



The Egret

the Newsletter of the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club

Inside this issue ...

ECFNC Activities at a Glance	1
ECFNC Contacts.....	2
President Report 2014.....	3
21 st Pelee Island Trip.....	4
Mudpuppy	6
Bee Book Review	8
Windsor Essex Nature Sightings ...	10
Paper Reprints.....	11
Baillie Birdathon.....	20
Activities and Excursions	21
Membership Form.....	23

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

March 15th – Outing – Dave Kraus' Tree ID workshop

April 8th – General Meeting – Tammy Brown and Point Pelee Snake and Savannah Restoration

April 25th – Outing - Point Pelee Bird Walk at Point Pelee

April 26th – Earth Day Bake Sale

May 2nd and 3rd – Outing - Dave Kraus' Pelee Island trip

May 9th – Outing - Peg Hurst and Heinz Bush

May 13th – General Meeting - Barb MacDonell and the Parkway Project

May 24th – Outing - Cedar Creek Reptile and Amphibian Hike

June 10th – General Meeting - Krystal Hann speaking

June outing – Tom to check on Kentucky Coffee Tree area

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

Devonshire Mall P.O.
P. O. Box 23011
Windsor, Ontario N8X 5B5

Information

ECFNC website
www.essexcountynature.com
Egret email
sheeva.nakhaie@gmail.com
ECFNC fax # 519-839-4795

Ojibway Nature Centre
519-966-5852
Point Pelee National Park
519-322-5700
Essex Region Conservation Auth.
519-776-5209

ECFNC Contacts

President: Jesse Gardner Costa (zissoucosta@gmail.com)
Vice-President: Dave Kraus (519-825-7491)
Secretary: JoAnn Grondin (519-734-0056)
Treasurer: Cathy Lapain (519-776-6097)
Membership Secretary: Carl Maiolani
(carlmaiolani@cogeco.ca, 519-972-1399)
Directors:
Linda Menard-Watt (519-734-1879)
Kory Renaud (koryrenaud@gmail.com)
Sarah Baldo (519-300-0039)
Claire Sanders (sandersc@uwindsor.ca)
Steve Marks (steve.marks66@gmail.com)
Tom Preney (tomprenney@hotmail.com)
Jess Rose (roset@uwindsor.ca)

Chairpersons/Liaisons:

Ontario Nature Liaison: JoAnn Grondin
ERCA Liaison: Sarah Baldo
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: Jesse Gardner Costa
Windsor Essex County Environmental Committee: Jesse Gardner Costa
Canada South Land Trust Liaison: Dave Kraus
Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Liaison: Claire Sanders and Steve Marks

Committees:

Egret Editorial: Sheeva Nakhaie (chair), Sarah Baldo, 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, Kory Renaud, Sheeva Nakhaie (co chairs)
Social Media: Kory Renaud and Sarah Baldo

President Report for 2014**By Jesse Gardner Costa**

Dear Club Members,

2014 was a very productive year, we've taken on a number of projects and continue to build connections throughout the county. We had our first ever BioBlitz (24 hour species count of Ojibway), which also supplemented our inventory of Ojibway Shores and the campaign to save the property. There are a number of restoration projects underway. We've also had some great speakers, as well as collaborated with the Windsor Essex County Environment Committee to bring higher profile presenters.

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

Annual Achievement Awards – We were recognized for our contributions to the environment this year by ERCA; we received the 2014 Conservation volunteer group award. If that wasn't enough, Don Bissonnette won the Individual Conservation award for all his hard work on the Blue Bird committee (keep up the great work Don!) It's certainly nice to be recognized, especially on an anniversary and I'd like to thank all members, past and present for their hard work and dedication to the club. Because of you we're well respected and considered valuable in dealing with environmental issues, all on top of being great naturalists. Our current executive hopes to build on this legacy and continue to promote and explore Essex County.

Windsor Airport Tree Planting - Despite some delays, we hope to plant again. Ian Nesbitt and Little River Enhancement have been leading the charge, next steps are replacing trees that have died in Phase 2 (though we did have a very high success rate 80-90s %). Phase 3 will hopefully be on the horizon.

Speaking of expanding and maintaining green-space, Phil Roberts, my predecessor, has been appointed Director of Parks for the City of Windsor. We're very excited for him and hope to see some improvements of our green-space around the city. Congratulations Phil! Hopefully this will provide more opportunities for the City of Windsor and Field Naturalists to work together.

Riparian Buffer Restoration Big Creek – The project is currently underway. ERCA and the MNR will be providing "the boots on the ground support" to restore riparian zones along Big Creek. Work will hopefully continue in the spring. As an aside, we're still looking for willing landowners to allow this type of restoration work to occur on their properties. So far we have a small number of stakeholders that serve as a proof of concept but we're always looking for more. If you or someone you know would like to be a part of this project, please contact Linda Menard Watt on the executive.

Ojibway Shores – *As a recap: the last natural shoreline along the Detroit River was slated to be clear-cut and filled in fall 2013. 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.

We've spent 2014 taking catalogue of all the species on the property. We've had experts go out onto the property, some of our members have also taken inventories (You may have participated in one of our many outings to Ojibway shores) and we also collected data on the day of the BioBlitz.

