

# THE EGRET



THE ESSEX COUNTY FIELD  
NATURALISTS' CLUB

DECEMBER, 1992 VOL.9, #4

# THE EGRET

Volume 9, Number 4, December, 1992

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Report/Tom Hurst.....	1
Editorial/Tom Hince.....	2
Ruscom Shores Revisited/Mike Malone.....	3-5
"        "    Management Plan Correspondence/Malone, Allsopp....	6,7
"        "    Media/collage.....	8
"        "    Preferred Management Concept/ERCA.....	9-16
Heritage Committee Report/John DeMarco.....	17,18
Islands of Green/ Mike Turton (ERCA).....	19
Essex County's Vanishing Herps/Dave Kraus.....	20,21
A Year of Bluebird Trail Monitoring (Part 1)/Don Bissonnette..	22-24
Treasurer's Report/Peg Wilkinson.....	25
Calendar of Events.....	26

## ECFNC Officers and Executive Contacts

President - Tom Hurst 839-4635  
Vice-President - Peter Bondy 253-6333  
Treasurer - Peg Wilkinson 252-1806  
ERCA Representative, Guest speakers - Mike Malone 733-4038  
Secretary - Myrtle Bissette 256-2867  
Corresponding Sec., NHRP rep. - Barbara Oulette 733-2371  
Public Relations, FON rep. - Phil Roberts 776-5209 (work-ERCA)  
Annual Dinner - Carl Maiolani 972-1399  
Egret Editor, Heinz Bush Comm. - Tom Hince 326-4354  
Bluebird Committee - Don Bissonnette 738-3279  
Membership - Denise Hartley

ESSEX COUNTY FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

1993 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_ TYPE OF PROJECTS YOU WOULD VOLUNTEER FOR \_\_\_\_\_

Please enter/renew my membership in the ECFNC in the following category:

Individual - \$15 per year \_\_\_\_\_

Family - \$20 per year \_\_\_\_\_

Sustaining - \$25 per year \_\_\_\_\_

Life - \$200 p. person \_\_\_\_\_

(if payment is received prior to December 31, 1992 the cost of a life membership will be \$150)

Note\* - the Junior Egret is no longer available.

Please make cheque payable to the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club and mail to: ECFNC, P.O. Box 2211 Walkerville, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 2L5.



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.



## President's Report

Greetings!

It is hard to believe that another year is almost at an end. This was an exciting year for the ECFNC. Three new committees; Heritage, NHRP and the Heinz Bush, were all created this year while the Bluebird committee expanded its important activities. These groups are the means by which our club reaches out to the wider community in an effort to educate and improve our natural surroundings. At the same time, the rostrum of monthly speakers and club field trips have never been more varied or rewarding. All in all, I would say it has been a good year for the ECFNC!

Our success for the most part is due to the enthusiasm of our executive and committee members. On behalf of the club, I would like to thank each and every one of them and list their contributions. Fortunately, they are all modest people concerned only with getting the job done. Otherwise, it would take several pages of the EGRET to do them justice.

Recently, the club held its annual dinner meeting. It certainly ranks as one of our most successful events. Not only did those in attendance enjoy a fine meal and speaker, but also generously contributed to the Heritage Fund and, for the first time, to the NHRP program. Thank you, Carl Maiolani for ensuring the event went so smoothly; and you, Peter Bondy for ensuring our wallets were lightened so painlessly. I was also pleased to see a sizable contingent from ERCA, including the General Manager, Ken Schmidt, as well as the Superintendent of Point Pelee, Ross Thomson, at our dinner. The event certainly benefited from their presence and I hope that they join us annually for this fine event.

The annual dinner also marked the culmination of a fund raising drive to procure a slide projector for the club. A special thanks goes out to Bill and Frances Langlois whose raffle banished the nightmare of the "missing slide projector". This occasional embarrassment at monthly meetings will not be missed by the club's executive!

This is the last issue of the EGRET for 1992. Tom it was nice of you to put my ramblings to print. I know it has been a very busy year for you. We are grateful that you made time to do a fine job of editing our newsletter.

It has been a good year and I am sure our members will make 1993 an even better one for the ECFNC. Until then, renew your memberships and we'll see you at the Christmas bird counts.

Respectfully,

Tom Hurst

## Editorial

Forgive me this liberty... I've managed to make it through most of the year as editor without trying to impress my thoughts on you (at least under my own signature anyway). However, for many good reasons, I will take that liberty.

