



The Egret

the Newsletter of the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club

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ERCA's Conservation Award for Education, 2004



Award winner Dave Kraus is shown with ERCA General Manager Ken Schmidt and ERCA Full Authority Vice Chair Ray Renaud.

Wow!

This month marks the 20th anniversary of the incorporation of the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club.

Congratulations!

The Annual Meeting of the Essex Region Conservation Authority's Board of Directors was held on January 20, 2005 in the Council Chambers of the Essex Civic Centre. A highlight of this meeting are the conservation awards recognizing significant contributions by individuals and groups within the community.

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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 the 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:

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Point Pelee Advisory Committee Liaison: to be announced

Bluebird Committee Chairman: Don Bissonette

NHRP Seed Collection: Bruno Sfalcin

Special Events Coordinator: Karen Cedar

Essex County Stewardship Network Liaison: Tom Hurst

Ojibway Liaison: Karen Cedar

Citizens Environment Alliance Liaison: Mark Buckner

Windsor Planning Advisory Comm. Liaison: Mark Buckner

Canada South Land Trust Liaison: Betty Learmouth

Committees:

Egret Editorial: Betty Learmouth, Karen Cedar, David D'hondt, Shirley Grondin

Speaker: ECFNC directors

Field Trip: JoAnn Grondin, Bert Harris, Margaret

Jennings, Betty Learmouth

Heritage: JoAnn Grondin, Margaret Jennings, Dave

Kraus, Betty Learmouth, Muriel Kassimatis, Jim

McAllister, Patricia Rhoads, Gerry Waldron, Peg

Wilkinson

Annual Dinner: Heritage & Special Events Committees

ERCA's Conservation Award for Education, 2004 (continued)

Danielle Breault, ERCA Coordinator of Marketing and Community Relations, provided the following comments with regard to the recipient of the Conservation Award for Education:

"The philosopher Democritus once said: "Nature and education are somewhat similar. The latter transforms man, and in so doing creates a second nature." 2,500 years later, this still holds true, and educating the population that we all have a role to play in protecting and improving our environment will be key to creating a future that is sustainable for all of us."

In this regard, it is our pleasure to honour **Mr. Dave Kraus** with the **Conservation Award for Education**. Mr. Kraus is a science teacher at Essex District High School. Concerned with environmental issues, conservation, and the protection of our region's unique habitat, Dave is actively involved in a number of organizations and projects focusing on local environmental concerns.

'His passion and appreciation for our region's biodiversity is inspiring,' says his nominator. And he passes this love for our natural habitat onto his students. Dave inspires his students to be actively involved in environmental restoration, and organizes hands-on field trips where the students participate in local conservation efforts. One of his most recent projects included an Endangered Species habitat restoration project for the federally endangered Prothonotary Warbler. Together with 50 of his students, Dave spent a day planting native plants to encourage more nesting pairs of this species. This is only one example of the many field trips and activities that Dave has organized for his students.

Dave is also the administrator of the Wetland Habitat Fund, the past president of the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club, and is currently restoring two pieces of his personal property to natural habitat. His efforts in educating young people about the importance of a clean and healthy environment are impressive, and for these accomplishments we are pleased to invite him to accept the 2004 Conservation Award for Education."

Eleventh Annual ECFNC Weekend Trip to Pelee Island**Saturday April 30 & Sunday May 1, 2005**

Dave Kraus

Leave at 10:00 am Saturday from Leamington Dock aboard the M.V. Jiimaan (be at the dock by 9:30 am). We will return to Leamington Dock by 5:45 pm Sunday.

We will hopefully 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 may also get a chance to visit the "Wilds of Pelee Island" renewable energy and endangered species conservation education centre, and/or the Pelee Island Bird Observatory (bird banding station). We will have plenty of time to walk, observe, and relax on the excursions to some of Pelee's most beautiful natural areas, including: Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve, Lighthouse Point Provincial Nature Reserve, the Stone Road Alvar Complex, Sheridan Point ESA, and possibly a few other stops along the way. Should we experience inclement weather, (however, Carl Maiolani is arranging excellent weather for us - as usual) we will visit the Pelee Island Heritage

Centre. The museum presents an interesting and diverse view of Pelee Island's rich natural and human history (as well as the Middle Island exhibit).

I have arranged for bus transportation while on the island - no vehicles are necessary or desired on this trip. There is parking at the Leamington Dock area (for a reasonable fee) or have someone drop you off. I have reserved space on the ferry for all registered, walk on passengers attending this trip - we will need to meet and form a group before boarding and I will purchase our tickets as a group (using the deposit money).

Accommodations have been reserved at the Anchor and Wheel Inn. The motel and bed and breakfast style rooms are very comfortable and are situated on treed, 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 !!!

The Anchor and Wheel Inn contains a clean and comfortable restaurant where I have arranged for our meals. We will break for meals regularly (lunch ~ 2 pm and dinner ("Big Island Buffet" including prime rib, veggie options, fish, etc.) ~ 7:00 pm on Saturday, breakfast ~ 9 am Sunday) and hot meals and snacks are also available on both ferry crossings.

I am requesting a \$ 20 deposit (which will be applied to your fees for accommodations, etc.) from each person to secure reservations. I will also need to collect an additional \$ 130 from each participant once on the island, to fully pay for the two ferry trips, weekend bus transportation, three meals, and overnight accommodations. This \$ 150 total cost will include all expenses for the weekend other than alcoholic drinks, souvenirs, or additional snacks or meals on the ferry. If there is any additional funds remaining after I pay for all of our trip expenses, I will donate the remaining money to the ECFNC Heritage Committee Fund which will be used to help purchase and protect Carolinian habitat in southwestern Ontario.