We're still waiting to hear what the ultimate fate of the property will be, unfortunately we've haven't gotten the answers yet. We must remain optimistic and continue to press our local politicians on these issues. The 'environmental coalition' consisting of many environmental NGOs continue to meet and strategize on what the next steps should be.

1st Annual Bioblitz - We did it! So far, we've identified 1119 species but data is still coming in. Tom and I have been working on a summary of the event and the report will be available on the website and facebook and we can email it out to members if they want a copy.

We're planning for a BioBlitz this year on July 18, 19th and preparations have already begun. Our goal is to be bigger and better than the last event and hopefully break the Canadian record for number of species. The committee is always looking for volunteers to get involved in any way they want. Contact us!

All this work wouldn't be possible without the excellent board members of the executive. There's such a diverse base of knowledge among them that has allowed us to undertake so many projects. It also helps that they're very capable people that are supportive of each other's' ideas. In 2015 I suspect we'll focus on reaching out and working with our groups, not to mention a few new projects that we're planning. Stay tuned and feel free to contact me anytime!

Thank you for your dedication and support,
Jesse Gardner Costa

**21st Annual ECFNC Weekend Trip to Pelee Island - Saturday May 2 &
Sunday May 3, 2015**
Organized and Lead By Dave Kraus

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 again 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
 text: 519 257 8674

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

Unexpectedly amazing... The Mudpuppy **Steve the Snake Guy**



In southern Ontario, there are 13 types of salamanders. Essex County is astonishingly devoid of most of them, although that becomes less surprising when one considers their habitats, and what would be available to them here. However, the most unusual of them all lives and thrives here – our most abundant salamander by far, the mudpuppy.

Mudpuppies (*Necturus maculosus*) are neotenic, that is to say they spend their entire life in the larval state and do not transform into adult forms

as most other Ontario salamanders do. External gills, a paddle-like tail, and a totally aquatic lifestyle are with them for the entire span of their 10-35+ years. Essex County is right in the centre of the species' range, and in the County they are found in the Detroit River, Lake Erie, and Lake St. Clair, along with a few of the tributaries.

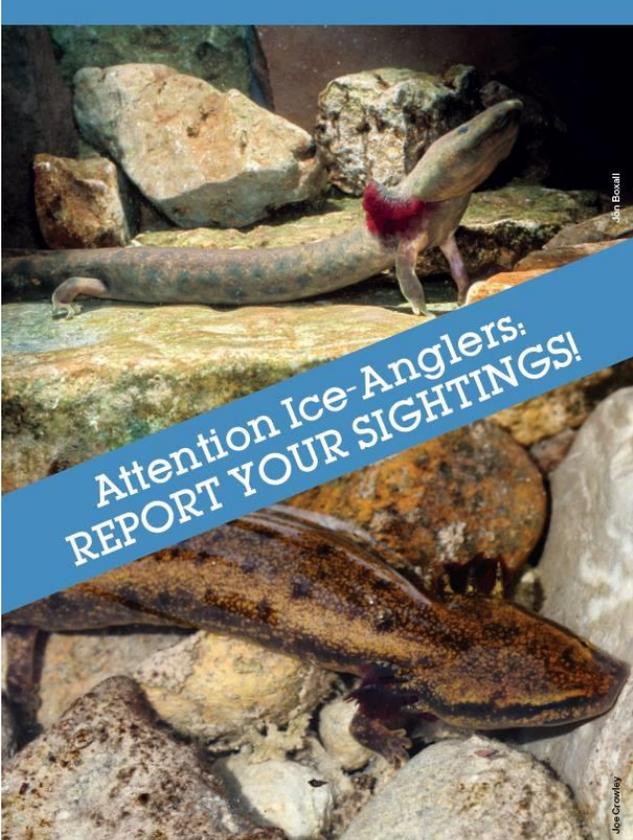
This is by far the largest of our salamander species, with large adults being more than 40 cm long, while most adults are 30 or more centimetres in length. Most people go their entire lives without ever seeing this wonderful unusual animal. Ice fisherman are the most likely to encounter one, and that is the hook of a poster campaign by Ontario Nature, hoping to get some good sightings data.

Amphibians are ectothermic. That is, their body temperatures are the same as their surroundings. They regulate their body temperatures by seeking out microhabitats with

appropriate temperatures for what they intend to do. Most amphibians in Canada have to hibernate to escape freezing, as their body temperature would literally kill them if exposed to temperatures much below freezing. The hibernation sites of amphibians are below the line of frost, whether in a pond environment, beneath the muck at the bottom, or below the level of ground frost in an upland environment, as in the case of toads and most terrestrial salamanders. So why do I keep referring to mudpuppies as unusual and unexpectedly amazing? These amphibians are more active than other amphibians in the winter months! In fact, their *peak* activity time is winter. Their more dormant times are the summer months! They are not only active at temperatures below freezing, they are actually feeding and breeding in water temperatures that are lower than freezing! It's true! These ectotherms are capable of foraging and digesting food in temperatures of running stream water that is flowing at or slightly below 0°C. Witnessing a mudpuppy nudging a near-frozen hibernating green frog out from under a rock in the stream and swallow it whole in February is fantastic!

