



The Egret

the Newsletter of the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club

Inside this issue ...

ECFNC Activities at a Glance	1
ECFNC Contacts.....	2
President's Report.....	3
Baillie Birdathon.....	6
Mary Celestino.....	7
Pelee Island Trip	8
Essex County Wildlife	9
Bird Life on the Detroit River.....	10
North Shore CBC.....	10
Cedar Creek CBC.	12
Windsor Star Reprints.....	13
Point Pelee Birds	20
Activities and Excursions	21
Membership Form.....	22

ECFNC Monthly Meetings

Except for our annual dinner in November, monthly members' meetings are held the second Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm at Ojibway Nature Center, 5200 Matchette Road, Windsor, 519-966-5852. We also have monthly outings, posted in the 'Activities and Excursions' section of this newsletter as well as on our website. Visit our Website at essexcountynature.com

A great big *Thank-You* to everyone who submitted articles and photos to the Egret this month. We always appreciate your submissions and couldn't run this newsletter without them!

Upcoming ECFNC Activities

Mar. 16th – Outing - Late Winter Birding Walk at Hilman Marsh

Apr. 9th – General Membership Meeting – Dr. Alan Trenhaile

Apr. 13th – Outing – Walk through Kopegaron Woods

Apr. 26th – Outing – Eastern Bluebird walk with Don Bissonnette

April 27th-Earth Day Bake Sale

May 3rd to May 4th – Outing – Dave Kraus' Annual Pelee Island trip

May 10th – Outing – Eastern Bluebird walk with Don Bissonnette

May 14th – Membership meeting – Robert Krausz for the WECEC 'Green Speakers Series'

June 11th – Membership meeting – Charles Wilkins

About the Club ...

The Essex County Field Naturalists' Club was incorporated in March 1985. We are a registered charitable organization which promotes the appreciation and conservation of our natural heritage. ECFNC provides the community opportunities to become acquainted with and understand our natural world through identification, maintenance and preservation of the natural areas within Essex County and surrounding regions. ECFNC is affiliated with Ontario Nature/Federation of Ontario Naturalists. *The Egret* is published quarterly. To receive information on the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club or to submit articles, letters, reports, etc., please write to:

Essex County Field Naturalists' Club

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Chairpersons/Liaisons:

Ontario Nature Liaison: JoAnn Grondin
ERCA Liaison: Phil Roberts
ERCA Conservation Areas Advisory Committee for park management: Sarah Baldo and Tom Preney
Bluebird Committee Chairman: Don Bissonnette
Essex County Land Stewardship Liaison: Linda Menard-Watt
Ojibway Liaison: Tom Preney
Citizens Environment Alliance Liaison: Phil Roberts/Jesse Gardner Costa
Windsor Essex County Environmental Committee: Phil Roberts/ Jesse Gardner Costa
Canada South Land Trust Liaison: Dave Kraus
Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Liaison: Steve Marks/Phil Roberts

Committees:

Egret Editorial: Sheeva Nakhaie (chair), Betty Learmouth
Field Trips: The Executive
Heritage: JoAnn Grondin (coordinator), Dave Kraus, Betty Learmouth, Jim McAllister, Bruno Sfalcin, Gerry Waldron, Shirley Grondin, Cathy Lapain
Little River Enhancement Group: Ian Naisbitt (chair), Jesse Gardner Costa
Fish Book: Dave Kraus
Website: Sarah Baldo, Sarah Renaud, Sheeva Nakhaie (co chairs)
Social Media: Sarah Renaud, Russ Jones and Steve Marks
Arising Issues in the County: Phil Roberts

President Report for 2013

By Jesse Gardner Costa

Dear Club Members,

I've just completed my first year as President and I have been honoured to represent the Field Naturalists. We had a lot to do and I had big shoes to fill, luckily I had an excellent executive to support and guide this club. This executive has such a diverse knowledge set that has really brought some great speakers and events (and future events) to the table. I'll try to be as short and informative as possible but we accomplished a number of things last year and have a few new projects coming up this year.

Last year's achievements and this year's plans:

Field Naturalists' & ERCA Harrow Rain Garden - a simple and cheap storm-water solution for residents and municipalities alike. We planted the garden in the summer and our membership helped to maintain the garden. ERCA just released the 'how to create a rain garden manual' and I've gotten word that the rest of the county wants to start implementing these types of projects! This was a very successful event and hopefully it inspires further work. Don't forget, you can plant your own rain garden in your yard!

Annual Achievement Awards – Congratulations to Karen Cedar and Shirley Grondin for their hard work and enthusiasm for our club!

Windsor Airport Tree Planting – We're planting again! Last year the airport woodlot was protected and we collaborated with Little River Enhancement Group and ERCA to plant more trees in the area. It was a successful planting, over 85% of the trees survived. This year we're going to continue; ERCA has the trees and funds to plant another strip of trees in the area. We need volunteers to come out and plant. As soon as we get authorization from the city, we'll send out more information about the planting. Eventually we'll connect the two woodlots into one large one and increase the county's overall tree cover.

Riparian Buffer Restoration Big Creek – We've teamed up with the Ministry of Natural resources to plant wetland vegetation in various wetlands within the Big Creek watershed. Funding is almost in place and we hope to be planting sometime in the spring.

