

The EGRET

the newsletter of the *Essex County Field Naturalists Club*



Report on 10th Anniversary Celebration

by Pam Simpson

September 18th, 1994 was a spectacular day for the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club. Not only did we have excellent participation from local nature organizations and businesses who displayed their brochures and items, but we also had over 80



asm of the 10th anniversary committee. Thank you to Paul Pratt and Karen Cedar for obtaining Ojibway Park and Nature Centre for the day and for your tireless work on the 18th. Thanks also to Denise Hartley for co-ordinating the displays, Tom Bruner for his help in distributing flyers and for helping set up

the displays, Phil Roberts for his invaluable ideas and assistance in organizing our display, Myrtle Bessette for her contributions and note-taking, Gerry Waldron for his ideas and for leading the hike on tree identification and of course Tom Hurst for his leadership, ideas and support of me as chair. I would also like to acknowledge Tom Hince for his time in leading the bird hike, Jeff Larson for leading the butterfly hike,

Continued on page 2...

people participate in the scheduled nature hikes. The weather was just beautiful for an outdoor event. The club gathered quite a few new members and many new people came out to the next meeting at Union Gas because they learned about the club at Ojibway. We sold T-shirts and patches and calendars as well and in general made the community more aware of the club and it's activities. Of course none of this would have been possible without the dedication and enthusi-

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Paul Pratt for helping us learn about wildflowers and Yvette LePage and Susan Walker for organizing the children's games. Also Ian McInnis for designing our attractive flyer. Thank you also for Tom Hurst, Denise Hartley, Margaret Jennings, Karen Cedar, Myrtle Bessette, Muriel Kassimatis and Thelma Walker for assisting at the Devonshire Mall Display.

At the end of the day when the majority of the committee stayed to reminisce around the campfire I realized that I would miss getting together with the committee. We had fun planning the event and I know they share in my satisfaction of a job well done. It could not have been done without everyone working together.

As Tom Hurst, Paul Pratt, Karen Cedar and myself were walking to the parking lot around 10:00 p.m. it was very symbolic that an Egret flew over the nature centre as if to say thank you for trying to make things better for all wildlife. □

Pelee Wings - Important Announcement!

Pelee Wings will remain open until January 1 for all your nature and binocular Christmas gifts!

Open every day except Monday at 636 Point Pelee Drive, Leamington - (519) 326-5193.

President's Report

by Tom Hurst



Esex County has been blessed with another bountiful fall. It has kept us all busy following bird migrations, seed collecting and observing nature's

“...raising money for the Heinz Bush gives us a chance to raise awareness and do our part to preserve our community's environmental health.”

preparations for winter. But now that our trees' green boughs have transformed to naked skeletons of bare branches we should take a moment to ponder the stupidity of our Provincial Government.

Last year Finance Minister Floyd Laughren cancelled the property tax rebate program for woodlots of Conservation Authorities and private land owners. Since then it has partially softened this policy as it affects Conservation Authorities; however, private landowners are still subject to tax increases of up to 300%. Their properties are now being taxed as if they were residential property. It is obvious that

in Essex County, at least, it will not be long before many of our remnant natural areas are converted to urban or agricultural use. It is criminal that woodlot owners who, of their own accord, have preserved natural habitats which in turn benefit society as a whole are being penalized for their public service. I would urge everyone to contact their M.P.P. and the Government Ministers and inform them of the devastating consequences of this

policy for Ontario and specifically for Essex County. It would be a shame for our descendants to inherit a sterile wasteland so that the Government can

meet its short term budgetary goals.

The Field Naturalists' effort to save one natural remnant, namely the Heinz Bush, is continuing to creep towards its goal. I wish to commend all those who have volunteered to sell Heinz Bush Lottery Calendars. I know that inducing friends and acquaintances to part with a small portion of their wealth is not a preferred activity for most of us. Nevertheless raising money for the Heinz Bush gives us a chance to raise awareness and do our part to preserve our community's environmental health. If you wish more calendars

contact me at 839-4635 or Ruth Junge at 326-6630.