How is this phenomenon possible? The answer is linked to DNA. Mudpuppies have more DNA per cell than any other animal on Earth! For example, human cells have about 6 billion base pairs of DNA each. Mudpuppy cells have approximately 180 billion base pairs! Other salamanders have on average 10-90 billion base pairs of DNA per cell. The hyper-abundant DNA in mudpuppies provides them with, among other things, a range of enzymes specifically suited for activity at really cold temperatures!

Mudpuppies, like all salamanders, are carnivores. Prey species range from invertebrates like worms and insect larvae, to vertebrates like frogs and fish. The breeding season, at least in Ontario, is during the months of November and December. Males will attempt to attract a female, and convince her, with nudging and rubbing behaviours, to pick up his dropped spermatophore with her cloaca. The female lays between 10 and 200 clear jelly-like eggs, stuck to and under rocks in rivers and streams. The young hatch in early spring, just 30-60 days later. Young mudpuppies, only 2.5cm long, are marked very differently than adults. They are striped the entire length of their bodies in dark gray and yellow, where the adults are of light, solid body colour, with faint spots all over. General body shape is quite similar. Mudpuppies have external, bright red, feather-like gills near the head which filter oxygen from the water. Four short legs,



**Attention Ice-Anglers:
REPORT YOUR SIGHTINGS!**

Does the "fish" you just caught have legs?
If so, it may be a mudpuppy - Ontario's largest salamander.

Report your sightings to the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas by taking a photo and sending it to atlas@ontarionature.org. Even better, download the atlas app at ontarionature.org/app to quickly and easily report all your species sightings.

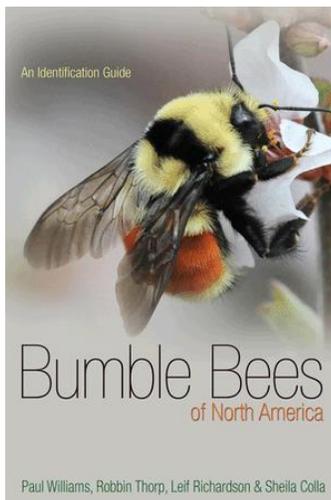
Ontario Nature
A registered charity protecting Ontario's wild spaces and species since 1991
ontarionature.org

allow clambering around, and a huge paddle-shaped tail enable rapid swimming action. Mudpuppies are sexually mature at 5 or 6 years of age, at about 20cm in length.

Fisherman sometimes catch mudpuppies through the ice. Naturally, this is because the salamanders are actively feeding in winter. When the “ugly” unexpected creature is pulled up, they are often cast aside, left on the ice to die. Instead, it is encourage that one gently removes the hook and releases the salamander back into the water as quickly as possible, without touching the gills. This will allow them to keep up their role in the ecosystem of our Great Lakes Watershed. Some fishermen believe they are somehow dangerous, but this simply isn’t true! Please join me in doing everything we can to preserve this species, along with the other unpopular, misunderstood animals in Ontario!

Book Review

Reviewer: Russ Jones



Title: Bumble Bees of North America, an Identification Guide

Author: Paul H. Williams, Robbin W. Thorp, Leif L.

Richardson, Sheila R. Colla

Publisher: Princeton University Press (March 30 2014)

ISBN: 0691152225

List Price: \$30.22

Summary: There’s been a lot of buzz about bees recently. The threats they face in our industrialized world are broad, varied and well publicized. The more we learn about this vital group of animals, the more aware we become and the more appreciation they will receive, hopefully leading to a society where we can find ways to conduct our business in a way that allows insects to continue to fill their important roles in the natural system. Creating easy to use

guides like this one will go a long way in raising this awareness.

Billed as “the first comprehensive guide to North American bumble bees to be published in more than a century”, the book covers all 46 species of bumble bee presently recognized in North America. It is lavishly illustrated with graphs, charts, creative colour diagrams neatly portraying variants within species, beautifully detailed range maps (something often lacking in insect books) and stunning photography. It has extensive identification keys and the latest taxonomic revisions drawn from data gathered through museum collections and the latest molecular research. Upon holding the book for the first time, my immediate thoughts were that it was an impressive book. There are 16-20 species that occur locally so when trying to identify your specimen, most of the book can be eliminated from range maps alone. With some practice and a good hand lens (or dissecting microscope), narrowing your bee down to species is a simple as going through the keys (don’t worry, there’s lots of explanations and illustrations that pretty well walk you through the process). If you manage to get that far you are rewarded with an incredibly detailed species account with the following sections;

Identification. This section talks about similar species and basic identification features

Hand Characteristics. This subsection describes the features easily seen in the hand or with a good photograph. Some species may be identified top species by these features and range alone.

Microscopic Characteristics. This subsection describes some of the subtle features only visible through careful examination. Although most people may not be familiar with some of the anatomical parts discussed here, the book does a wonderful job of illustrating and describing each and every one of them. Often times, these characteristics are necessary to distinguish similar species within the same range.