Ojibway Shores – The last natural shoreline along the Detroit River was slated to be clear-cut and filled in this past fall. The Windsor Port Authority held a public meeting on July 3rd and was met with an overwhelming response from the public (over 500 people!), including many of our members.

In the aftermath of this meeting, the Windsor Port Authority decided not to clear-cut the area and have committed to work with the environmental community (Field Naturalists', Citizens Environment Alliance, Detroit River Canadian Cleanup), ERCA and our local MPs, Jeff Watson and Brian Masse to come up with a solution to save the property.

Our role is to perform a 3 season biological inventory of Ojibway shores for 2014. We're

also contacting various groups (Nature Conservancy, Windsor Essex County Environmental Committee, etc.) to look for opportunities to protect the area. Lastly, we've been and will continue to organize monthly outings to hike through the area. Our MPs are going to petition transport Canada for any opportunities; we expect a response sometime this month.

This may be our biggest environmental campaign yet, if you wish to participate, please attend our outings, and be a part of our upcoming Bioblitz (info below)! This could be our last chance to connect a number of our natural areas back to the Detroit River.

1st Annual Bioblitz - A bioblitz is an event where expert and amateur volunteers survey a natural area, inventorying as many species as possible within a 24-hour period.

Why do a bioblitz in this area? Although Essex County has relatively little natural area compared with the rest of Ontario, the county is species rich and home to numerous endangered species. This event creates opportunities to promote conservation and public education, provide records of important species and generate interest in our natural areas. We hope to eventually cover all the natural areas in the county with future bioblitz events. We have one of the most diverse ecosystems in the province and with your help we're hoping to prove it! When is this event? Saturday, June 28th at the Ojibway Nature Complex, 5200 Matchette Rd, Windsor, ON. We will organize ourselves at 9 am and officially start at 10 am and run until 10 am on Sunday.

Ojibway Shores will hopefully be covered in this year's bioblitz. We'll be providing more info soon and hope that everyone will participate in the event as volunteers, participants or experts.

Currently I plan to stay on the executive and hope to improve our feedback with the membership. If we can I would like to make it easier to solicit ideas from the membership about outings and speakers. We have so many talented and knowledgeable people, I want to encourage those people to lead walks and give presentations. I want to encourage our membership to attend our outdoor meetings as well as volunteer for our club's events and campaigns. To do this I'll try to provide more information on our events, updates on projects, and ask for volunteers at our meetings. A connected group is a resilient group.

We've got a lot to do this year I'm hoping this year will be even more successful than the last, our continuing projects and a few new projects should not only be a lot of fun but beneficial to the area. We're hoping you'll be a part of these events too!

Thank you for your dedication and support,
Jesse Gardner Costa

A Member of Our Executive Steps Down

This year Sarah Renaud will step down from the executive. Sarah's done wonderful work, especially with our website and social media. We'll miss her on the executive but we're sure to see her around.



The 2013 Essex County Nature Executive. From the top left: Tom Preney, Russ Jones, Steve Marks, Jesse Gardner Costa, Sheeva Nakhaie, Cathy Lapain, Dave Kraus, Sarah Baldo, Carl Maiolani, Linda Menard-Watt, JoAnn Grondin, Sarah Renaud and Claire Sanders.



The 2012 Essex County Nature Executive. From the top left: Ron Muir, Jesse Gardner Costa, Phil Roberts, Carl Maiolani, Dave Kraus, Cathy Lapain, JoAnn Grondin, Sheeva Nakhaie, Sarah Renaud, Gerry Waldron, Linda Menard-Watt. Absent: Sarah Baldo

Baillie Birdathon

By Cathy Lapain

The Baillie Birdathon is the oldest sponsored bird count in North America, raising money for bird research and conservation. The challenge is to identify as many bird species as possible within a 24-hour period, during the month of May. The money raised benefits Bird Studies Canada, the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund and participating migration monitoring stations and conservation organizations such as our very own **Essex County Field Naturalist Club**.

The Baillie Birdathon is a great opportunity for conservation clubs to raise money for special projects. As a birdathon participant you can direct a portion of the funds you raise to any conservation club. (I.e. ECFNC) Over the years participants have directed a portion of what they raised to our very own Bluebird Committee. There is potential to get up to 50% back if the “birder” raises \$5001.00 or more-see chart below.

	To Club Programs	<u>Baillie Fund & Bird Studies Canada</u>
\$ 1.00-3000	25%	75%
\$ 3001-3500	30%	70%
\$ 3501-4000	35%	65%
\$ 4001-4500	40%	60%
\$ 4501-5000	45%	55%
\$ 5001-up	50%	50%

More than 7,000 people from across Canada and from several countries around the world participate in and/or sponsor a Birdathon in May of every year. During a 24-hour period in May, they attempt to find as many bird species as they can, sponsored at a flat rate, or on a per-species basis.

Get information and register at www.bsc-eoc.org (Get Involved link/Choose a Program link/Download Birdathon Kit/Download Registration Form **or**

Sponsor our club birder: Kory Renaud and Team: “No (r)Egrets”

Mary Celestino

By: Betty Learmouth

Long time Essex County Field Naturalists' Club member Mary Celestino passed away on January 26, 2014. Mary's husband John passed away July 21, 2013.

Mary and John purchased a lakeside property on Pelee Island a number of years ago. Here Mary was inspired to paint her large canvasses of the Pelee Island shoreline and the Stone Road alvar in her island studio.