All interested persons need to do is: sign up with me & provide a \$ 20 deposit (cash or make cheques payable to Dave Kraus), show up at the Leamington Dock by 9:30 am Saturday morning with warm field clothes and accessories (no need for rubber wading boots as the trails are elevated), overnight necessities, \$ 130 cash per person for me for the group trip expenses, and maybe a few additional dollars for extra snacks, etc. Please have cash to pay me for our group rated accommodations, meals, & transportation.

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.

To register for this trip: see me at the ECFNC meetings, call, or write:

Dave Kraus phone: 519 825 7491

mailing address: 1515 Concession 7, RR 3, Wheatley, Ont. N0P 2P0

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

Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count, 2004

Betty Learmouth

Clear, cool weather greeted participants of the twentieth Cedar Creek Christmas Bird County on Saturday, December 19, 2004. Area 2 of the count circle, a long north to south section within the 15 mile diameter of the count circle is divided into a northern and southern segment. Our crew for this count in the northern sector were Marg and Clary Calder, Denise Hartley and myself. To our south in the Cedar Creek watershed, counters included Paul DesJardins, Pauline Renaud, Bob Wicket, and Ian Woodbridge.

Passing Tim Hortons's on Talbot Street in Essex at 8:20 a.m., I noted several crow counters, so stopped to catch up on their count news. Shirley Grondin, JoAnn Grondin and Lynn Meloche were just getting organized to head out to their day count area after meeting with Phil Roberts for their crow compilation. The count had not been easy with the crows moving in the dark and streaming in various directions. An estimated 47,000 American Crows were counted (the average count is 60,000).

Area two's northern sector crew was on its way shortly after 8:30 a.m., driving slowly along Talbot Road. A street in a subdivision to our left yielded a flock of Dark-eyed Juncos as they flew from one property to another. Marg remarked that there appeared to be fewer flying birds such as the usual European Starlings and Mourning Doves. At 10:00 a.m. we were at Betty Moore's home, ready for a walk around the pine plantation. By this time, the weather was changing with the sun disappearing and a raw wind picking up.

On our walk we glimpsed two unidentified sparrows as these birds disappeared into the pine plantation cattail wetland. As well, we found the carcass of a half consumed Ring-necked Pheasant. Back at Mrs. Moore's house we were fortunate to see a pair of Downy Woodpeckers and a few House Finches. Betty Moore directed us to the Bosvelds' home a few houses to the east where we found flocks of well fed Mourning Doves and House Sparrows.

At the Thunder Bowl Bowling Alley in North Ridge we watched a Red-tailed Hawk as it soared into the wind. We slowly made our way along Talbot Road to our turnoff that led to the Essex ByPass. Then we began our drive back and forth on the concession roads of the former Gosfield South Township, now the Town of Kingsville. We were delighted to find a male American Kestrel on a hydro line at a yard full of House Sparrows.

At noon hour we had lunch at the Arner Stop where we had a chance to visit with our counterparts in the southern part of Area Two. Paul DesJardins told us that his group had walked all morning through the woodlands to the south of Cedar Creek, searching diligently for wintering birds.

Following lunch, we decided that we were ready for an afternoon walk so drove to Bill and Jack Balkwill's farm on Road 2. Jack and Bill were outside and gladly took us to the spots that might yield birds. We were pleased to see a flock of Tree Sparrows in the dogwood shrubs adjacent to the prairie restoration. As we started down the most westerly woodland trail, we observed Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers foraging above us. Grain in the woodland had attracted Mourning Doves. The Balkwill brothers told us that they had seen the neighborhood Northern Harrier earlier in the week as well as a Sharp-shinned Hawk. That morning the Balkwill's had seen two White-breasted Nuthatches which we added to our list.

We then headed off to the woodlands south of the Balkwill farm. By this time it was after three o'clock and rapidly dropping in both temperature and visibility. We found Northern Cardinal and Dark-eyed Juncos in the hedge rows. Close to four o'clock snow began to fall, then a driving sleet developed which sent us scurrying back to our vehicles.

On the way into Essex as we passed the small woodlot north of Jones Fine Furniture on the Arner Townline, a large shape with wings flew over the vehicle. Denise said she could see black patches at the wing elbows. Rough-legged Hawk! This end of the afternoon sighting was a wonderful addition to our day's list.

Then it was off to the Peggy and Tom Hurst's home for a potluck supper and the day's compilation. Before supper, we merged our numbers from the northern portion of Area 2 with those of the southern portion for a total of 36 species in Area 2. Thank you to Peggy and Tom for their hospitality.

As usual, everyone brought wonderful food for the supper – appetizers, hot entrees, salads and decadent desserts – with Peggy providing her vegetarian dishes.

Just as the compilation was to begin, compiler Paul Pratt's cell phone rang. Caller Tom Hince was reporting his day's tally of 104 species seen in Corkscrew Swamp, Florida.

Each area reported its sightings, with Karen Cedar recording numbers on a laptop while Paul used a display chart. A few days after the count Paul submitted the following summary of sightings to the Ontario Birds listserv:

The count recorded 80 species (our long term average) plus Black Duck and Kingfisher for count week. Highlights included: Common Loon - (1) Kingsville Harbour, third count Double-crested Cormorant - (3) fifth count, Bufflehead - record high count of 29 (previous high of 21 in 2001), Cooper's Hawk - record high count of 11 (tied with 2001), Northern Goshawk - (1) fifth count, Killdeer - (1) Harrow sewage lagoons, Red-bellied Woodpecker - (40) second highest count, numbers increasing, Northern Flicker - record high count of 65 (previous high of 55 in 2000), American Crow - 46,925 (dawn count at Essex roost), Carolina Wren - (36), Winter Wren - record high count of 19 (previous high of 16 in 1997), American Robin - (78) second highest count, Cedar Waxwing - (127) second highest count, Northern Shrike - (1) tenth count, Eastern Towhee - (6) second highest count, Savannah Sparrow - (1) seventh count.