Range and Status. A detailed description of the known range and a general description of the status (abundance) within its range.

Habitat. What type of habitat the bee typically inhabits

Example Food Plants. Lists all of the known plants the bee has been observed and documented feeding on

Behaviour. Talks about general behavior, nest types and usual locations, breeding and movements

Parasitism by Other Bees. Though there is still a lot to learn here, the book attempts to go into some detail about known parasites of the particular bumble bee being discussed. In many cases it simply says “unknown”, which is also valuable information because you may be able to fill some of these gaps with your own observations if you are lucky!

My thoughts: It is a bit too big to be a field guide but not by much, which is no big deal to me because I spend as much time in my backyard prairie garden identifying bugs as anywhere else. Thankfully there are only 46 species, but even so it required 208 jam packed pages to squeeze it all in. It's well worth the list price, but easily obtained for far less from various online sources. This book offers something previously unavailable and it is completely up to date, those two facts alone make it a valuable tool for the biologist, gardener, photographer or anyone else interested in bumble bees. I even saw a copy on the shelf at the local Chapters, a testament to the growing interest (and concern) for pollinators in general and bumble bees in particular. If only all plant animal groups had an inexpensive, comprehensive and easy to use identification book! We can all dream right?

Windsor Essex Nature Sightings

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Windsor-Essex-Nature-Sightings/174034306043155>

Visit Windsor Essex Nature Sightings on Facebook. This page was designed for reporting/documenting flora and fauna sightings in Essex County. You don't have to be a facebook member to visit this page.

On February 14, 2015 Theresa LeMire had a surprise visitor to her LaSalle backyard bird feeders a beautiful Red-headed Woodpecker. "My Valentine, better than any chocolate or flowers!" Photo by: Theresa LeMire



On January 26, 2015 Tom Preney found three Trumpeter Swans, two adults and one immature at Lakeview Park Marina. These birds are still being seen periodically at the mouth of Little River. Photo by: Kory Renaud



Paper Reprints
Submitted by Betty Learmouth

Wild turkey sightings in Tecumseh and east Windsor
Story by Ian Naisbitt
Special to Shoreline Week
Friday, January 9, 2015

This was an extraordinary observation in our serene, suburban neighbourhood. My neighbour across the street knocked on my door and excitedly said, "Come on out and see the turkeys beside your house!" I thought it was a joke, but just in case, I ran and got my shoes; out the front door I flew. To my amazement, six female Wild Turkeys were walking on the boulevard beside our home! My neighbour told me he saw them jump over the fence off a house down St. Thomas Street. Because of our presence on Woodridge Drive, the rafter of turkeys paraded around us and walked along the middle of St. Thomas. Cars on the road stopped and drivers were delighted to see the flock of birds.

These feathered wanderers were wary of the traffic and gaggle of people, so they scurried to the safety of the grassy area of the boulevard. The skittish hens sprinted and flew eastward along St. Thomas towards Centennial Drive; turned the corner and ambled north. Another neighbour stopped his truck and told us these turkey have been seen roving around Tecumseh for the past six months. He has seen them on the west side of Lesperance Road. These large birds eat seeds (wheat, barley, oats, corn, soybeans, snails, acorn nuts, fruit (hawthorn, wild grapes) and insects (grasshoppers, crickets, beetles).

I imagine they must be visiting bird feeders in backyards to survive through the winter. Wild Turkeys were introduced into southern Ontario by the Ministry of Natural Resources beginning in 1983. I believe MNR introduced the birds to the Essex Region in the late 1990s.

It appears they have successfully adapted to the habitat in east Windsor and Tecumseh.

Usually, these birds prefer woodland areas beside open fields, and they will use natural corridors that connect these habitats. They require mature trees to roost in at night time for protection. It is quite surprising to see turkeys in a suburban setting of streets with homes, lawns and fences.

Evidently, these Wild Turkey hens are comfortable rambling about Tecumseh, especially after Christmas Day supper!

Naturalized areas

There are several naturalized areas and corridors in East Windsor for the birds to feed, roost and travel together: Ford of Canada Essex Engine Plant property and their natural corridor, the Little River Valley (Golf Course, Corridor Park, Derwent Park and Twin Oaks Corridor Park), East Riverside Park (Blue Heron Hill and Lake) and Lakeshore Woods.

However, it remains to be seen whether they are the same or separate flocks.

Ian Naisbitt is chair-person and a founding member of the Little River Enhancement Group.

Snowy owls spotted around Essex County

Majestic birds have been seen near Safety Village, WFCU Centre and Windsor Airport

By Caleb Workman

Special to Shoreline Week

Friday, January 23, 2015

Snowy Owls have been showing up all around Essex County and many residents are noticing an increase in their numbers.

These northerners have been migrating further south every year and our region has been given the opportunity to temporarily home these birds through the winter months in exchange for their bird watching value.

Ojibway Nature Centre naturalist Tom Preney has been following the birds around for a few years in Essex County.

He says although his specialty and favourite species are reptiles and amphibians, snowy owls have a winter majesty that he enjoys observing during the winter months.