Mary had intended to plant tomato plants behind the cottage but found there was hardly any soil covering solid rock which was the limestone of the Stone Road alvar. The discovery of the alvar was to change Mary's life as Mary became a student of the alvar. An array of alvar plant species inspired Mary to draw and study the plants.

Over ten years Mary researched and drew the plants of the alvar. In 2002, Mary's book *Wildflowers of the Canadian Erie Islands* was published by the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club. Mary's book continues to be a wonderful resource for anyone looking for information on the formation of the Lake Erie Islands, human history of the area, places of interest and the flowering plants of the Canadian Lake Erie Islands. Mary's drawings of the flowering plants, flowering shrubs and vines are delightful.

Mary and John welcomed visiting naturalists to their screened porch with its view of Lake Erie to the south. Cold lemonade was enjoyed after a walk on the alvar. On page vii of her guide, Mary included a drawing of South Bay, Pelee Island as it would be seen from the porch. Mary was pleased that the Celestino's cottage was Canada's most southerly summer cottage.

Field naturalist members will have fond memories of Mary as she lead tours on the alvar, joined Dave Kraus' annual visit to Pelee Island, and discussed her paintings on exhibit at the Art Gallery of Windsor. Mary was an excellent speaker. Field naturalist members will remember her presentations discussing her inspiration to draw and paint Pelee Island shoreline and alvar.

Mary and John regularly attended monthly ECFNC meetings where they had an opportunity to speak and mingle with other ECFNC members. Essex County Field Naturalists will miss Mary and John.

20th Annual ECFNC Weekend Trip to Pelee Island Lead by Dave Kraus

Saturday May 3 & Sunday May 4, 2014.

Leave at 10:00 am Saturday from Leamington Dock

aboard the M.V. Jiimaan (be at the dock by 9:20 am)

We will return to Leamington Dock by 5:45 pm Sunday

We will very likely see: migrating waterfowl & warblers, wildflowers such as trilliums & phlox, basking turtles and snakes, bullfrogs, historic sites, and hear a chorus or two of American Toads, to suggest a few of the many enjoyable experiences on Pelee Island in spring. We should also get a chance to visit the Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO bird banding station) and some of the recently acquired Nature Conservancy of Canada properties: Red Cedar Savannah ESA, Stone Road Alvar ANSI, Brown's Point and woods, and Brown's Road Alvar. We will have plenty of time to walk, observe, and relax on the excursions to some of Pelee's most beautiful natural habitats, including: Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve, Lighthouse Point Provincial Nature Reserve, the Stone Road Alvar Complex, Sheridan Point ESA, and many other stops along the way (including the new habitat restoration work completed on my property).

Should we experience inclement weather, we can visit the Pelee Island Heritage Centre, tour the island in the comfort of our rented bus driven by ECFNC member Sharon Medeiros, and/or lounge at the Anchor and Wheel Inn.

I have arranged for bus transportation while on the island - no vehicles are necessary or desired on the trip. There is parking at the Leamington Dock area. I have reserved space on the ferry for all registered, walk on passengers attending this trip - we will meet in the ticket office at the dock on Saturday morning.

Accommodations have been reserved at the Anchor and Wheel Inn. The motel and bed and breakfast style rooms are comfortable and are situated on spacious grounds. Reservations are generally set for two persons per room. However, people do not need to register in pairs or groups - everyone is welcome and will be comfortably accommodated!!!

The Anchor and Wheel Inn contains a clean and comfortable restaurant where I have arranged for our delicious meals. We will break for meals regularly (lunch ~ noon and dinner ~ 6:00 pm on Saturday, breakfast ~ 8 am and lunch ~ noon Sunday) and hot meals and snacks are also available on both ferry crossings.

The total cost will be \$180 this year. This cost will include: the two ferry trips, weekend bus transportation, four hot meals, overnight motel accommodations, and all taxes and tips. The \$180 cost will include all expenses for the weekend other than alcoholic drinks, souvenirs, and snacks or meals on the ferry.

All interested persons need to do is: sign up with me and then show up at the Leamington Dock by 9:20 am Saturday morning with warm outdoor clothes and accessories, overnight necessities,

\$180 cheque (payable to David Kraus) or cash per person, and a few additional dollars for extra snacks, etc. if desired.

I will contact each person that registers should any time or location changes for the ferry occur, otherwise the above outline is the basic schedule, rain or shine. I will hand out more detailed schedules on the Saturday morning of the trip, but with our own driver and rented bus, we can be flexible and able to visit various sites depending on the group's wishes.

To register for this trip: see me at the ECFNC meetings, call, or write:
Dave Kraus phone: 519 825 7491
mailing address: 1515 Mersea Road 7, RR 3, Wheatley, Ont. N0P 2P0
email address: david.kraus@publicboard.ca

I look forward to your company on this ECFNC outing!!!

Essex County Wildlife, Winter 2014

By Betty Learmouth

Nancy Phillips, spokesperson with "Wings Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre" spoke with host Bob Steele of the CBC afternoon radio program *The Bridge* on February 14, 2014.

Nancy Phillips told Bob Steele that wildlife in Essex County has suffered for weeks from high winds and snow which has made life for wild creatures very difficult. Nancy said that Wings normally has three hundred animals under care but this winter season there are five hundred animals.

The weather has resulted in frozen pipes which means water needs to be carried. Usually winter in Essex County will relent for a few days. This year the weather has been constantly cold, windy and snowy with no let up for weeks.