Along the same vein I wish to congratulate our N.H.R.P. seed collectors on another fine effort. Gerry Waldron has accepted the post of seed collection coordinator for a second season ensuring that the E.C.F.N.C. will continue to make a valuable contribution to the 'greening' of Essex County. Since N.H.R.P.'s inception, Barbara Ouellette has been the driving force behind the Club's participation in N.H.R.P.. Her unswerving dedication to the cause has been greatly valued by N.H.R.P. and instrumental in the projects' successes. Now that she feels compelled to step down as Committee Chairperson; I am sure her successor Dave Kraus and his outstanding committee will use Barbara as an inspiration to continue the work she has begun.

The Essex Region Conservation Authority has applied to have eight one acre lots severed from the Ruscom Shores Conservation Area to be developed as housing lots. These lots will be on the farmland adjacent to north-south section of Surfside Drive. The Executive of the Club were reluctant to see the sale of any Conservation lands but we are gratified that the resulting profits from the sale are pledged towards the restoration of the natural habitat of Ruscom

Shores. We look forward to the fulfilment of the Ruscom Shores Master Plan.

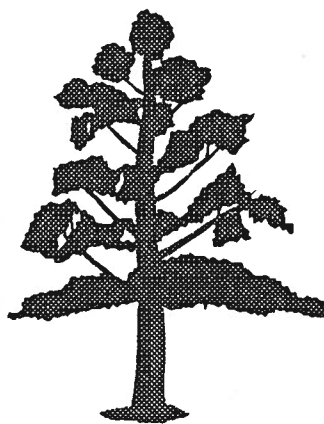
The Authority is about to proceed with the third stage of the dredging of River Canard. This third stage will include the riverbed of the New Canaan E.S.A.. I've heard mixed reviews on the effects of the first two stages of the Canard project on the river's natural features. If you have a viewpoint on this project the Executive would be glad to be made aware of it.

I hope you enjoyed the Club's Anniversary

Bash in September as much as I did. Let me tip my Tilley to Pam Simpson and her committee for a well organized and successful event. I would also like to thank the field trip leaders, the vendors and like-minded organizations for participating and a special thanks to our congenial hosts at the Ojibway Nature Centre.

Well Carl you finally got the timing down pat for the proceeding of the Annual Dinner in November. Along with Margaret Jennings and Betty Learmouth you set a high standard for next year's chairperson. For me the highlight of the Dinner was the opportunity to

honour Myrtle Bessette. Myrtle has been the Club's Secretary since its founding in 1984. She has steadfastly kept the minutes and thus the history of the Club through several administrations. Over the years she has as a principal officer had a positive influence on the Club's activities and evolution. More than that her pleasant demeanour has made membership on the Club's Executive much more attractive to the rest of us. Equally comfortable discussing Club policies or serving coffee at monthly meetings, Myrtle epitomizes the ideal Essex County Field Naturalist.



No group can have too many Myrtle Bessettes or Barb Ouellettes. With this in mind perhaps you will consider submitting nominations for the Club's Executive. The Annual General Meeting in January is close at hand. Numerous nominations would help make this a spirited event.

Also sometime in the near future we can look forward to a new look to the Egret, a new promotional pamphlet and a more professional financial organization for the Club. We can also look forward to an expanded field trip agenda this winter. Be sure to check the Egret's Calendar of Events. We owe this

turn of events to the Heritage Committee. Instead of complaining about the past lack of field trips in the Club's agenda they got together and corrected the situation. I am sure that this is just the beginning of a renewed commitment to emphasize the Field in Field Naturalists' Club.

Respectfully,
Thomas Hurst. □

Bluebird Committee Report 1994

by Don Bissonnette

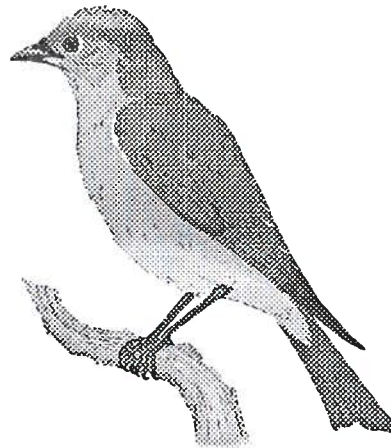
Congratulations to all the monitors! 1994 was a good year for "Bluebird production" with 114 fledglings.