Breeding Bird Atlas Enters Final Year!

Paul Pratt

There will be a workshop for the **Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas** on Saturday, March 26 at the Point Pelee Visitor Centre, 1:00pm to 4:00pm. Anyone interested is encouraged to attend.

2005 is the final year for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. During the first four years of atlassing 140 species have been recorded in Essex County as possible, probable or confirmed breeders.

Ontario is divided into 10km X 10km "squares" for the purposes of the atlas. Paul Pratt and Karen Cedar are the regional coordinators for Essex County where over 1000 hours have been spent atlassing by a large group of volunteers.

Despite the coverage to-date there are still many species to confirm as breeders in each square of our region. Anyone can help with the atlas. During the nesting season watch for nests, fledged young or adults carrying food and report your sightings. Birds such as Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl and American Crow often use conspicuous stick nests that are easy to find before the trees leaf out in early May. If you are out birding during the nesting season watch for nests, fledged young or adults carrying food and report your sightings to Paul Pratt or Karen Cedar at the Ojibway Nature Centre.

The atlas web site is a great way to learn more about the breeding birds of any part of Ontario. You can review all the information gathered to-date, download topographic maps, register as an atlasser and submit data on-line.

www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html

Help Raise Cash for Bird Conservation through the Baillie Birdathon

Spring is coming, and with it the spectacle of returning migrating birds, and the Baillie Birdathon. The annual Birdathon is your chance to have fun birding while raising funds for the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club and Bird Studies Canada. Participants can designate the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club to receive a portion of the money they raise (from 25-50% depending on the total amount raised by the club). BSC, Canada's pre-eminent bird research and conservation organization, coordinates the event and handles the administration (including tax receipts).

You don't need to be an ace birder to get involved in the Birdathon. Essentially, participants collect sponsor pledges, and then spend up to 24 hours in May searching for as many species of birds as possible. You can bird for only a few hours, from your armchair, in front of your bird feeder, and still make a substantial contribution. Or, challenge club members to a friendly competition and see how far it goes. Some fantastic prizes are available to be won by participants including an all-inclusive trip through Eagle-Eye Tours (www.eagle-eye.com), and Eagle Optics binoculars and scope (www.eagleoptics.ca)

Many great things have been accomplished for birds through the Baillie Birdathon. This national fundraiser has provided important finances to local clubs for everything from land purchases and habitat work to bird feeding trails and youth nature camps. Funds received by Bird Studies Canada are used to support Canada-wide volunteer surveys that track bird population changes over time such as Project FeederWatch and the Christmas Bird Count, as well as regional owl surveys, Species at Risk projects, and much more. BSC scientists use this information to draw attention to serious declines and assist with conservation planning. The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund also receives a portion of revenues for its granting program to support special research projects.

Coordinated by Bird Studies Canada (BSC) for 28 years, the Birdathon raises over \$175,000 annually. Over 100 conservation clubs benefit, with about 6,000 sponsors supporting participants Canada wide. For more information, visit Bird Studies Canada's web page at www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/brdathon.html or contact Wendy Cridland at Bird Studies Canada at 1888-448-2473, birdathon@bsc-eoc.org. Baillie Birdathon registration forms, kits, and exclusive 2005 t-shirts are available upon request.

An ECFNC birder will be chosen to whom donations and pledges may be made. A number of members participate in the Baillie Birdathon and would appreciate your support. Note that the Ojibway Nature Centre offers Big Day birding for those persons seeking one hundred or more species in a single day in May.

Prowling for Owls

Betty Learmouth

Tom Hurst has lead our January owl prowls for a number of years at Holiday Beach Conservation Area but this year we decided to change the location due to the often productive Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Counts on which Tom and his fellow CBC'ers Keith and Jim Burke have discovered Long-eared Owl roosts.

Thus on January 9, 2005, Tom was joined at Arner Stop by fifteen field naturalists and friends. As all good leaders do, Tom had scouted out the roosts the day before and had come up emptied-handed – no owls anywhere. On the Cedar Creek CBC, four Long-eared Owls had been found, but none were spotted by Tom who tramped everywhere through several pine plantations in newly fallen snow. Tom shared all this with us and added that he had checked Betty Moore's pine plantation where he had seen a single owl. We all joined a convoy and headed off to Betty's on County Road 34, west of Essex.

Tom suggested we enter Betty's plantation from the south and walk north along the west side of the plantation, looking and watching for owls. As Tom promised, the walking in the plantation was actually quite easy. It was beautiful in the plantation with the pines laden with freshly fallen snow.

We walked the length of the plantation to the wetland, then turned and walked back on the eastern side of the plantation. We did not see any owls but caught glimpses of Black-capped Chickadees, kinglets and American Goldfinch. Our walk was lovely and a wonderful way to enjoy a winter afternoon.

Thank you to Tom for leading us on another owl prowl and winter walk.

Explore Our Natural World: A Biodiversity Atlas

The newly published *Explore Our Natural World: A Biodiversity Atlas of the Lake Huron to Lake Erie Corridor*, the fine product of the Wildlife Habitat Council's Great Lakes Regional Office, was introduced to an appreciative audience on December 14, 2004. An early evening reception was held at DTE Energy Headquarters on 2nd Avenue in Detroit, Michigan in "The Learning Zone," an attractive learning resource area especially designed for group meetings and employee training.