Owls and hawks have suffered from these severe winter conditions. An Eastern Screech-Owl was dropped off at Wings after having sat on a window sill for two or three hours. Nancy remarked that this little bird was hungry. Lacking body fat, it could go no further. Opossums that have reached Wings have been hard hit. They are on the skinny side, in a rundown condition, exhausted and suffering from frostbite which has resulted in the loss of ears, tails and foot pads.

Wings intends to provide a warm spot for needy wildlife along with food and eventual release into the wild.

Donations to Wings Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre would be welcome. The address is 5281 Middleside Road, Essex Road 10, Amherstburg, Ontario N9V 2Y9

Bird Life on the Detroit River, January 23, 2014

By Betty Learmouth

January 23, 2014 started as a remarkably cold and cloudy morning over the Detroit River with the sun breaking through about mid morning. My friend Larry Onysko and I pulled into the City of Windsor Marina about 10 o'clock. We parked at the furthest parking spot which gave us a view of Lake St. Clair, Peche Island, the docks at the Marina, and the Detroit River.

We looked over the thirty sleeping Mute Swans on the Marina ice edge with a few Canada Geese and Mallards also on the ice edge. In the background four hearty souls were setting up to ice fish next to the Marina docking facilities.



Other duck species seen near the Marina included two Common Goldeneye, a single Bufflehead and several Common Mergansers. A single Great Blue Heron was noted flying off Peche Island.

Far out on ice covered Lake St. Clair we could see at least eight Bald Eagles which eventually flew to Peche Island, perching in trees and on the shoreline. Some disappeared around the back of Peche Island.

The water was open off shore from the Marina with a build up of ice down river from the Marina. We could see rafts of ducks slowly making their way in the portion of the river that we could view from the Marina. These ducks proved to be Canvasbacks, the males showing whitish backs and sides. Several rafts came to this open area, then worked their way back towards Lake St. Clair, only to repeat the process.

We surveyed the Detroit River on our drive to the Ojibway Nature Centre at 11:00 a.m., finding no more open spots on ice-filled Detroit River.

At the Ojibway Nature Centre, we observed a flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds enjoying a feeder full of cracked corn. Other winter birds included Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Tree Swallow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, and American Goldfinch.

North Shore Christmas Bird Count, December 21, 2013

By Betty Learmouth

For days before the North Shore Christmas Bird Count, counters were watching the weather closely. Everyone was hoping for clear weather but that was not to be as drizzle was forecast for

the morning, and rain for the afternoon. When counters headed out on the day of the count, they encountered both drizzle and rain.

While traveling from Windsor to the Maidstone Conservation Area, Larry Onysko and I watched for bird activity along the way, noting two small flocks of European Starlings and a flock of 25 House Sparrows.

At 9:20 a.m., we were proceeding along the unpaved road that passes by the entrance to the Maidstone Conservation Area. A dark object on the left hand side of the roadway caught our attention. A quick look through our binoculars revealed an attractive Red Fox which quickly disappeared into the Conservation Area. We were amazed at its full red tail.

We then entered the Conservation Area, deciding to “pish” from the vehicle, hoping that birds would be within hearing distance of the parking area.

A few minutes later a large woodpecker flew through the parking lot, followed by two others. We were delighted to record three Northern Flickers. Minutes later we observed three Blue Jays close to the parking lot.

At 9:50 a.m. we decided to drive over to North Rear Road to check the woodlands there. As we looked up and down the roadway before pulling away from the Conservation Area, we saw that the fox was on the road again. We drove slowly towards the fox, which quickly returned to the woodland.

A few minutes later, at 10:04 a.m., we flushed a Red-tailed Hawk which glided from the power line over to the nearby trees.

At the stop sign, before making the turn onto North Rear Road, we watched as a flock of twelve Dark-eyed Juncos flew across into a thick evergreen hedge to our right. Proceeding along North Rear Road we spotted the second Red-tailed Hawk for the morning.

We parked off the North Rear Road in an area with many old trees. In the past this area had been productive so we hoped that would continue on this wet morning. We were rewarded with nine Blue Jays moving back and forth and a glimpse of a Red-bellied Woodpecker.

As we were driving north along the Belle River Road to the compilation site, a flock of birds suddenly appeared in front of us, flying to our left. Then a single bird appeared with a Cooper’s Hawk in full pursuit. The pursued bird dove downwards and doubled back, followed by the raptor. The birds were then out of view so the results of this chase are unknown.

Kory Renaud and his group reported on their observations. Through their scope they had seen three Snowy Owls resting on the Lake St. Clair ice. Kory stated one was likely an immature female (very heavily barred) but the others were difficult to confirm sex. Two were visible from the end of Wallace Line Road and one was seen on the ice near the mouth of Pike Creek.

Kory added that there must have been more Snowy Owls on the ice along the shores of Lake St. Clair as Kory’s group only covered a small area.

A Red Fox was noted curled up asleep on the ice at one of the group's stops. Following the morning count CBCers enjoyed delicious chili at June Hurley's home as they warmed up after a wet morning. At least one CBCer reported to be thoroughly soaked from the morning's efforts.

The last sighting was that of a white Eastern Gray Squirrel as it scampered up a tree trunk close to June's home. Thank you to June and all the CBCers who participated in the count.

Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count, December 14, 2013

By Betty Learmouth

The long awaited yearly Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count was scheduled for the first Saturday within the count period with hopes that December 14, 2013 would be mild and ice free. A few days before December 14, 2013, weather broadcasters drew listeners' attention to a forecast for Essex County of a winter event for the night of December 12, 2013 and the day of December 14, 2013.

So Christmas Bird Counters were not surprised that December 14, 2013 would be a challenge with low temperatures, northerly winds and snowy conditions.

In the upper portion of Area 3 which ranges from the Talbot Trail south to the Greenway, Christmas Bird Counters (Kathy Lesperance, Betty Learmouth, Larry Onysko and Mac the Dog) checked the Talbot Trail, then drove over the Essex By-pass and followed the Concession Roads back and forth between the Arner Town Line and the McCain Side Road and south to the Greenway.

The first stop was at Mrs. Moore's home on the Talbot Trail where the Dark-eyed Juncos were feeding on seed beneath the front yard feeder. A Red-tailed Hawk was flushed from its perch in a nearby yard. This was the only raptor to be seen in Area 3's northern section throughout a day long search.

The second stop was at Mrs. Moore's neighbours who have made their yard attractive to wildlife. Birds spotted here included Northern Cardinals and Woodpeckers. The owners have provided two small ponds with an active water pump that keeps this important water source open for wildlife.

Then it was on to North Ridge and a turn that took the observers across the Essex By-pass. Suddenly there were several dozen birds on the roadway which were identified as Horned Larks. The birds would fly as a flock, then drop into corn stubble or onto the roadway again. The morning tally for Horned Larks was 307 individuals.

The Christmas Bird Counters took a break for lunch then proceeded south on the Arner Town Line to a wooded area just north of the Greenway. Due to the constant snow, driver Larry Onysko was unsure of the laneway approach so the group continued on to the farm of Bill Balkwill and Jack Balkwill.

The Christmas Bird Counters joined Bill and Jack in their garage. Bill provided a list of birds seen on December 14, 2013 which included Mourning Dove (1), Red-bellied Woodpecker (1, female), Downy Woodpecker (1), Blue Jay (9), Horned Lark (20), White-breasted Nuthatch seen while the group was standing in the garage as they discussed their sightings (1), American Tree Sparrow (6), Dark-eyed Junco (30), and House Sparrow (40).

Bill reported that on the previous day, December 13, 2013, the following bird species were observed: Northern Harrier (1), Cooper's Hawk (1), Northern Flicker (3-4), Black-capped Chickadee (1), and White-breasted Nuthatch (1).

Bill reported tracks in the snow included Coyote tracks and fox tracks. The Christmas Bird Counters continued on from Bill Balkwill and Jack Backwill's farm, driving along the remaining Concession Roads to be checked.

Some of the tallies from this portion of Area 3 included Horned Larks (357), American Tree Sparrows (37) and Tufted Titmouse (1).

The compilation from all areas was held again this year at Tom and Peggy Hurst's home. The potluck buffet was delicious and enjoyed by all. Thank you to Peggy and Tom for opening their home for the count.

Some Christmas Bird Counters were unable to attend the compilation so their numbers will be added in by Compiler Paul Pratt as they are provided. Seventy bird species were observed as of December 14, 2013.

Windsor Star Reprints

Submitted By Betty Learmouth

Wildlife rehab nearly full after deep freeze

Wings staff work to keep critters comfy.

Reporter: Shelby Wye, In *The Windsor Star*, March 1, 2014

Amherstburg – There are swans in the waiting area and opossums in the lunch room and this isn't even beginning to explain the extent of the over-crowding situation at Wings Wildlife Rehabilitation.

Nancy Phillips, the president of the animal rehabilitation centre, says she has about 65 cages full of wild animals, ranging from waterfowl to small mammals. Normally, about 15 cages will suffice at any given time,

“January and February are usually our slowest months, but this year, we've probably accepted around three times the normal amount,” Phillips said.

These past few days have been extremely busy, due to a bevy of distressed swans that were brought in.

The staff kept them in the warmest room in the centre: the waiting room. The entire centre has

had to make changes to try and accommodate all the animals.

“It’s more chaotic. It’s adjusting to all the extra animals, and making sure there are enough people to help. Usually a person could clean a room by themselves, but now it takes two or three people because the cages are very dirty,” said Jennifer Dalley, wildlife-co-ordinator at the animal rehabilitation centre.

The staff report that they have kept their mandate, despite the overcrowding. Animals aren’t released until they’re ready to face the elements, and any animal that comes through the door is helped.

“We hear it’s a lot, that it’s just a part of life that these animals die. But, when human influences are the reason some of these animals are getting hurt, that’s when we have to help,” Dally said.

The overcrowding pales in comparison to some of the other troubles the centre has been experiencing. During Thursday’s swan rescue, staff couldn’t assist in bringing in the swans because a truck had broken down.

The washing machine stopped working just after the animals began to arrive. And more food than usual has had to be ordered to accommodate for the influx of wildlife. The centre has gone over budget to help get the animals the supplies they need.

To balance out the tasking first months of 2014, Wings Wildlife Rehabilitation is hosting a Critter Care Fundraiser on March 22.

They will host a dinner, along with a bake sale, 50/50 draw and a silent auction to bring in funds. For more information, contact the staff at 519-736-8172.