The winter of 1993-94 was severely cold. Earlier, many Bluebirders feared it would kill off many of our local Bluebirds, especially our non-migrants. However, the local population was not harmed too much as 26 pairs of Bluebirds were recorded, compared to 27 from 1993.

And, my, what productive birds these 26 pairs were. 114 fledglings reveals an average of 4.56 fledglings per pair. That's much better than last year, when 27 pairs produced only 107. That was an average of 4.0 fledglings per pair. The snow in early April was quite a blow to our local

Tree Swallow population. Most monitors observed less pairs than last year. A few monitors noted the same for wrens.

The harsh long winter was a blow to all our local wildlife, except the House Sparrows of course. They



escaped the cold wind by flying into barns and other buildings. These birds came out only to eat "buffet-style" at somebody's bird feeder.

This spring our Bluebirds and Tree Swallows were weary from the long difficult winter. They were no match for the House Sparrows which were fed and sheltered all winter by local residents. We couldn't begin to count how many Tree Swallow and Bluebird nests were taken over by House Sparrows this spring. There were 4 reports of Tree Swallows killed on their nests, with House Sparrows building their own nest on top of the dead swallows.

Paquette Corners was a popular place for the Tree Swallows this year. The

Paquette Corners Trail had 21 pairs. Five minutes away, the South Anderdon Trail was busy with 5 pairs.

A warm welcome to a new Bluebirder, Mr. Al Merritt. He established and monitored the "Comber Trail". With beginner's luck, he had a pair of Bluebirds arrive and produce 8 young. A welcome also to a new affiliate Bluebirder, Mrs. Linda Kennette. This spring she set up 4 boxes on her Maidstone township farm. Each box on her "Pleasant Park Trail" had a pair of Tree Swallows. Again, beginner's luck!

It was a tremendous year at the Harrow Trail. This recently expanded trail had 6 pairs of Bluebirds produce 43 fledglings. This reporter wouldn't believe it, except he saw it for himself. Hopefully, this will be repeated!

Thanks to the monitors who reported to the Bluebird chairman in the late summer without being badgered with letters and phone-calls. A special thanks...to the both of you. □



Please recycle this
newsletter, let a friend
read it!

Bluebird Committee 1994 Statistics

Club Trails	# Boxes	# BB Pairs	# BB Fledged	# Pairs TreeSwal	#Pairs HouseWren
Wheatley	6			1	3
Harrow	12	6	43	4	1
Brunet Park	4	1	4		4
ArnerNut Grove	7			2	2
Arner Point	6	1		5	4
Maidstone C.A.	8			2	2
Pleasant Valley	32	4	15	3	4
Shell Trail	13			8	2
3rd Conc.	8	1	4	5	5
Stewart's	5			4	1
Comber	10	1	8	5	2
4th Conc.	36	7	19	12	10
Affiliated Trails	# Boxes	# BB Pairs	# BB Fledged	# Pairs TreeSwal	# Pairs HouseWren
Chewick	21	2	6	6	5
Paquette Corners	24			21	4
Wilamette Farms	10			4	
Gore Road	4			1	4
Ruthven	6			5	2
Braithwaite	5	1	5	3	
Pohanka Farms	6	1	5	2	1
South Anderdon	5			5	
Pleasant Park	4			4	
Kummer	5	1	5	4	
Totals	231	26	114	106	56

Caution To All Bluebirders!

Occasionally, while cleaning out a bird box, you will find a mouse nest. Mice, their feces, urine and bedding, can carry diseases. The hantavirus disease can be fatal to humans and is showing up in B.C., Alberta and

Manitoba. No one can predict where this disease will occur next.

When dry, mice feces break down into dust particles. When disturbed, these particles become airborne and could possibly enter your airways which could introduce you to disease.

Please follow these steps when handling mice nests:

1. Slowly pour water over the nest, thoroughly wetting the nest. This will minimize the dust particles from becoming airborne.
2. Avoid contacting the nest material. Remove the nest with a stick, garden trowel or tongs while wearing gloves.