All guests were greeted at the reception area, presented with an information package which included a copy of the *Biodiversity Atlas*, then were invited to enjoy a finger food buffet with the soothing sounds of the Cass Technical High School string quartet in the background. Canadian naturalists present included five representatives of Lambton Wildlife Inc. who had traveled from Sarnia and two representatives from the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club.

Various speakers spoke of the events and efforts by many persons who had worked towards the publication of the *Biodiversity Atlas*. Mike Matuszewski, Manager of Public Policy for DTE Energy, welcomed everyone to the reception.

Caroline Biribauer, Director of the Great Lakes Regional Office, Wildlife Habitat Council thanked all those present, representing government, industry, academia, non profit groups, the general public, First Nations representatives, and corporate sponsors who have funded the printing of the *Biodiversity Atlas*. Many of those present were part of an enormous collaborative effort in the creation of the Atlas.

Next, Karen Rodriguez provided background on the development of the *Biodiversity Atlas*. An initial meeting at the Lake St. Clair Conference in 1999, held in Port Huron, MI, attracted 300 persons, all of whom were struck by the natural resources of the St. Clair River corridor, including its prairies, savannahs and wetlands. Lisa Appel submitted a proposal for producing the *Biodiversity Atlas* and four years later we have this publication.

During the first three years of the *Biodiversity Atlas* development, Lisa Appel worked as a staff member of the Wildlife Habitat Council, an organization that works to increase the amount

of quality wildlife habitat on corporate, private and public lands. Lisa has been employed as director of the Pine River Nature Centre during the last two years as her work devoted to the *Biodiversity Atlas* has drawn to a conclusion.

Lisa Appel's hope is that the *Biodiversity Atlas* will be a powerful tool for understanding our natural heritage. Users of the *Biodiversity Atlas* are urged to refer to Appendix B: Species at Risk to review the 296 species in the corridor which are at risk.

A whole group of government agencies and their representatives contributed to the Atlas during meetings at the Ojibway Nature Centre, the University of Michigan and "The Learning Zone" at DTE Energy's headquarters. Several individuals were acknowledged for their contributions to the *Biodiversity Atlas* including Julie Craves (bird accounts), Doug Sweet (fish and mollusk accounts), Allen Woodliffe (prairie section) and Tim Marchand (Ontario Parks).

Following Lisa's presentation, Dave White, Walpole Island Heritage Centre, stated the Walpole First Nation Peoples are pleased to share the natural heritage of their homeland through the *Biodiversity Atlas*. Chief Dean Jacobs provided more information on the Walpole community which is home to 4,000 citizens. The Walpole Island community, comprised of six islands, consists of 58,000 acres of which 17,000 are world class wetlands. Some fifty species have been identified as Species at Risk and these will be studied as part of five identified ecosystems. The importance of Walpole Island natural heritage is recognized by the community as tourism is its number one industry, followed by agriculture and Walpole Island bureaucracy which provides employment for 300 persons.

As an acknowledgement of their contributions, Lisa Appel and Peter Shade, graphic artist, were presented with framed prints of the *Biodiversity Atlas* cover by Caroline Biribauer.

If you are interested to receive a copy of the *Biodiversity Atlas* or to contribute financially towards a second printing of the *Atlas*, please contact Caroline Biribauer at 313-235-9624 (biribauerc@dteenergy.com) or Brittany Bird (313-235-9627 (birdb@dteenergy.com)) at the Wildlife Habitat Council, Great Lakes Regional Office.

Topics covered by the *Biodiversity Atlas* include the Lake Huron to Lake Erie corridor physical landscape, information on the connecting channels including fish species, wetland habitats and residents, bird of prey migration through the region, imperiled natural communities including tallgrass prairie and oak savannahs, human influence within the region and stewardship efforts. Appendices include maps of protected lands in the region, species at risk, recommended reading, resources and organizations in the region, a glossary and index. The *Biodiversity Atlas* includes numerous colourful maps, illustrations and photographs.

Exploring Baileys Beach

Betty Learmouth

ECFNC members and friends joined ECFNC executive member and Consulting Ecologist Gerry Waldron on January 16, 2005 for a walk in an area known as Baileys Beach which abuts Mann's Marsh in the Town of Amherstburg. Mann's Marsh is a privately owned Detroit River wetland to the west of Big Creek Marsh. It is a Provincially Significant Wetland which runs several kilometres to the north and eventually joins Big Creek PSW. In fact, it occupies a channel in the former delta of the Detroit River.

We parked on McBride Avenue which has the distinction of a row of non glare light standards, the only such lighting in an area where all other streets are in darkness. There was

some discussion as to whether Baileys Beach extends this far east or should be reserved for the old beach pavilion area to the west.

Bailey's Beach is accessible by a trail which has been constructed through a swamp woodland that allows good views of nearby trees, views over Mann's Marsh with glimpses of Lake Erie. To our right and below us lay Mann's Marsh with Lake Erie on our left. Through the trees beside the trail we could see Buttonbush in the marsh as well as the distinctive winter silhouette of Marsh Rose Mallow with its large seed pods, many Purple Loosestrife plants and the arching stems of native Swamp Loosestrife (*Decodon verticillatus*).

Gerry took a moment to show us the pith of Silky Dogwood using his practical Lee Valley pocket knife. The large oak trees in the swamp woodland were identified by Bill Balkwill as Burr Oak. These trees displayed misshapen crowns, an indication that these trees are older growth. The swamp woodland in which these trees stand does not appear to have been disturbed, another indicator of older tree growth.

Upon reaching the trail's end, Gerry suggested that we explore the beach and attempt to work our way as far as possible back along the beach without returning to the trail. Walking towards the beach along a canal, Bill Balkwill pointed to tracks across the canal's frozen surface which Bill identified as those of a mink.