A year ago, I took on the role of Editor of the EGRET, and I must say quite frankly, not without missgivings. I write enough at work, and I had no interest in writing more to fill out a newsletter! But I think the EGRET plays a pivotal role in our group, and it must vigorously reflect their thoughts, their successes and their challenges. Reflecting on the past year, much of this has been accomplished.

The successes of this club are many as elucidated by our committed president, Tom Hurst in his remarks. In this issue, you will find out what your commitment and the commitment of a few strong individuals can mean. Much of this issue is focused on the Ruscom Shores Proposed Management Concept, how we got their, and what the future holds. It represents a major success, and that is to your credit.

Also in this issue is an update on the club's Heritage Committee and its progress. This is especially important, in light of a parallel challenge presented to us by The Islands of Green Project, also in this issue. Perhaps Islands of Green is the ideal purpose for the Heritage Fund? The Heritage Committee and executive members welcome your comments on this.

As the year ended, I wanted to focus issues of the EGRET on the major initiatives of the club, such as those aforementioned. In the first issue of 1993, you can look forward to similar articles on the Natural Habitat Restoration Program and the Heinz Bush project. It is absolutely essential that everyone be aware of these major initiatives and our role in them. We are growing and we must grow together.

In the past year, I have been blessed with many excellent contributions to the EGRET. People have shown remarkable flexibility in meeting deadlines and assisting me when required. My sincere thanks to all who write articles, and all who read this newsletter.

As the year draws to a close, I will leave you with this challenge. Get out your pens or typewriters, or computers and put your thoughts down on paper about the EGRET, your concerns, opportunities we should be concerned about, why you love mussels, or whatever pleases your fancy. I am willing to consider any form of submission, and I would certainly welcome short letters. I can't emphasize enough that this is YOUR FORUM. If you don't use it, we will all be the poorer for it.

As time allows it I will work on some changes to the layout of the newsletter. If you have any ideas, or comments, just let me know. You can reach me at 326-4354 (leave a message, please!).

Tom Hince, Editor

Lake St. Clair some years, then turned under the plough in others. An engineer working from a warm office, last winter had determined that on this very spot would be constructed the berm - with 3 feet of freeboard, sloped at precisely a 5:1 angle, and with a 5 foot top width. This is where the lake would abruptly halt, and where the beautiful green turf, manicured to perfection and without a weed to be seen, would roll gently away to smiling golfers.

I poked around in the pools and immediately came upon a tiny snapping turtle. Cold and stiff, recently emerged from a sunlit mudbank, I imagined the fall hatchling in search of its first meal of the spring - a larval dragonfly, or a small snail. Looking further, we soon found a sleek green leopard frog, while nearby in the shallows newly born tadpoles hid in the detritus. Life in abundance in the sedge meadow was awakening from along winter rest. We struck out along the marsh trail to the beach and were greeted by a big lumbering snapping turtle on the path. She posed for a few photos, and we carried on to the lake. There a pair of mallards took flight and circled the marsh. I had become thoroughly convinced that this marsh was alive and well, and my Irish blood began to boil when I began to contemplate a golf course being built that would affect this - one of the last remaining marshes on the Lake St. Clair shore of Essex County. If it was built, it was going to be over my dead body.

Betty Learmouth was equally determined to protect the marsh. Her intimate knowledge of the area and tireless efforts in contacting parties with an interest in the problem generated a groundswell of support from far and wide. We formed a loose association with the Clean Water Alliance from Windsor (now the Citizen's Environmental Alliance - CEA), made contact with Great Lakes United, involved the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON), who was fighting similar proposals in Ottawa and in Kingston, prodded the MNR in Chatham and in Toronto, and explained to some sympathetic adjacent landowners our concerns. A few brave ERCA Full Authority members, Sheila Wisdom of Windsor, and Patrick O'Neil of Kingsville, stepped forward from the flock and voiced opposition to the proposal. Numerous club members offered support in many ways, then the media became involved. Sensing a good public fight in the air, they followed the story closely and began to ask pertinent questions of all parties.

The CEA called for a rally at RSCA for July 9, 1990 at which angry local residents awaited about 100 county-wide citizens supporting the wetland. For those expecting a quiet evening stroll, in peaceful support of nature, it was a shock to become involved in such a dicey demonstration. Cooler heads restrained one particular gentleman, who proclaimed to me "I'll drop you on the spot if you don't get the \_\_\_ out of my way". He having a large placard saying "Residents in Support of the Golf Course" and me without a hard hat! Well, I politely obliged.