Monitors, please clean out your boxes, if you haven't

already. This will keep the boxes from smelling and rotting. Also repair or replace any poor boxes you may have. Good Luck with your bluebird trail in the upcoming 1995 nesting season! □

Vermilion Flycatcher at St. Clair NWA

by Paul Pratt

On the morning of November 3, 1994 the manager for the St. Clair National Wildlife Area, John Hagerman found an odd flycatcher at the refuge headquarters. After checking his field guide he called Alan Wormington who responded "I'll be there in twenty minutes". Alan was shortly followed by Norm Chesterfield, Pat Watson, Karen Cedar and myself. Many others made plans to visit the refuge at the earliest opportunity.

When we arrived at the parking area Norm reassured us that the bird was indeed still present. We hurried towards the headquarters only to hear from Pat that it had disappeared just minutes ago. Good birds are sometimes missed by arriving only seconds too late and we hoped this wouldn't be the case. An extensive search was launched, through every shrub and tree for the little devil. And there it was! Perching on the edge

of a small bush making short flights out to catch an insect snack and returning to its perch. The KOWA provided stupendous looks of this marvellous flycatcher. It was an immature male with a bright salmon coloured belly and a smattering of dark red feathers around the face and back of the crown.

Hundreds of birders from across Ontario and several nearby states have made the trek to St. Clair NWA to see this bird which continues to reside on the refuge grounds and very few have been disappointed. This species rarely strays outside its normal range (South America north to Arizona) and few birders have ever seen one in Ontario (and only if they were birding in 1949). As I write the first snow of the season is falling outside. How much longer will this visitor from the Southwest remain? □

Tropical Birding in Oaxaca State, Mexico

Leaders: Paul Pratt and Michael Malone.

There are still 4 seats available on this 10 day mid-winter tour!

Contact Paul at 966-5852 for details. □

Winter Bird Feeding

by Ojibway Nature Centre

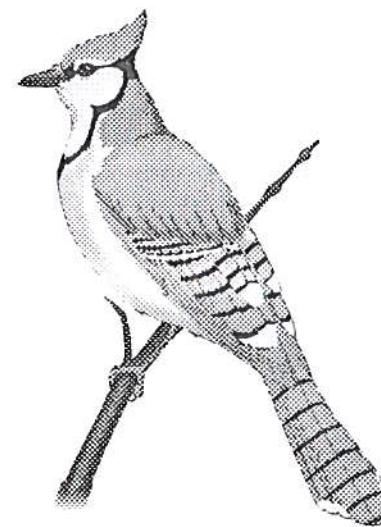
Choice Foods of Winter Birds

Striped Sunflower

Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Evening Grosbeak, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, House Finch, Tufted Titmouse.

Sunflower Chips

American Goldfinch, House Finch, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch.



Mixed Seed

Ring-necked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Common Grackle, Dark-eyed Junco, Rufous-sided Towhee, House Sparrow, American

Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch, Purple Finch, House Finch.

Peanuts

Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch.

Suet

Downy, Hairy, Red-headed, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Creeper, European Starling.

Oil Seed

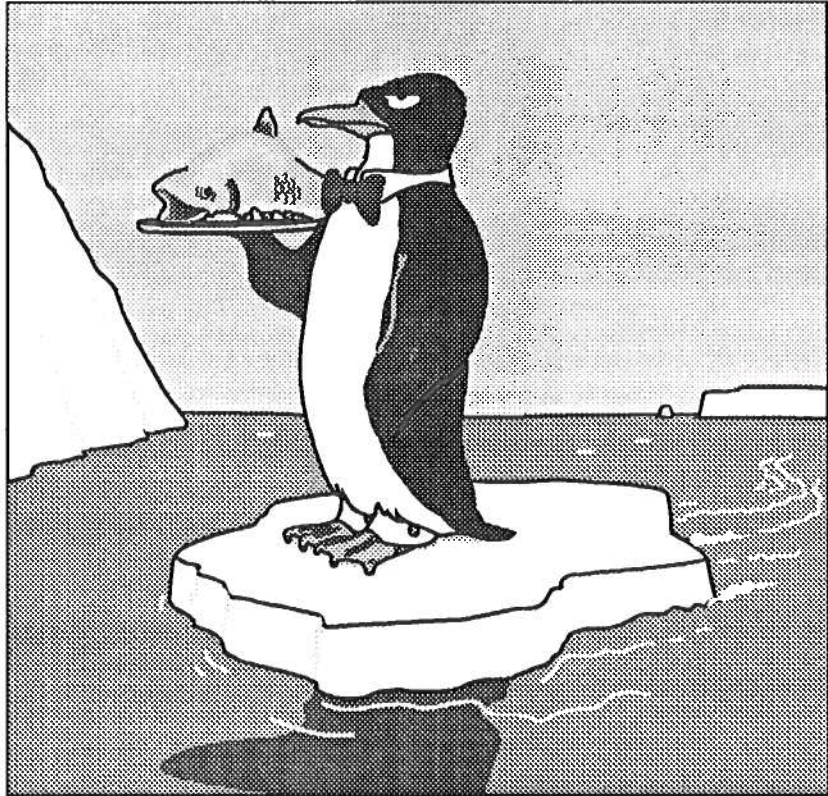
House Finch, American Goldfinch, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Tufted Titmouse, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch.