Stepping onto the sand beach, we enjoyed a view of ice covered Lake Erie with open water in the distance attracting some soaring gulls and a few resting ducks. Despite the chill in the air, the sun actually felt warm as we walked along the beach. Gerry commented that the beach area has its own microclimate and some interesting flora and fauna. Native termites live here in the fallen trees scattered about the area. We found fallen elderly willows with suspicious looking tunneling.

Clambering up and down over many piles of fill debris, we made our way along the beach. On a sandy slope, Gerry showed us a few plants of American Beach Grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*), a native plant which stabilizes dunes. This species has been planted in Pinery Provincial Park dunes as a sand binder. Following our walk, Gerry reported American Beach Grass to be ranked as R3, Regionally Rare, as it is known from three Essex sites. This Baileys Beach site would then be the fourth site in the County. Another possible site to the north on a Front Road residential property is to be investigated. This sighting, if confirmed, would remove this species from its status as Regionally Rare.

We hoped to find Hop-tree but had to content ourselves with a bushy escaped Yucca that appeared to be growing well in this sandy environment and the dried seedpods of Clammyweed (*Polanisia graveolens*), the only native species in the Caper Family which grows in Ontario. Vines draped over fallen limbs appeared to be those of a species of bindweed, likely Hedge Bindweed. A small deadly nightshade species with tiny fruit was examined. Gerry commented this plant was worthy of a return visit during growing season as it did not seem familiar to Gerry. Both Tree-of-heaven and Catalpa were noted growing on the beach.

Bird species viewed on this walk included duck species, gull species, Carolina Wren, Mourning Doves and an identified blackbird.

Thank you to Gerry for leading us to another little known corner in the Town of Amherstburg.

An Uncommon Sight

Marie Deneau

A weekend afternoon usually just floats by peacefully, only occasionally punctuated with something unusual. Then, the instrument of interruption was the steady cry of a bird in distress.

The cry was made by a starling – you know, one of the noisy many – but this one definitely in distress. Of course I go to see. When you are raised in the woods, you understand such things. Sure enough it was and holding him down insecurel was an American Kestrel.

Now, having had an female American Kestrel (we named her Herman before we knew she was a girl) as a pet for thirteen years as a kid, I knew the attacker well. In that determined but consciously undisturbed way, the hawk was holding down the blackbird, who was screaming and struggling for all he was worth.

He screamed right outside my upper fourplex bedroom window, in early January 2005, at the base of the neighboring fourplex, in the lovely manicured, park-like setting of Riverside Manor, half a block from the Detroit River. In Old Riverside, a city Kestrel and this time the victim got away.

But this was not the end of our association. I heard the same cry again, on the late January 2005 day when the snow came down like a rain storm all day. The wind was howling in Riverside Manor and visibility was limited, but the Kestrel was on the hunt again.

I heard the screaming again and looked out of the same bedroom window. There, in an accumulated two or three inches of soft, new snow and amid the blow, was what I assumed was the same Kestrel, this time on the roof of the same fourplex at which I has spotted him before. He had the same huge prey in his talons.

I sat and watched the life and death struggle for at least five minutes. The blackbird would put up a valiant struggle, then rest with the hawk pecking at its neck for the quick kill. They would then both slide down the roof a few inches. This pattern continued four or five times until I thought they would both fall off the roof. But soon, I could see the struggle was being dominated by the Kestrel.

The life ebbed out of the blackbird finally. To my relief, about a foot from the edge of the roof, the Kestrel began to enjoy his prey. This drama unfolded within twenty feet of my eyes.

Valentines and Robins

Jim Oates

What in the world have Robins got to do with Valentines? Absolutely nothing; but a friend told me that she had seen a Robin on Valentine's Day, the 14th of February. As crazy as this sounds, there was another sighting a couple of miles to the West of me. What's going on? It's too early for them to arrive. Maybe they know something I don't know; maybe they have been in touch with that crafty little rodent up on the Bruce Peninsula by the name of Wiarton Willy. This year Willy's weather forecast was, "Spring is just around the corner." Who am I to doubt Willy's wisdom, but Robins on Valentine's Day! Isn't that a stretch? I didn't see them personally but I was informed by two trusted informants that it, indeed, is true.

I hope their visit was just a day trip to scout out the territory, because the weather turned bitterly cold within a couple of days. I know they were anxious to come up to the Sun Parlour to get an early start on nest building but this was ridiculous. I hope they made it back to a warmer climate. If that fuzzy little rodent was right with his prediction, we'll soon see the Robins again and this time to stay.

The American Robin is probably more recognizable to most Canadians than any other bird. It was named by early settlers because its brick-red breast reminded them of the European Robin. Our robin is much larger and aside from the colour of its breast, it bears no resemblance to the Old World bird.

The breeding range is from the northern tree line limit of Alaska, across Canada, from Vancouver and the Queen Charlotte Islands to Labrador and Newfoundland. It covers the whole United States south to the Gulf coast, central Florida and southern Mexico. The Robin winters from southern Canada southward to south Florida and down to Guatemala.

Our adult Robin is 23 to 27.5 cm. in length and is easily recognized by its brick-red breast. The top and sides of the head and the nape are black with small white areas about the eyes; the upper parts are mostly dark gray, becoming blackish on the wings and tail. The outer tail feathers are tipped white; it has brown eyes and a yellow bill. The female is duller in colour than the male. The young have black spots on the breast and pale streaks on the back; otherwise, they resemble the adults that accompany them.

The Robin has a pleasing personality with a song of 2-3 syllable phrases that suggest, "cheer-up, cheer-up," or "cherrily- cherrily," with variations of pitch, continuing for long periods of time, all through the spring and summer. They have alarm or scold notes as well; these are very high-pitched lisping whistles of alarm.