Snowy Owl Invasion

January 3, 2014, In The Windsor Star, by Dalson Chen

They’re big, they’re white and they’re overstaying their welcome: They’re snowy owls, and they’ve been hanging around Windsor’s airport in remarkable numbers this winter.

“We haven’t seen snowy owls around Essex County like this in about 15 years,” said Phil Roberts, director of airport operations and past president of the Essex County Field Naturalists’ Club.

“I’d prefer not to see them around the airport.”

Roberts said the Arctic raptors started showing up near the runways at the beginning of December. Since then, airport personal have had more than a dozen snowy owl sightings, and have managed to trap and relocate seven of them – an exceptional amount for this region when it comes to these large birds of the tundra.

“We’ll go years here without so much as a glimpse of a snowy owl,” Roberts noted.

Native to Alaska, northern Quebec and Labrador, the owls fly this far south in the winter only when food is very scarce or there's been a significant weather event, Roberts said.

U.S. media have reported an abundance of snowy owl sightings this season, particularly in East Coast states. The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey said the birds have appeared in such numbers around JFK, Newark Liberty and LaGuardia airports that five planes were struck in a two-week period.

Roberts said adult snowy owls typically reach five pounds – heavy enough that a mid-air collision could be dangerous to a plane of any size. The risk is compounded by their fearlessness.

“They have very little experience with humans, or with machinery,” Roberts said. “They don't see an aircraft or a person as much threat.”

Paul Pratt of the Ojibway Nature Centre said Snowy Owls tend to haunt airports because they're attracted to expanses of flat, treeless terrain. “It reminds them of home, I guess – reminds them of the tundra.”

“They're spectacular birds,” Pratt added. “They're something bird-watchers love to see. Nature photographers love to take pictures of them because they're so dramatic, with their white plumage.”

Roberts said the Windsor Airport's live trapping methods are humane. The Swedish goshawk traps used to catch the owls are essentially box-shaped cages with trick lids. The owls attempt to perch on the devices and fall in. Captured owls are held for 24 hours, banded, then driven about 50 kilometres away from the airport and released. “We have a very low return rate.” Roberts said.

As for how much longer the snowy owls will visit Windsor-Essex this winter, Roberts said he can't predict their movements – but he wouldn't be surprised if sightings continue until the end of March.

Snowy owls are the biggest owls in North America, and are among the biggest in the world. They're even heavier than great horned owls.

Adult females – which are always larger than the males – typically weigh more than two kilograms and have 1.5 metre wing spans. The females are also distinguishable by their mottled feathers. Males are almost pure white.

Both sexes have striking yellow eyes, black beaks, and heavily feathered feet.

Northern Natives

Snowy owls are Arctic birds. They're truly at home on tundra lands well above the treeline. They breed in the northern-most parts of the continent, but travel south in the winter when food grows scarce. It's very rare to see them any farther south than the Great Lakes. When they're visiting non-tundra regions, they prefer open fields and shorelines.

Mexican Monarch Migration Disappearing

In *The Windsor Star*, January 31, 2014, Reporter Sharon Hill

The number of monarch butterflies in Mexico this winter has plummeted to its lowest point ever and is fueling grave concern that the monarch's spectacular migration is nearing an end.

It's a migration where Point Pelee National Park once recorded an estimated half a million monarch butterflies flying over mainland Canada's southernmost tip at once and regularly gave fall visitors a chance to see butterflies roosting in trees and waiting for the right wind to cross Lake Erie.

"It's something we'd be incredibly disappointed and sad about because this has been part of Point Pelee for such a long time," the park's interpretive program coordinator Sarah Rupert said Wednesday.

Monarch butterfly expert Lincoln Brower said the migration is at risk after hearing the area occupied by monarch butterflies at their overwintering sites in Mexico has dropped to 1.65 acres or 0.67 hectares.

That's down from 1.19 hectares in the winter of 2012-2013, which was the previous low, and a dramatic drop from the peak in the last 20 years of 20.97 hectares in the winter of 1996-1997.

Losing the migration would be like losing the Mona Lisa, said Brower, a professor at Sweet Briar College in Virginia who has studied monarch butterflies for 58 years. It's a mind-boggling migration that sees a generation of tiny monarchs that have never been to Mexico fly thousands of kilometres south to overwintering spots.

"It's probably where the passenger pigeon was a year or two before they went extinct," Brower said Wednesday.

The World Wildlife Fund which collects the data with Mexico's National Commission for Protected Areas, said the 1.6 acres combined of forests that had monarchs in December was a 44 per cent drop from a year earlier and was the lowest number since such surveys began in 1993. It called on leaders from Canada, the United States and Mexico who are meeting in Mexico February 19 to agree on immediate action to conserve the monarch migration.

Brower said it's the lowest amount since the mid-1970s when monarch butterflies were first found to be spending the winter in Mexican forest.

Great Backyard Bird Count

In *The Windsor Star*, February 14, 2014, Reporter: Don Lajoie

Naturalists and scientists are calling on local nature lovers and birding enthusiasts to join an international effort to help chart the world's shifting and dwindling bird populations over the next four days as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Paul Pratt, City of Windsor naturalist at the Ojibway Nature Centre, said Thursday (February 13, 2014) that the task is daunting, on a world scale, but simple enough on an individual basis.

The results could prove beneficial to scientists hoping to gain a better understanding of the world’s ecosystems, including the important Great Lakes region of North America, he said.