Niger Seed

American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, House Finch.

General Hints For Better Feeding:

- The best times to put out bird seed are early in the morning and at dusk when birds prefer to feed.
- Keep one feeder just for sunflower seed as it is a favourite for Cardinals, Blue Jays, Chickadees and Nuthatches.



- Putting out table scraps and bread will attract Starlings but few other birds will eat these foods.
- Provide feed in different areas. While Jays and Nuthatches prefer to feed off the ground many birds are just as happy to feed on the ground.
- Place feeders close to areas with protective cover. A row of evergreens or a thick patch of shrubs is ideal. You can even put out your Christmas tree and anchor it by the feeder to provide extra cover.
- A pan of water can attract as many birds as the best equipped bird feeder.
- To prevent squirrels from reaching your bird feeders, hang a squirrel guard or baffle above hanging feeders and for pole feeders, attach a section of stove pipe around the pole directly under the feeder. These methods will only work if the squirrels can not reach the feeder from other directions.
- Save money by buying your bird seed in bulk rather than small bags. The Nature Centre stocks a wide selection of bird seed in large and small quantities. □

Winter Wonders at Ojibway Park

Winter Fun for the Young

Are there any insects around in the winter?

Where do all those tracks in the snow lead to?

Does a squirrel really remember where it buried its acorns?



Help us uncover the secrets of nature beneath winter's blanket at Ojibway Park. We will investigate these mysteries through exploration, environmental games, experiments, crafts, and outdoor fun!

Please register by December 16.

Winter Wildlife Detective

Age: 7 to 11

Date: December 22

Time: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm (activities run 9:00 am - 4:00 pm)

Fee: \$18.00 + \$2.00 material fee

Wee Winter Wildlife

Age: 4 to 6

Date: December 23

Time: 10:00 am - 12:00 noon

Fee: \$6.00

Winter Birding

Join us as we explore local birding 'hot' spots in search of owls, winter finches, waterfowl and more. We'll get eye-to-eye with chickadees and learn the observation and identification techniques needed to discover the variety of winter bird life in Essex County.

Dates: January 12, 14, 28, February 4, 11

Times: Thursday 7:30 pm (introductory programme)

Saturday (morning field trips)

Fee: \$28

Winter Festival

Don't hibernate! The wonders of winter will pass you by. Here is your chance to bundle up with family and friends and enjoy the season at our Winter Festival. Cross-country skiing, skating, winter wanders through the park, environmental games and crafts are among the exciting activities in store for the whole family!

This event is absolutely free and you will also enjoy a 10% discount on all birdseed and feeder purchases for the day.

Date: February 5, 1995

Time: Sunday 12:00 noon - 4:00 pm

Spring Stirrings at Ojibway Park



Slither with the snakes! Leap with the frogs! Sing with the birds! Welcome spring and greet the wildlife it brings to Ojibway Park through learning activities, environmental games, crafts, and field studies.

Frogs, Snakes and You



Age: 4 to 6

Date: March 14 or 15

Time: Tuesday or Wednesday 10:00 am - 12:00 noon

Fee: \$6.00

Captivating Critters

Age: 3 to 5

Dates: March 20, 27, April 3, 10

Time: Mondays 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Fee: \$18.00 for 4 weeks plus \$2.00 material fee

Snake Tales

Age: 7 to 11

Date: March 16 or 17

Time: Thursday or Friday 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Fee: \$14.00.