They arrive in early spring as first patches of bare ground begin to appear through the melting snow. The Robin has a fondness for trees and lawns about our homes. Also farmland, woodlots and thickets are ideal for nesting and foraging. In general they favour residential areas over heavily forested lands. Although insects, worms and wild fruit make up the bulk of their diet, the fondness for fruit sometimes gets the Robin in trouble with small fruit farmers. Robins are one of the few species that have benefited by the coming of the white man.

Nests are usually built 1.5 to 4.5 metres up in a conifer or deciduous trees and shrubs but often much higher and occasionally on the ground. At times nests are built in recesses of building exteriors, and occasionally inside buildings. Nesting material such as twigs, weed stems, and grass are readily found. While the base and walls are made of mud, the nest is lined with fine grass and other soft materials. Then four plain blue eggs are laid. The female incubates them for eleven to fourteen days. On occasion she is assisted by the male.

Unquestionably the Robin is our favourite harbinger of spring. The Robin scouts have been here, can spring not be far behind?



Essex County Field Naturalists' Club 2004 Raffle

Draw held on December 8, 2004

1st Prize

The Rodale Book of Composting, by Deborah L. Martin and Grace Gershuny. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1992. (book)

Won by: Mike Tremblay, Tilbury, ON

2nd Prize

Claude the Crab (Beanie Babies toy)

Won by: Ember Soos-King, La Salle, ON

3rd Prize

Habitats, by Pamela Hickman. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1993. (book)

Won by: Mira Wray, Windsor, ON

4th Prize

Rustic Birdhouses and Feeders, by Colin McGhee. Pownal, VT: Storey Communications, 2000. (book)

Won by: Meagan Curtis, Windsor, ON

5th Prize

A North American Rain Forest Scrapbook, by Virginia Wright-Frierson. New York: Walker and Company, 1999.

Won by: Beth Bawtenheimer, Windsor, ON

6th Prize

Birds of Michigan, by Ted Black & Gregory Kennedy. Edmonton: Lone Pine Publishing, 2003.

Won by: Tom Henderson, Windsor, ON

7th Prize

Raccoon wall decoration

Won by: Cathie Etzl, Windsor, ON

8th Prize

What's That Bug? by Nan Froman. Toronto: Madison Press Books, 2001.

Won by: Caroline Biribauer, LaSalle, ON

9th Prize

Growing Frogs, by Vivian French. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2000.

Won by: Rebekah Croley, Windsor, ON

10th Prize

Fall Colors Across North America, by Anthony E. Cook. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 2001.

Won by: Helmut Birkner, Windsor, ON

How Much Habitat is Enough?

Wed., March 23, 2005
Windsor Public Library
850 Ouellette Ave.

Draft Agenda

Technical Workshop

12:30 – 1:00 p.m. **Registration**

1:00 p.m. **Welcome and Introductions**

Tom Henderson, Chair of Outreach Committee, DRCC

Overview of Detroit River RAP

Melanie Coulter, Remedial Action Plan Implementation Specialist
Detroit River Canadian Cleanup

A Framework for Guiding Habitat Restoration in Great Lakes AOCs

Graham Bryan, Habitat Biologist
Canadian Wildlife Service; Environment Canada

The Essex Region Biodiversity Strategy

Dan Lebedyk, Conservation Biologist
Essex Region Conservation Authority

2:45 p.m.: **Coffee Break**

3:00 – 4:00 p.m.: **Small group sessions:** Facilitators TBA

4:00 p.m.

Percentage of an Urbanized Watershed that is Impervious Surfaces: Case Studies in the Detroit River AOC

Mark Buckner, Natural Heritage Coordinator
Citizens Environment Alliance

4:20 – 5:00 p.m. **Plenary Session:** results of group sessions and further discussion

Public Forum

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Success Stories: Bald Eagles Nesting on Peche Island

Phil Roberts, President
Essex County Field Naturalists Club

Keynote Speaker

TBA

Public discussion to follow

ECFNC Winter / Spring Activities and Excursions, March - June 2005

For further information concerning the ECFNC excursions, contact Bert Harris (966-3263), JoAnn Grondin (734-0056), Margaret Jennings (250-0705), or Betty Learmouth (944-0825). "Thank you" to those who have volunteered to lead an excursion. We appreciate leaders sharing their time and expertise with others. Let us know about your ideas for upcoming excursions. Consider volunteering as an excursion leader.

February 9 – **ECFNC Members Monthly Meeting** - Australia with Tom Hince and Paul Pratt

March 9 – **ECFNC Annual Members Meeting** – Enjoy an evening of reports from the various ECFNC committees. The evening always features entertainment arranged by the ECFNC executive. Meet in the Essex Civic Centre at 7:30 p.m. in Room C.

March 20 – **ECFNC Spring Event** – ECFNC executive member JoAnn Grondin will again be organizing a spring cleanup on the Greenway. Meet in the Greenway parking lot in Harrow where Walker Road passes over the Greenway. Wear clothing and gloves appropriate for work along the edge of the greenway. JoAnn will provide garbage bags. Meet at 2:00 p.m.

March 23 – "How Much Habitat is Enough?" – A workshop presented by The Detroit River Canadian Cleanup Outreach Committee at the Windsor Public Library, Central Branch, 850 Ouellette Avenue, Windsor. A technical workshop will be held from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. with a public presentation from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Please contact Mark Buckner, Natural Heritage Coordinator, Citizens Environment Alliance, 275 Oak Avenue, Windsor, ON N9A 5E5 Telephone: 519-973-1116 e-mail: ceatours@cogeco.net

March 26 – Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas - Last chance! This is the final year of data collection. Join us for owl surveys and square bashing. The Atlas will be hosting a local workshop at Point Pelee National Park on Saturday, March 26, 2005 in the Interpretive Centre, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Call Ojibway Nature Centre for more details.