“This year has been a terrific year for snowy owls throughout southwestern Ontario and we’re starting to see all kinds of snowy owls popping up in unusual places,” he explained.

Preney said there have been sightings at places such as the Safety Village and the WFCU Centre.

He said that in these unusual places that they are spotting the owls there also is a good number of them showing up.

Areas to see them

Preney said there are many areas for people to see these snowy owls.

“There’s been quite a few showing up at the Windsor Airport,” said Preney. “Anywhere in Essex County, where there is a lot of farmland or barren areas, there is a chance you could see one of these birds perched on a street post or in old farm equipment in the middle of a field.” Preney said these areas that mimic the Arctic’s land have the highest chance of homing a snowy bird.

With all the reports he said they are estimating about 25 different sightings, but at the airport they’ve have had about 30 they had to capture and relocate so Preney believes there could be as many as 50 to 100 in the area, maybe even more.

“People who see these owls get very excited because they think of it as almost a mythical creature,” said Preney.

“I think it’s been getting really good because it’s sparking an interest in people to get outdoors during the winter months and see these birds.

“They’re not a common bird in this area so it’s good for people to take the opportunity to get out and look for them.”

Preney said the main reason Essex County is seeing so many snowy owls is because in the arctic, where they are from, lemmings – their food source – aren’t enough to sustain.

“Something unusual is happening,” said Preney. “The amount of lemmings is allowing the breeding numbers to be higher with the snowy owls and the young snowy owls, because there are so many, need to find somewhere to find their own food sources.”

Snowy owls have about 15 to 19 hatchlings when they lay in the spring.”

All the young that are produced up north have found alternate food sources in places like Essex County.

Preney said the reason this happens is because the elder owls get the primary hunting grounds during the winter seasons forcing the young out.

“We tend to see the younger snowy owls, although we do get a few older ones,” said Preney.

“The younger ones generally have more markings of dark brown and black along the breast while the older ones have a seemingly pure white coat.”

Keep distance

Although the owls don’t associate us with predators, residents should keep their distance from the animals because they don’t see many humans in the high Arctic and are unfamiliar with us.

The snowy owls in this area have been preying upon small mice and even water fowl.

Preney said some people think the snowy owl considers anything smaller than itself potential prey.

Anyone who sees a snowy owl should call it in to the Ojibway Nature Centre. “We’re always interested to hear about people’s wild life sightings,” said Preney. “Also, there is a program online called E-bird which is a database that people use to share and record their sighting online.”

Monarch butterflies rebound in Mexico

Mark Stevenson

The Associated Press

In The Windsor Star, January 28, 2015

MEXICO CITY – The number of Monarch butterflies that reached wintering grounds in Mexico has rebounded 69 per cent from last year’s lowest-on-record levels, but their numbers remain very low, the World Wildlife Fund says.

Last year, the Monarchs covered only 0.67 hectares, the smallest area since record-keeping began in 1993. This year, the butterflies rebounded to cover 1.13 hectares, according to a formal census by Mexican environmental authorities and scientists released Tuesday.

The orange-and-black butterflies are suffering from loss of milkweed habitat in the United States, illegal logging in Mexico and climate change. Each year, the butterflies make a migration from Canada to Mexico and find the same pine and fir forests to spend the winter, even though no butterfly lives to make the round trip.

“Of course it is good news that the forest area occupied by Monarchs this season increased,” said Omar Vidal, head of the World Wildlife Fund in Mexico. “But let’s be crystal clear, 1.13 hectares is very very low, and it is still the second-smallest forest surface occupied by this butterfly in 22 years of monitoring.

At their peak in 1996, the Monarchs covered more than 18 hectares in the mountains west of Mexico City.

Lincoln Brower, a leading entomologist at Sweet Briar College in Virginia, has said that with anything below two hectares, “they will remain in the danger category and I will continue to be concerned.”

“A population covering four or five hectares would be a sign of significant recovery,” he said.

The butterfly population has plummeted before, and then partially recovered.

In 2001, driving rain and bitter cold killed millions, leading scientists to speculate that migrating populations would be seriously depleted in 2002. To their surprise, twice as many returned as some had predicted.

In 2004, unfavourable weather, pollution and deforestation caused a drastic decline in the population, but the next year the butterflies bounced back.

But the overall tendency since 1993 points to a steep, progressive decline.

Each time the Monarchs rebound, they do so at lower levels. The species is found in many countries and is not in danger of extinction, but experts fear the migration could be disrupted if few butterflies make the trip.

The temperate climate of the mountains west of Mexico City normally creates an ideal setting for the Monarchs. Every fall, tens of millions of the delicate creatures fly thousands of miles to their ancestral breeding grounds, creating clouds of butterflies. They clump together on trees, forming chandelier shapes of orange and black.

The migration is an inherited trait: it is unclear how they find the route back to the same patch of forest. Some scientists suggest the butterflies may release chemicals marking the migratory path

and fear that if their numbers fall too low, the chemical traces will not be strong enough for others to follow.

Extreme cold and drought hurt butterfly populations, and in Mexico, illegal logging can punch holes in the forest canopy that shelters them, creating a situation in which cold rainfall could kill millions.