Weekend Trip to Pelee Island for ECFNC Members

by Dave Kraus

Saturday April 29 & Sunday April 30, 1995

Leave at 9:00 am Saturday from Kingsville dock for Pelee Island. Return to Kingsville dock at 6:00 pm Sunday

I intend to focus on the many rare and interesting reptiles and amphibians but we will undoubtedly also see many birds, wildflowers, etc. as we visit various natural areas and reserves on the island. This time of year is the best time to locate and observe

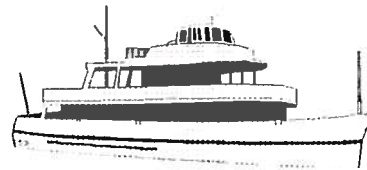
reptiles and amphibians, especially on sunny days which we will hopefully have (Carl can you please arrange this?!).

Accommodations have been tentatively reserved and consist of a large, clean, modern cottage at the west dock area. The cottage has two wash-rooms with showers, two full kitchens, large bedrooms and living rooms with several regular and bunk beds and roll-out beds depending upon attendance (sleeping bags and pillows recommended).

I will arrange for the necessary transportation while on the island (no one needs to bring transportation to the island). The cottage is within a 5 minute walk to the two taverns/restaurants, the trading post collectibles store, the liquor/beer store, the west dock (ferry access), and the Pelee Island Heritage Centre (museum).

We will break for meals (2 lunches, 1 breakfast, and 1 dinner) at the restaurants, with costs, etc. up to the individual. Cost for ferry transportation (ca. \$10 per adult round trip) will be the responsibility of the individual as well. I will however make the necessary reservations for those who reserve in advance with myself.

I request that interested persons sign up as soon as possible and provide \$10 to cover deposits on the cottage and transportation. This will provide an assurance of commitment to allow me to make appropriate arrangements for transportation and accommodation. I need to know well in advance to secure the appropriate ferry reservations and island transportation!



Space may become quite limited and will be on a first-come (& deposit) basis. I am collecting the above money to cover the deposits to secure our reservations. I expect we will each have to provide approximately another \$15 once on the island to pay for the accommodations and island transportation.

All interested persons need to do is: let me know and provide \$10, show up at the Kingsville dock by 8:30 am Saturday morning with a sleeping bag, pillow, warm field clothes and accessories, overnight necessities (as if camping indoors). I recommend that \$90 (+ \$10 deposit) per person should more than cover all of the weekend's expenses - ferry & island transportation, meals, accommodation, etc.. I believe the ferry and restaurants do take a few of the

major credit cards such as Mastercard and Visa.

I will contact each person that signs up should there be any time or location changes for the ferry, otherwise the above outline is the schedule, rain or shine. I look forward to your company on this ECFNC outing!

Dave Kraus: 733-2289
ERCA office: 776-5209,
ext. 368 ☐

Activities Calendar

Further information regarding E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunts is available from either Muriel Kassimatis (252-4801), Betty Learmouth (work: 944-2292), or Margaret MacDonald (252-3515). Let us know about your ideas for further jaunts in the spring, summer and fall.

December - 1994

Dec. 14 - E.C.F.N.C. Membership Meeting

7:30 pm at the Ojibway Nature Centre. Member's night. Share a selection of slides with other members or bake cookies for the coffee hour.

Dec. 17 - Join the Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count.

Call Ojibway Nature Centre for more details. Consider participating in other C.B.C.'s such as the Point Pelee CBC, the Rondeau

CBC, the Rockwood/Amherstburg CBC, the Detroit River CBC.

January - 1995

Jan. 7 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Explore the winter skies with Anne Barbour. 7:30 pm, call Anne at 726-6560 for details.

Jan. 11 - E.C.F.N.C. Membership Meeting

7:30 pm at the Union Gas Building. Attend the Annual Meeting for an update on our club's activities.

Jan. 12 - Ojibway Nature Centre Programme

7:30 pm Winter Birding programme at Ojibway Nature Centre.

Jan. 14 - Ojibway Nature Centre Programme

Winter Birding Field Trip

Jan. 15 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Our president Tom Hurst will lead an owling excursion at Holiday Beach Conservation Area. Meet at 2:00 pm at the C.A. entrance.