March 30 - ECFNC Executive Meeting

April 2 – Spring meeting of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' Carolinian West Regional group, hosted by the McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London

April 2 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Spring Bird Migration – A series of field trips to observe the incredible variety of bird life which migrates through Southwestern Ontario. Fee: \$14/1 or sign up for all 4 and get a discount.

April 2 – Naturalized Landscape Conference "Cultivating Positive Change" to be held in the Hellenic Banquet Halls from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Tickets are \$47 per person which includes lunch and refreshments. Speakers include Ecologist Mathis Natvik, Author Lorraine Johnson, Town Planner Larry Silani, Native Plant Grower Joe Frei, Nature Conservancy of Canada representative James Duncan, and City of Windsor Forester Bill Roesel. Register by March 29, 2005. Call Dan Bissonnette (259-2407) for registration and more information.

April 10 – Friends of Ojibway Prairie Annual General Meeting – Ojibway Nature Centre 2:00 pm. Refreshments and Guest Speaker, David Wake. All are welcome to attend.

Topic: The U.S.-Ontario-Michigan Border Transportation Partnership (the Partnership), is moving forward with technical and environmental work leading to the selection of a new or expanded crossing of the Detroit River. The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is leading the Canadian work program in coordination with Transport Canada. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), in coordination with the U.S. Federal Highways Administration, is leading the U.S. work program.

David Wake is the Windsor Project Co-ordinator in the London office of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation. Mr. Wake has spent most of his career in the field of environmental planning, and has supervised environmental assessments for a variety of provincial transportation projects over the past 25 years. In his presentation he will provide background information about the recently announced Detroit River International Crossing Environmental Assessment study, explain the planning process, and identify opportunities for public input during the study.

Public meetings, are expected to be held in the Windsor area in early April. Please look for updates on the partnership website, <http://www.partnershipborderstudy.com/> for specific dates. In addition, notices will be placed in area newspapers.

April 13 – **ECFNC Members Monthly Meeting** – University of Windsor student Nick LaPointe will share his summer 2004 fish project in the Detroit River with ECFNC members. Meet in the Essex Civic Centre at 7:30 p.m. in Room C.

April 16 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Spring Bird Migration – A series of field trips to observe the incredible variety of bird life which migrates through Southwestern Ontario. Fee: \$14/1

April 17 – **ECFNC “Signs of Spring” Excursion** – Join Bill Balkwill for a walk in Bill and Jack Balkwill’s forty acre woodland to look for signs of spring. The north portion of the Balkwill woodland is a water retention and discharge area which is wet in the spring with water flowing through the woodland. Please wear the appropriate waterproof foot wear for this walk. Meet at 2:00 p.m. To reach Bill’s home, if you are in Essex proceed south along the Arner Townline watching for Road 2 West (Gosfield South) which will be on your left. Turn left (heading east) and proceed a short distance to house number 1880 on your left. Proceed down the lane.

April 24 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Earth Day at Ojibway – Fun for the whole family including environmental exhibits, entertainment, children’s activities, food and much more! Noon until 4:00 p.m. Free admission. The ECFNC Heritage Committee will again be organizing its bake sale which has been a good fundraiser for our land preservation fund. Plan to bake for this sale and volunteer a few hours of your time at the baked goods table. Call Betty Learmouth for more details.

April 27 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Discover the most popular outdoor hobby in North America through a series of morning field trips at Point Pelee. 8:30 p.m. Fee: \$10/trip

April 27 – **ECFNC Executive Meeting**

April 30 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Spring Bird Migration – A series of field trips to observe the incredible variety of bird life which migrates through Southwestern Ontario. Fee: \$14/1

April 30 - May 1 – ECFNC Excursion – Annual Pelee Island trip with Dave Kraus. See details in this issue of *The Egret*.

May 1 – 31 – Point Pelee National Park Birding Festival – Enjoy the spectacular spring migration that passes through the Park. Events will be in the Spring Schedule as of March 2005.

May – ECFNC Spring Activity – Over the past few years, ECFNC members have journeyed to Pelee Island to pull the invasive Garlic Mustard on the Shaughnessy Cohen Memorial Savannah and Ontario Nature's Stone Road Alvar Nature Reserve. If you would like to participate in this mid week overnight activity, please call organizer Bonnie Ross at 969-4247.

May 7 – Hillman Spring Shore & Songbird Celebration – A one day Festival from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. will be held at the Hillman Conservation Area. Banding demonstrations with volunteer banders on hand from the Holiday Beach Migration Observatory will be featured throughout the day. Light refreshments (morning coffee, muffins, hot dogs and sweets at lunch) will be provided by ECFNC members. Please call Shirley Grondin at 972-5781 if you wish to volunteer to assist at the Festival.

May 4 - Ojibway Nature Centre – Spring Bird Migration – A series of field trips to observe the incredible variety of bird life which migrates through Southwestern Ontario. Fee: \$14/1

May 11 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Big Day Birding – An intensive day of birding for people seeking 100 plus species of birds in a single day. Time: 6:00 a.m. Fee: \$25.00/day

May 11 – ECFNC Members Monthly Meeting – Caroline Biribauer of the Wildlife Habitat Council will discuss the activities of the Council which works to increase the amount of quality wildlife habitat on corporate, private and public lands. Caroline will introduce a newly published comprehensive guidebook published by the Wildlife Habitat Council entitled *Exploring Our Natural World: A Biodiversity Atlas of the Lake Huron to Lake Erie Corridor*. Meet in the Essex Civic Centre at 7:30 p.m. in Room C.