Vidal said Mexico has been able to essentially stop illegal logging in the Monarch protected reserve, but he said habitat loss in the United States remains a huge problem. Milkweed, the butterflies' main source of food has been crowded out by pesticide-resistant crops.

“The question we should all be asking now” is whether the U.S. can halt the loss of milkweed habitat,” he said.

*Conservation Award winners recognized
Shoreline
Friday, January 30, 2015*

The Essex Region Conservation Authority recognized organizations and individuals that have made significant contributions to the region's sustainability with the 2014 Conservation Awards at its annual general meeting last week.

“It is important to recognize and thank those who work vigilantly at creating a healthier environment in the Windsor-Essex region,” said ERCA chairperson Ed Sleiman.

Caesars Windsor's CodeGreen was lauded for their many environmental outreach and education initiatives that include their employees, guests and the broader community.

Gino Piccioni, of Timberland Homes, and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation were recognized with awards for Environmental Achievement.

Piccioni has demonstrated his commitment to the environment and community through the preservation and enhancement of the Turkey Creek wetlands.

He was also the developer of the first Energy Star community in the region.

Over the past five years alone, the TD FEF has contributed \$400,000 to more than 100 environmental projects in the Windsor-Essex region, many which would not otherwise have been able to take place.



ECFNC members Don Bissonnette and Jesse Gardner Costa accepting ERCA Conservation Awards. Photo courtesy of the Essex Region Conservation Authority Facebook Page.

The **Town of Lakeshore** was awarded the Robert Pulleyblank Award for Municipal Environmental Achievement.

The Town has significantly invested in environmental improvements over the last few years, including upgrades to its drinking water and wastewater treatment plants, waterfront improvement and rehabilitation, and re-greening efforts.

Kris Ives, ERCA's curator/education coordinator, was honoured with the Dennis Chase Staff Award for joy, optimism and love of local conservation.

Gertrude Pare was the recipient of the John R. Park Homestead Award for her preservation of traditional arts and Franco-Ontarien culture.

Don Bissonnette, a leader in the protection of the Eastern Bluebird for over 25 years was recognized for his volunteer efforts.

The Essex County Field Naturalists' Club was honoured for three decades of commitment to volunteerism and environmental sustainability. Jesse Costa Gardner represented the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club.

Nicole Palazzi, a teacher at W.D. Davis Public School, received an award for leadership in conservation education.

Charles Desmarais, of Stoney Point, received the Conservation Farm Award for his on-going stewardship of the land.

*The monarch massacre
Herbicide use on milkweed plants blamed
Darryl Fears
February 11, 2015
The Washington Post*

Washington – Threatened animals such as elephants, porpoises and lions grab the headlines, but the plight of the monarch butterflies is nothing short of a massacre. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services summed it up in just one grim statistic Monday: since 1990, about 970 million have vanished.

It happened as farmers and homeowners sprayed herbicides on milkweed plants, which serve as the butterflies' nursery, food source and home. In an attempt to counter two decades of destruction, Fish and Wildlife launched a partnership with two private conservation groups, the National Wildlife Federation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation basically to grow milkweed like crazy in the hopes of saving the monarchs.

Monarch butterflies are a keystone species that once fluttered throughout North America by the billions. They alighted from Mexico to Canada each spring on a trek that required six generations of the insect to complete. Afterward, young monarchs about the quarter of the weight of a dime, that know nothing about the flight pattern through the United States and

Mexico, fly back, resting, birthing and dining on milkweed.

The extinction of certain butterfly species is not unheard of. The blueberry-coloured Xerces blue disappeared from San Francisco years ago, and recently Fish and Wildlife announced that two subspecies – the Rockland skipper and Zestos in South Florida – haven't been seen since 2004 and are probably extinct. Pesticide use also has caused a collapse of other pollinators – wasps, beetles and especially honeybees.

Fish and Wildlife is reviewing a petition filed by the Center for Biological Diversity to list monarch butterflies as an endangered species requiring special protection to survive. The agency is studying whether that's necessary and also trying to do more to help restore the population.

The agency is granting \$2 million to the federation to raise awareness about the need for milkweed, provide seeds to anyone willing to plant it and to plant the seeds in open space – roadsides, parks, forests and patio flower boxes, to name a few places. Another \$1.2 million will go to the foundation as seed money to generate a larger fundraising match from private organizations.

Fish and Wildlife will chip in to plant milkweed seeds in refuges and other areas it controls to create 200,000 acres of habitat along the U.S. Interstate 35 corridor from Texas to Minnesota, where 50 per cent of monarchs migrate. Fish and Wildlife will encourage other federal and state agencies to do the same on public lands and is working with the governments of Mexico and Canada to help restore the iconic butterfly.

The monarch butterfly's trip to and from Mexico takes it past a killing field of agriculture. But farmers aren't entirely to blame for the insect's decline, said Dan Ashe, director of Fish and Wildlife.

"We've all been responsible. We are the consumers of agricultural products. I eat corn. American farmers are not the enemy. Can they be part of the solution? Yes," Ashe said.

"It's not about this wonderful mystical creature. It's about us."