The idea is for participants to take 15 minutes during one of the four days, February 14 to 17, to count birds at their location, record the results on a tally sheet and report the results to a central database.

Pratt said because organizations are hoping to attract thousands of participants across North America and tens of thousands more internationally, the results could give scientists a snapshot of the health and size of bird populations, not only in a particular area, but around the globe.

Last year the massive undertaking, a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society and Bird Studies Canada, went beyond North America for the first time and broke records for the number of bird species identified, with more than 111 countries taking part to identify about 35 million birds, representing more than 4,000 species.

“You can do it any way you like,” said Pratt. “You can submit what you see coming to your feeder in your own backyard or come down to Ojibway Park and report what you’ve found. We have a field trip going to Point Pelee. If you’re going to be on vacation you can take even 15 minutes and report what you’ve seen in the Dominican Republic.”

Bird Studies Canada is recommending that participants get a field guide, available at bookstores, or go on line to find guides that can help accurately identify the birds. Once the information has been gathered, said Pratt, it can officially be recorded by accessing gbbc.birdcount.org. The results will be tabulated as entered to ensure real-time results.

Pratt said ornithologists have been trying to determine why certain species seem to be declining in numbers locally, such as many grassland species and aerial insect feeders like swallows and night hawks. Pratt noted that the reasons for fewer grassland birds can be attributed to loss of habitat but the decline of the flying insect feeding birds is more difficult to determine.

“They have been steadily declining at an alarming rate,” he said. “Are pesticides depressing insect populations? That’s harder to nail down.”

He added that it will be also interesting to see how the unusually cold and snowy winter has effected local bird populations.

Deep snow is “very hard” on populations and, with the ice covering much of the Great Lakes, he said he wouldn’t be surprised to see many deep water species “forced inland.”

He noted that the cold weather has resulted in an increase in Snowy Owl sightings this year.

Luckily, Paul Pratt was able to schedule the Ojibway Nature Centre’s Hillman – Wheatley birding trip for February 15, 2014. Thirty one species were observed and are noted below:

Canada Goose 19	European Starling 120
Common Goldeneye 15	American Tree Sparrow 1
Common Merganser 8	White-throated Sparrow 1

Red-breasted Merganser 1	Dark-eyed Junco 9
Bald Eagle 1	American Crow 70
Red-shouldered Hawk 1	Horned Lark 5
Red-tailed Hawk 2	Black-capped Chickadee 1
Ring-billed Gull 1	American Robin 3
Herring Gull 12	European Starling 120
Great Black-backed Gull 1	American Tree Sparrow 1
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 11	White-throated Sparrow 1
Mourning Dove 3	Dark-eyed Junco 9
Great Horned Owl 1	Northern Cardinal 3
Downy Woodpecker 2	Red-winged Blackbird 25
American Kestrel 1	Rusty Blackbird 1
Blue Jay 4	Brewer's Blackbird 1 Present at this
American Crow 70	location north of Conc C since December
Horned Lark 5	Common Grackle 30 Two flocks of
Black-capped Chickadee 1	mostly adult males
American Robin 3	Brown-headed Cowbird 50
	House Sparrow 5

Holiday Census for the Birds

Sarah Sachel, In The Windsor Star, January 2, 2014

While the rest of Windsor and Essex County was taking shelter from a wintery start to the new year January 1, 2014, a large flock of Snow Buntings was flitting through a field in the city's far west end.

The little birds were eating seeds off weeds poking out of the snow between the rows of unharvested cabbage, and City of Windsor naturalist Paul Pratt, his spotting scope at the ready, was there to document them.

Pratt was taking part in the 114th annual Audubon Christmas Bird County. As the organizer of the bird census that takes place along the Canadian side of the Detroit River January 1 each year, Pratt and about 15 volunteers were taking stock of the species wintering in the area.

"It's a great flock," said Pratt, watching the snow buntings lift off en masse, circle, then settle into the field again. "The snow buntings are a beautiful little bird. They're like little wind-up toys. They're always in motion, and they love the cold, unlike me.

Snow buntings nest in Greenland in the summer, Pratt said. This is as far south as they come.

They were joined in the field off Morton Drive January 1, 2014 with juncos wintering away from their nesting sites in Algouquin Park.

If not for bird counts like the one he was participating in, we wouldn't know how species are faring, Pratt said.

Local conservationist band snow buntings at Holiday Beach and other local sites. Such efforts, combined with bird counts, has shown that the species has suffered a 60 per cent population decline since the 1940s.

The Christmas bird count began December 14, 2013 and continues to January 5, 2014. Audubon calls it the “longest-running citizen science survey in the world,” with tens of thousands of participants whose data gets posted to the conservation group’s website.”
Count numbers are available at www.audubon.org

POINT PELEE BIRDS — ANNUAL SUMMARY FOR 2013

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This 2013 summary pertains to the official Point Pelee Birding Area, which is a standard 15-mile diameter CBC circle centred slightly north of Concession Road B. The area includes all of Wheatley and Wheatley Provincial Park to the northeast, and all of Seacliff and Leamington to the northwest.

It was an excellent year for birds at Point Pelee, with many significant sightings to report. A total of 292 species was found, which is well above the long-term annual average of 281.0 species dating back to 1980 inclusive ($n = 34$). Remarkably it was the second-highest annual total ever recorded at Point Pelee, with a total of 292 species also recorded in 2012. The 292 total is exceeded only by the 301 species that were found during 2005, which was truly an exceptional year. In contrast the lowest annual totals were tallied in both 1989 and 1984, when only 271 species were found in each of those years.