May 13 – Point Pelee National Park activity – A fund raising dinner with guest speaker and bird identification author Chris Earley will be held at the Roma Club in Leamington. Chris' topic will be Hawks and Owls. Contact Sarah Rupert at PPNP for more details.

May 14 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Native Plant & Tree Sale – Attract wildlife to your yard with flowers, trees and shrubs. 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

May 15 – ECFNC Spring Activity – Join ECFNC members for a visit to Tulleys Bush in the Town of Essex. We will be inviting the adjacent neighbours to join us for the walk during which we will learn about the old growth trees and native plants that are just beyond the residents' backyards. Doug Sweet, director of Parks and Recreation for the Town of Essex, has told us that the town is interested to know more about this remnant woodland belonging to the town. The town is considering a trail system in this area as part of future housing development. The meeting place will be at the eastern end of Woodview Drive. If you are in Essex heading east on Talbot Road, watch for Fairview Avenue West, turn right, proceed to Woodview Drive (one street before the Essex Civic Centre), proceed along Woodview, and park near a future right of way on the south side. Meet at 2:00 p.m.

May 21 – Ojibway Nature Centre – Big Day Birding – An intensive day of birding for people seeking 100 plus species of birds in a single day. Time: 6:00 a.m. Fee: \$25.00/day

Monday, May 23 – **Victoria Day - ECFNC Spring Excursion** – Enjoy the Victoria Day weekend with a morning birding excursion to Point Pelee National Park. Bring your guides as we will all contribute to finding and identification of the birds we see. We will meet at the Visitors Centre at 8:00 a.m. Following the walk we will gather for lunch at picnic tables near the parking lot.

May 25 - **ECFNC Executive Meeting**

May 29 – **ECFNC Spring Excursion** – Join in a Garlic Mustard pull at Carolina Woods in the Town of Leamington. Ruth Junge is the organizer for this event. Please call Ruth at 326-6630 to indicate that you will be participating. Bring your own gloves. Bags will be provided. This remnant woodland has a variety of native plant species as well as some impressive old growth trees which we will have an opportunity to view. Park at Zellers and walk around the building to the Carolina Woods main entrance which is on the west side of the woodland. Meet at 2:00 p.m.

June 3, 4, 5 – Nipissing Naturalists Club hosts Ontario Nature and the Nature Canada Annual Conferences in North Bay. Contact Ontario Nature, 355 Lesmill Road, Don Mills, ON M3B 2W8 at 1-800-440-2366 extension 224 for more information. The conference brochure will be in the Spring issue of *ON Nature*.

June 5 – **ECFNC Spring Activity** – This is the fifth and last year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project. Join us for an opportunity to contribute to the atlas by participating in a series of walks to observe evidence of breeding bird activity. Meet in the parking lot of the Colchester North Public School. If you are at the corner of the Arner Townline and the Essex By-Pass, proceed south on the Arner Townline, watch for the first road to your right and proceed to the hamlet of Gesto, watching for the school on your left. Meet in the early evening at 6:00 p.m.

June 8 – **ECFNC Members Monthly Meeting** – speaker to be announced. Meet in the Essex Civic Centre at 7:30 p.m. in Room C.

June 11 - The Canada South Land Trust is planning a walk at Penelope Potter's farm followed by a salad picnic. More information available from Betty Learmouth.

June 12 - **ECFNC Spring Activity** – This is the fifth and last year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project. Join us for an opportunity to contribute to the atlas by participating in a series of walks to observe evidence of breeding bird activity. Meet in the parking lot of the Colchester North Public School. If you are at the corner of the Arner Townline and the Essex By-Pass, proceed south on the Arner Townline, watch for the first road to your right and proceed to the hamlet of Gesto, watching for the school on your left. Meet in the early evening at 6:00 p.m.

June 19 – **ECFNC Spring Activity** – This is the fifth and last year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project. Join us for an opportunity to contribute to the atlas by participating in a series of walks to observe evidence of breeding bird activity. Meet in the parking lot of the Colchester North Public School. If you are at the corner of the Arner Townline and the Essex By-Pass, proceed south on the Arner Townline, watch for the first road to your right and

proceed to the hamlet of Gesto, watching for the school on your left. Meet in the early evening at 6:00 p.m.

June 22 - 26 – Volunteer for Nature - Birds Beckon: Ontario Ornithology – Pelee Island – Trip description: Explore Canada's most southerly inhabited island while honing your birding skills on Pelee Island. Learn to identify and record bird song with assistance from expert birders. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is a volunteer-based five-year project studying and mapping the distribution and abundance of the province's breeding birds. Fee: \$325. Contact Ontario Nature's Volunteer for Nature Registration Desk at 1-800-440-2366 ext 222 (toll free) or e-mail at vfn@ontarionature.org

June 26 - ECFNC Spring Activity – This is the fifth and last year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project. Join us for an opportunity to contribute to the atlas by participating in a series of walks to observe evidence of breeding bird activity. Meet in the parking lot of the Colchester North Public School. If you are at the corner of the Arner Townline and the Essex By-Pass, proceed south on the Arner Townline, watch for the first road to your right and proceed to the hamlet of Gesto, watching for the school on your left. Meet in the early evening at 6:00 p.m.

June 29 - ECFNC Executive Meeting

**Essex County Field Naturalists' Club
Membership Renewal**

Annual dues are due as of January 1, 2005.

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

Sustaining membership \$30.00 / year _____ Life membership \$500.00 / year _____
(tax receipt eligible)

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ Province _____

Postal Code _____ Phone Number _____

E-mail _____

Make cheques payable to:

Essex County Field Naturalists' Club
Devonshire Mall P.O.
P. O. Box 23011
Windsor, Ontario N8X 5B5

Thank you for renewing your ECFNC membership!