Jan. 22 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Join Karen Cedar to explore the Oxley Poison Sumac Swamp for winter birds. Meet at 2:00 pm at the Harrow Research Sta-

tion parking lot, east of Harrow.

Jan. 25 - E.C.F.N.C. Executive Meeting

7:30 pm at the Union Gas Building.

Jan. 28 - Ojibway Nature Centre Programme

Winter Birding Field Trip

Jan. 29 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Join Carl Maiolani for winter birding at the Kopegaron Woods Conservation Area located between Leamington and Wheatley. Meet at 2:00 pm in the C.A. parking lot.

February - 1995

Feb. 4 - Ojibway Nature Centre Programme

Winter Birding Field Trip

Feb. 5 - Ojibway Winter Festival

Noon until 4:00 pm at Ojibway Nature Centre. Enjoy winter indoor and outdoor activities at Ojibway Park.

Feb. 8 - E.C.F.N.C. Membership Meeting

7:30 pm at the Union Gas Building. Speaker: Betty Learmouth on the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador.

Feb. 11 - Ojibway Nature Centre Programme

Winter Birding Field Trip

Feb. 12 Erie Wildlife Rescue Open House

Feb.12 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Explore a woodlot in La-Salle for winter owls with David D'hondt. Meet at 2:00 pm in the parking lot of Ojibway Nature Centre.

Feb. 19 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Explore McAuliffe Woods Conservation Area. Ian Naisbitt will lead us over the trails of this little known C.A.. Bill Balkwill and members of the tree study group will assist us with tree identification. Meet at 2:00 pm in the parking lot of Place Concorde on Lauzon Parkway.

Following our visit at McAuliffe Woods, we'll travel to a good viewing area at the Windsor Airport where we might see Short-eared Owls. This will be in the late afternoon as the sun is setting. Watching for owls on a late afternoon in winter gives new meaning to the word 'cold'!

Feb. 22 - E.C.F.N.C. Executive Meeting

7:30 pm at the Union Gas Building.

March - 1995

Mar. 8 - E.C.F.N.C. Membership Meeting

7:30 pm at Union Gas Building. Speaker: Bob Pettit, Chairperson of the Seventh Conference of the Hawk Migration Association of North America to be held in Windsor, May 4 - 7, 1995.

Mar. 12 - E.C.F.N.C. Winter Jaunt

Join Margaret MacDonald, Muriel Kassimatis and Betty Learmouth to explore the St. Clair National Wildlife Refuge area for migrating waterfowl. Meet at the Tilbury 401 East Service Centre at 2:00 pm for the short drive to the N.W.R..

Hotline 252-BIRD
E.R.C.A. 776-5209
Ojibway N.C. 966-5852
Point Pelee 322-2365

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 be acquainted with and understand our natural world through identification, maintenance and preservation of natural areas of Essex County and surrounding regions. ECFNC is affiliated with the *Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON)*.

The Egret is published quarterly. To receive information on the Essex County Field Naturalists Club, or to submit articles, letters, etc., please write to:

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

ECFNC Officers & Executive Contacts

President - Tom Hurst

Vice President - Dave Kraus

Treasurer - Peg Wilkinson

General Meeting Speaker

Co-ordinator - Mike Malone

Secretary - Myrtle Bessette

Membership Secretary

- Denise Hartley

NHRP Representative

- Barb Ouellette

Egret Committee - Pat Arseneault

Editorial Assistant - Ian McInnis

Layout & Typesetting

- Ian McInnis

Fund-raising Co-ordinator

- Terry Ouellette

Public Information Officer

- Pam Simpson

Field Trip Co-ordinator

- Phil Roberts

Assistant Field Trip Co-ordinator

- Gerry Waldron

Assistant General Meeting

Speaker Co-ordinator

- Karen Cedar

Liasons & Committees

Point Pelee Liason

- Richard Bilinski

Annual Dinner Chair

- Carl Maiolani

Bluebird Committee

- Don Bissonnette

Heinz Bush Committee

- Mike Malone, Terry Ouellette,
Ruth Junge, Tom Hurst

Anniversary Committee

- Pam Simpson, Paul Pratt,
Karen Cedar, Terry Ouellette,
Denise Hartley, Myrtle Bessette,
Gerry Waldron, Peg Wilkinson,
Phil Roberts, Thomas Bruner,
Tom Hurst

Heritage Committee

- Peg MacDonald, Peg Wilkinson,
Gerry Waldron, Betty Learmouth,
Lois Thurgood, Jim McAlister,
Muriel Kassimatis

In The News . . .