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota underscored that point during the announcement of the partnership in Washington. Her mother, a second-grade teacher, was wild about the monarch butterflies, Klobuchar said, so much so that she dressed as one each year to call attention to their return flight home. Her mother carried a sign, Klobuchar said, "Mexico or bust."

"This is something that means a lot to my family," the senator said.

Klobuchar said her role is to help the foundation bring private partners to the effort and help the Fish and Wildlife Service to persuade public entities to get involved. Minnesota, she said, has a monarch festival each year.

Collin O'Mara, president of the National Wildlife Federation, said momentum is building. Charlotte, N.C., and St. Louis, he said, are two cities that have declared themselves as sanctuaries for monarchs.

But if the new effort generates widespread interest, the federation might find it hard to keep up with demand. Not enough seeds are available, and not just any seed can survive anywhere. Milkweed seeds grow everywhere in the United States, but they grow better when adapted to local conditions, he said.

Rebounding bald eagles now face bacterial killer

Threat found in reservoirs across the U.S.

In The Windsor Star, February 22, 2015

Darryl Fears

The Washington Post

Working late in a tiny Arkansas lab, Susan Wilde found herself alone with a killer.

It startled her. She jumped, let out a yelp, and took off down a hall. Wilde was running for her life, she was amazed by a discovery. She had uncovered a bacteria, one with a powerful toxin that attacked waterfowl, hiding on the underside of an aquatic leaf that grows nearly everywhere in the United States.

After 20 years of testing determined that the bacteria had never been recorded, and the brain lesions it causes had never been found before that night in 1994, Wilde recently gave her discovery a name: *Aetokthonos hydrillicola*. The Greek word means "eagle killer" for its ability to quickly kill the birds of prey. It's the latest threat to a raptor that is starting to flourish after being removed from the endangered species list.

Across the South, near reservoirs full of invasive plants from Asia called hydrilla, eagles have been stricken by this bacteria, with goes straight to their brains.

Eagles prey on American coots, which dine almost exclusively on hydrilla.

Before now, reservoirs that serve up a buffet of this plant were considered beneficial because they helped fuel the annual migration of coots from Canada to Florida and beyond, while also feeding eagles. But now the reservoirs are "death traps," said Wild, an assistant professor at the University of Georgia whose study of the topic was recently published in the journal *Phytotaxa*. In Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina and North Carolina, coots, shorebirds, ducks and eagles are dying by the dozens from the incurable lesions.

"We're attracting them to places where they're going to die, and that's not a good thing," Wilde said.

Eagles get top billing in the study because they're the U.S. national symbol, arguably the most recognized animal in America. But the bacteria and its toxin hits the coots harder. The migration of coots is a spectacle that bird watchers flock to man-made reservoirs to see. Five thousand can

descend at once on a single lake, noisy, splashing, feeding.

The only way to save the animals is to spend millions to eradicate a plant that was introduced to the United States in Florida about 60 years ago. It now grows in virtually every body of fresh water; from the southeast to California and Washington.

It grows prolifically in the Chesapeake Bay region, which is full of bald eagles and visiting coots, a dark, plump, duck-like bird with a bright orange dot for an eye.

Eagles don't mess around when they dine on coots, Wilde said. Even the head is fair game. They leave nothing but the feet, Wilde said. She theorized that the bacteria enters eagles while they're munching on the coots' guts. "The only way we can tell a bird has it is they have a characteristic in the brain, a lesion," she said.

The eagle killer might hide on the underside of leaves because it prefers shade, but Wilde and her fellow researchers haven't figured out why. It radiates outward in a circle with strange edges and she said, spikes. "It looks like it would kill eagles," she said.

Bald eagles were removed from the federal endangered species list only seven years ago. They nearly went extinct when their habitat was clear cut in the past century, their prey (such as ducks) was over hunted and a pesticide caused them to lay eggs with shells so thin their chicks couldn't survive.

Wilde and Brigette Haram, a doctoral student at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources where Wild teaches, conducted lab trials on chickens and mallard ducks to better understand the toxin, and studied other birds that were brought in acting disoriented and sick. "We haven't seen a species that's immune, Wilde said."

Baillie Birdathon

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 Baillie Fund & Bird Studies Canada

\$ 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)

Activities and Events

For further information concerning the ECFNC excursions, visit www.essexcountynature.com, or contact the executive (please see contact page). Let us know your ideas for upcoming excursions. Consider volunteering as an excursion leader!

March 15th – Outing – Join Club Member Dave Kraus for a workshop on tree identification. The event will be held at Ojibway Nature Centre and outdoors if the weather permits. There is no cost for this workshop. It starts at 2:00 pm. We will meet in the nature center and look at the tree displays before going out onto the trails (weather permitting) to do some winter tree and shrub identification as well as general nature appreciation and observation. Adults and children welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them.