The entire 12-page report for 2013, illustrated with 22 colour photographs, can be seen here:

<http://essexcountynature.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/point-pelee-birds-2013.pdf>

**The Birds of Point Pelee**

Point Pelee bird sightings (both current and historical) can be sent to:
wormington@juno.com

The Point Pelee database is used for multiple purposes:

- Annual Summaries (such as this current one for 2013)
- Seasonal sightings that are published in the journal *North American Birds*
- For a major publication which is currently in progress — *The Birds of Point Pelee*

Activities and Excursions

Mar. 16th – Outing - Late Winter Birding Walk. Kory Renaud will lead a late Winter (or early Spring) birding walk at Hillman Marsh. Meet at 9:00 am at the Hillman Marsh parking lot.

April 6th - The Friends of Ojibway Prairie, Annual General Meeting, Sunday, April 6, 2:00 P.M., Ojibway Nature Centre. Guest speaker: Stephen A. Marshall from the University of Guelph. Author of the book *FLIES: THE NATURAL HISTORY AND DIVERSITY OF DITTERA*. All welcome.

Apr. 9th – General Membership Meeting. Dr. Alan Trenhaile from the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Windsor will be speaking to the group about climate change. This talk will outline the basic science behind climate change, the evidence for present and recent changes, and the impact of these changes on natural systems from the global to the local scale. Meet at 7:30 pm at Ojibway Nature Centre.

Apr. 11th – Canada South Land Trust Annual Dinner. Paul Pratt will present a talk on Brazil's coastal forests and birdlife within this endangered habitat. The CSLT annual dinner will be held in the Caboto Club in the Da Vinci Room. Doors open at 6:00 pm and dinner is served at 7:00 pm. A silent auction is planned with donations welcome. Call for more details at 519-944-0825 or email bettlear@mnsi.net.

Apr. 13th – Outing – Walk through Kopegaron Woods. Dave Kraus will lead a walk at Kopegaron. Meet in the parking lot at 2:00 pm.

Apr. 26th – Outing – Eastern Bluebird walk with Don Bissonnette. Join Club member Don for a nice spring hike in search of Eastern Bluebirds and hopefully other birds and some wildflowers. Meet at the Greenway Parking lot at the Arner Townline (County 23), just North of No. 20. Start time is 9:30 am and is expected to end around 11:30 am.

April 27th-Earth Day Bake Sale-Please join us at Malden Park for a Heritage Committee fundraiser 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Looking for volunteers to donate bake goods and also to help out at the booth. Please contact Cathy Lapain at aclrab@xplornet.com to volunteer. We need a lot of bake goods to make this fundraiser a success so please donate generously!

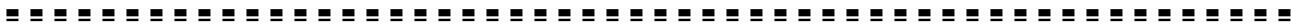
May 3rd to May 4th – Outing – Dave Kraus' Annual Pelee Island trip. Join Club member Dave for his annual Pelee Island trip. See the write-up on Page 8 for further details.

May 10th – Outing – Eastern Bluebird walk with Don Bissonnette. Join Club member Don for a nice spring hike in search of Eastern Bluebirds and hopefully other birds and some wildflowers. Meet at the Greenway Parking lot at the Arner Townline (County 23), just North of No. 20. Start time is 9:30 am and is expected to end around 11:30 am.

May 14th – Membership meeting – Join Robert Krausz, from Fredericton, New Brunswick, speaking on “All for Naught: Zero Waste's Reality Check for Community-Led Sustainability”.

Meet at 7:30 pm at Ojibway Nature Centre. This speaker is provided through the Windsor Essex County Environment Committee (WECEC) "Green Speakers Series".

June 11th – Membership meeting – Charles Wilkins is the author of fifteen books. In 2011, Wilkins undertook the most exhilarating and daring of his numerous adventures as a writer. At the age of 63, he joined a crew of 16 and, after a year of intense training, rowed across the Atlantic Ocean in a fragile experimental rowboat. He was motivated (in his own words) "by a lifelong fascination with exotic travel, by a deep curiosity about the planet, and by a question: What would happen if rather than merely enduring risk and uncertainty as we add years, we decided instead to embrace risk, to juice up on it... reclaim our bodies... re-establish ground." The result of that Atlantic crossing is Wilkins' most recent book, Little Ship of Fools, published by Greystone Books.



**Essex County Field Naturalists' Club
Membership Form – Due January 1, 2013**

Individual membership \$20.00 / year _____ Family membership \$25.00 / year _____
Student (full-time) \$10.00 / year _____ Sustaining membership \$30.00 / year _____

Tax Receipt Eligible: Life membership \$500.00 _____
Donation _____

Publications: Wildflowers of the Canadian Erie Islands by Mary Celestino \$15 _____
Fishes of Essex County and Surrounding Waters By Lynda D. Corkum \$25 _____
www.fishesofessexcounty.com

Name _____

Street _____ City _____

Province _____ Postal Code _____ Phone Number _____

E-mail _____ I wish to receive the Egret by email.

Please contact me to volunteer at ECFNC events!

Thank you!

Make cheques payable to: Essex County Field Naturalists' Club
Devonshire Mall P.O., P. O. Box 23011, Windsor, Ontario N8X 5B5