STAR, MONDAY, NOVEMBER, 21, 1994

Possums play survival game

By **Jacqueline Smrke**
Star Staff Reporter

They're slow moving and they're not very bright — but they're survivors.

North America's only marsupial, or pouched mammal, the opossum has been around since the age of the dinosaurs. But it's only been since the 1980s that they've begun to make a more permanent home in southern Ontario.

At the 10th anniversary dinner of the Essex County Field Naturalists at the Teutonia Club on Saturday, more than 100 people learned about these highly adaptable critters from Bruce Duncan, staff ecologist with the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority.

Tom Hurst, president of the club, said organizers decided to invite Duncan to speak about the animals because of the increased number of sightings and questions being asked about them. The club, which has 200 members, provides a social and educational forum which promotes the protection of natural habitat. All proceeds from the evening's silent and regular auction, which raised \$1,749, will go toward the Natural Habitat Restoration Program.

Opossums have been sighted in Ontario before. Duncan said they came in small waves at the turn of the century, in the 1930s and then again in the 1980s. But in the past four years opossums have become a much more common sight in Essex County — particularly as road kill.

"By about the year 2010 they'll be in all of southern Ontario and they'll be here to stay," he said. "The opossum is the first successful marsupial to invade North America."

OPOSSUMS AREN'T related to any North American mammal. Instead, their closest relatives, the kangaroo and koala bear, are found in Australia. The black opossum can be found in the Southern U.S. and, along with the common opossum, in Central and South America.

A small, nocturnal and solitary animal with grey fur and white head, the opossum has a long hairless tail it uses to grip things. Slow moving, it has an acute sense of smell, poor eyesight and very good hearing but a life span of only two to three years. It mates twice a year and a female can give birth to as many as 26 young in a year.

Opossums eat just about anything, from insects to small mammals, fruit, vegetables and toads. Duncan said they're somewhat helpful given one alone will eat literally thousands of insects around harvest time. Though it likes to live close to water, it prefers a mixture of open farmland and small woodlots as a habitat — often taking over the abandoned underground dens of other animals. It's virtually immune to North American rattlesnake venom as well as a variety of poisonous toads and frogs. As well, its

lower body temperature makes it less likely to become infected with rabies.

"With a brain that size (one sixth of the size of a comparable mammal) most of what it does is done by instinct as opposed to learning," said Duncan, who has raised a number of the orphaned marsupials.

ALTHOUGH IT has few predators, one of its more effective instincts is its ability to "play dead" when preyed upon. When extremely frightened, opossums will flop over, usually defecate and discharge a stinky green fluid that, more often than not, saves it from becoming an evening meal. Bobcats, foxes and coyotes won't eat opossums because they smell so bad, Duncan added.

While there is no population estimate in Essex County or Ontario, the increasing number spotted as road kill and more frequent sightings are evidence they're on the increase.



ESSEX COUNTY FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

1995 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

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- Individual - \$15 per year _____
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Please make cheque payable to the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club and mail to ECFNC, P.O. Box 23011, 3100 Howard Avenue, Shoppers Drug Mart, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 3X3



The Essex County Field Naturalists' Club is an incorporated non-profit organization open to anyone with an interest in nature and conservation. Club objectives are to promote appreciation and conservation of the diverse natural heritage of Essex County and surrounding region; to provide opportunity for people to become acquainted with and to better understand the natural environment; to promote the identification, preservation, maintenance and restoration of natural areas of high quality for living things; to cooperate with and support organizations with similar objectives.

Indoor meetings with guest speakers and programs are held on the second Wednesday of every month, except July and August, at the Union Gas Building at 650 Division Rd. (between Devonshire Mall and Leon's Furniture). Field trips and other activities are held throughout the year. The Club has several active committees including groups responsible for Bluebird Trails and a Heritage Fund. The Club Newsletter the EGRET, is published quarterly and mailed to members.

Brown Creeper, artist G. Scott

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