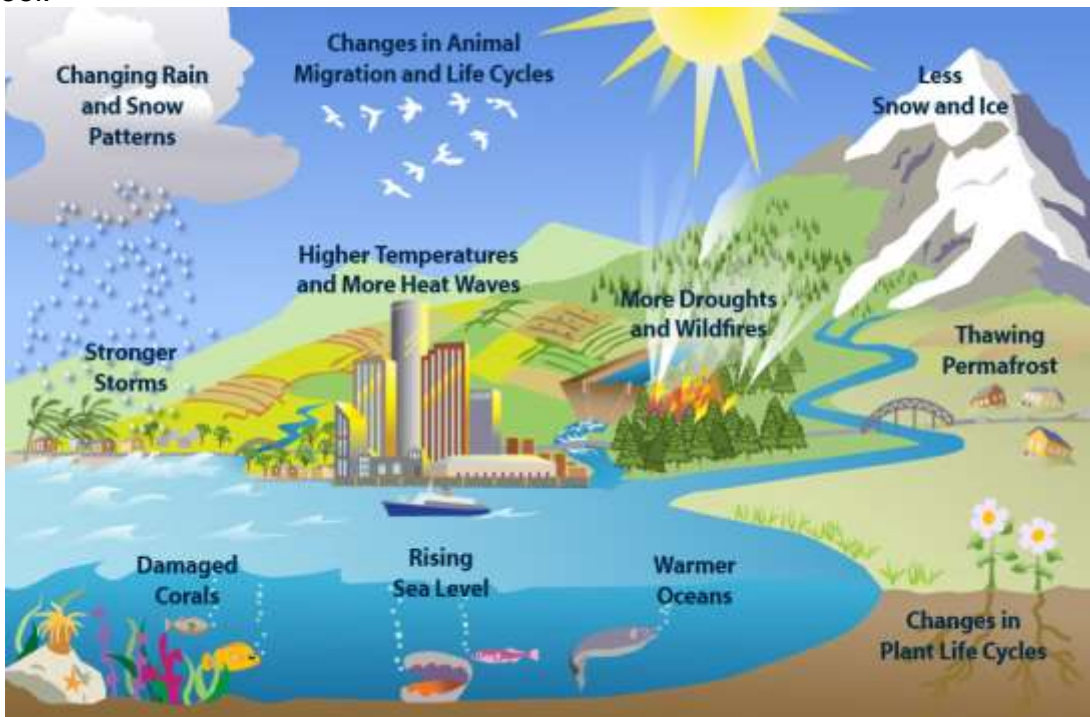
THERE IS NO PLANET B

A message from Penny Vance

Around the world, grass roots marches are planned for Sunday, November 29, the day before the U.N Climate Change Conference begins in Paris France. I have not heard of one in Belleville, so far. I urge everyone to attend one. Numbers count! And, as the top European Union climate change official stated in July, there is no Plan B if these U.N. Climate Change talks fail. Scientists warn that we must have begun to change within 17 years to hope to keep global average temperatures under 2 degrees Celsius. Above that, catastrophic events will be unstoppable. So far, our average global temperature has risen only a little, yet the world is already experiencing violent storms, wild fires, droughts, floods, ocean warming and acidification, species collapse.

Quinte Field Naturalists meet to share and celebrate our beautiful natural world in our own area and beyond. We all have young ones we love who are our children, nieces, nephews, neighbors, friends. We all enjoy birding, hiking, studying wild life all around us. All this is at risk! Please act.

One way, amongst many others, is to show up at one of these marches. The biggest one will be in Ottawa on Parliament Hill Nov 29 at 1:00 pm. Another, planned in Peterborough and called The Global Climate March, begins at 499 George St, also at 1:00 pm. The event that a number of us from Tweed plan to attend is in Kingston and is called The March Against Climate Change. It is starting at 390 Princess St, same time same date. We offer to arrange car pooling. Call [\(613\) 478 6229](tel:6134786229) if you want to be part of the car pool.



When the climate changes, everything changes.

Men argue. Nature Acts. - Voltaire

OUR UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Monday, November 23

SPIDERS OF ONTARIO

Speaker: Tom Mason

Tom Mason recently retired as Curator of Birds and Invertebrates at the Toronto Zoo, where he worked for 23 years. He has worked on three recovery teams for Ontario endangered species, and has bred over 50 species of reptiles and amphibians. Tom has traveled and collected on 5 continents, and worked on conservation projects in Cuba and Costa Rica. He holds a BSc from the University of Guelph and graduated from the Seneca College Zookeeper Course. He enjoys sharing his fascination with spiders with participants of the Carden Nature Festival.



Time: 7:00 p.m.

Location: Sills Auditorium, Bridge Street United Church, Belleville

Monday, January 25, 2016

NATIVE PLANTS FOR THE GARDEN

Speaker: Peter Fuller of Fuller Native and Rare Plants

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.

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Next Newsletter Deadline – January 10, 2016

Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com