SongbirdSOS, Thursday, March 19, 2015 at 8 PM on CBC-TV – Can you imagine a world without birdsong? Why are songbirds declining, and what can be done to help them? A new documentary follows birds on a visually breathtaking yet perilous journey through our changing world. [SongbirdSOS](#) was inspired by and features the work of Dr. Bridget Stutchbury. The film also offers perspectives from several additional researchers and conservationists on key threats to migratory songbirds. SongbirdSOS debuts on CBC's *The Nature of Things* in March. [Preview a clip](#) highlighting Hooded Warbler migration research. Bird Studies Canada is excited to be collaborating with SongbirdSOS Productions and Films a Cinq as Canadian Outreach Partner, to connect audiences with the issues affecting bird populations and empower citizens with the information and tools to support conservation.

March 27th - Canada South Land Trust Annual Dinner. The guest speaker at the CSLT Annual Dinner to be held Friday, March 27, 2015 will be Dan Mennill of the University of Windsor. Dan writes: I'm going to present a talk about some new research we're doing in my lab on sparrow communication. I think your group will find it quite interesting. The title of the talk is "Song of the Sparrow: Ecology, behaviour, and vocal learning in wild birds." The evening will include a fund raising Silent Auction. Donations towards the auction are welcome. Doors open at the Caboto Club at 6:00 p.m. Dinner is served at 7:00 p.m. Dinner tickets are \$35.00. Please call Betty at [519-944-0825](tel:519-944-0825) to purchase your ticket.

April 8th – General Meeting – Tammy Brown from Point Pelee will speak on the restoration work of snakes and the savannah in the park. 7:30pm at the Ojibway Nature Center.

April 25th – Outing- Point Pelee Spring Bird Walk - Meet Kory Renaud at 8am in the Visitor Centre Parking Lot. We'll hike the trails at Point Pelee in search of early spring migrants including waterfowl, warblers and other songbirds. We'll also keep our eyes out for spring wildflowers and budding trees.

April 26th - EARTH DAY BAKE SALE. Please join us at Malden park for a Heritage Committee fundraiser 10:00a.m. To 3:00p.m. Looking for volunteers to donate bake goods and also help out at the booth. Please contact Cathy Lapain at aclrab@xplornet.com or call [519-776-6097](tel:519-776-6097) (leave message). We need a lot of bake goods to make this fundraiser a success, so please donate generously. If you can't help by donating bake goods or helping out at the booth, please

drop by and buy some goodies! **If you are donating cookies or squares please try to have them packaged in 6's or 12's for easy pricing and please cover all bake goods with clear plastic wrap. Thanks! See you there!**

May 2nd and 3rd – Outing – 21st Annual Pelee Island Trip. Join Club member Dave for his annual Pelee Island trip. See the write-up on Page 4 for further details.

May 9th – Outing - Please join club member Peg Hurst for an enjoyable Saturday morning walk at Heinz Bush in Leamington. The walk starts at 10:00 am. We will enjoy an informational walk about the bush, occasionally stopping to pull garlic mustard. If you are unable to pull, you can hold a garbage bag for those who are pulling or just walk about and enjoy nature. Directions to Heinz Bush: Head south on Erie to the light at Pulford (Canadian Tire), turn left, go past the vacant Zellers and park behind it close to the road if you don't want to cross a ditch, farther to the left if you do. If you go to Google Earth and look at the Zellers Mall, the woods are directly behind it to the east.

May 13th – General Meeting – Barb MacDonell, senior environmental planner for the Ontario Ministry of Transportation will speak to the group about the 'The Parkway in the Prairie: An Introduction to the unique ecological features of the project'. 7:30pm at the Ojibway Nature Center

May 23th - Black Oak Park Clean-up: Join Field Nat Exec, Claire Sanders, and the Detroit River Canadian Cleanup on Sunday May 23rd from 11am to 2pm to help keep Black Oak in peak condition. Dress for the weather, clean up goes on rain or shine. Contact Claire for more details (info on contact page).

May 24th – Outing – Reptile and Amphibian Hike at Cedar Creek Conservation

Area- Take this unique opportunity to become a citizen scientist and join Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Regional Coordinators, Tom Preney and Jonathan Choquette to explore Cedar Creek Conservation Area. Observations will be submitted to the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas to help scientists study the populations of these fascinating creatures. The hike will start at Cedar Creek Conservation Area parking lot at 9:00am. Please come dressed appropriately for the outdoors, rubber boots are encouraged as off trail hiking may be involved while surveying. Driving directions from Windsor to Cedar Creek: Take Highway 3 East to Essex. Turn right (South) on Arner Townline (County Rd 23), go 14 km to its end. Cedar Creek will be on the West side, just after you cross County Rd 20. See <http://erca.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Cedar-Creek-Beach-Map-Sheet.pdf> for a map.

June 10th – General Meeting - Krystal Hans will present her talk "Bizarre Bug Tales: Maggots and Murder". She will discuss the history of forensic entomology, common applications of this field as well provide specific cases that she has worked on in Ohio. After this, she will present some of her PhD dissertation research and discuss how this has applications in forensic entomology and the potential importance and significance of my research. 7:30pm at the Ojibway Nature Center.

**Essex County Field Naturalists' Club
Membership Form – Due January 1, 2015**

Individual membership \$20.00 / year _____ Family membership \$25.00 / year _____

Student (full-time) \$10.00 / 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 _____

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