On July 11, 1990, the Windsor Star ran a front page headline reading "Disputed Territory" with a large, color aerial photo of RSCA. The article quoted Marion Strebig-Taylor of the FON, "It flies in the face of common sense... If this were to go through there would be a fairly major crisis" and the US based Sierra Club was quoted as saying "it would raise holy hell, if there were such a plan on its side of the Great Lakes." Adjacent to this article and also on the front page was a story entitled "Canada's Endangered Species List Now at 195." Finally, the momentum was building for us.

## Ruscom Shores Revisited

In December 1992, members of the ERCA Full Authority will debate and vote on a new Master Plan for the Ruscom Shores Conservation Area (RSCA) to direct restoration of agricultural lands, develop walking trails, and provide low impact developments such as a viewing tower, picnic tables, parking lot, and interpretive kiosk. (See the end of this article for the full proposed concept). This meeting will mark a new beginning for the long path to recovery for this remnant marsh and its adjacent "sedge meadow" or "upper marsh" and farmland.

The original 1983 Master Plan for 123 acres of RSCA was never acted upon due to the high cost and lack of funds for ERCA to purchase an additional 18 acres of beach frontage that was wanted to develop for an intensive use section of RSCA. Although some 50 plus acres of agricultural land was to be reforested in the 1983 plan, the area instead was leased for farming to generate funds for various ERCA programs. The whole area lay quiet for half a dozen years, enjoyed by a handful of locals for walks, a few hunters, and various naturalists seeking a quiet escape from urban pressures. During the five year field season of the "Breeding Bird Atlas of Ontario" program from 1985 to 1989, one notable club member, Betty Learmouth, made numerous trips to the area and compiled an impressive list of 95 species of birds using the site. Grouped by habitat use, Betty's list demonstrated clearly that the RSCA was a rich mosaic of varied habitats which resulted in the amazing diversity of avifauna. Frequenting the area and adjacent shoreline were Northern Waterthrush, Tundra Swan, Least Bittern and Wilson's Phalarope to name but a few. Presently the list is up to 112 species and counting.

In the late 1980's, a local developer proposed an 18 hole golf course for the site, which was quickly scaled down to 9 holes so as not to disturb the cattail marsh present. Being an "Environmentally Significant Area" (ESA), RSCA was afforded some weak protection. Designation as an ESA, however, does not hold weight politically, with municipal nor provincial planners. The "Conservation Plan" of 1983, ERCA's main policy document outlining management intentions on Conservation Areas, stated categorically in section 3.5.1 : Objective: To protect environmentally significant areas; 8 policies then outline general strategies for ESA protection. Rochester Township and ERCA wholeheartedly supported the golf course proposal, rationalizing the decision by claiming that a solid dike or berm would protect the marsh from the development and even provide "an elevated trail for viewing opportunities, especially during the birding season". Furthermore, an elaborate system of ponds, ditches, and pump stations would prevent herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers from entering the marsh; the water would simply be collected and pumped uphill and out to the lake. The ultimate irony was that "thousands of trees, shrubs, and 5-10 acres of rough lining the fairways will attract species of wildlife which prefer a mixed habitat - the number of species using the area should actually increase"!

Early in May of 1990, my wife Joan and I shut down the store and visited Ruscom to get a first hand look at the section slated for development. It was a typically cold, wet spring and scattered pools 2" to 6" deep dotted the sedge meadow. In dry years, this section had been farmed, whereas in wet years, left undisturbed. It regenerated in sedges and rushes from the seed bank below. It was the land between two worlds, the transition zone claimed by the waters of



At the July 1990 meeting of the Full Authority, ERCA member Patrick O'Neil made the point that he would be requesting an independent Environmental Assessment of the proposal, and would be looking for a Full Authority debate on the question at the September meeting. Then, in early August, MNR Toronto requested ERCA to "fully explore concerns about the project that have been raised.." before cabinet was asked to give a go ahead on the project.

Meanwhile, club member Russ Munroe had been in contact with the Ministry of Culture and Communications regarding potential heritage impacts at RSCA. The sand ridge, a former dune paralleling the lakeshore, which was known to be prime turtle nesting habitat, was also known to have "yielded numerous artifacts from native occupation of the site from CA 1500 B.C. to CA 1000 AD" and that 2 localities "have also yielded evidence of human burials". MCC recommended an archaeological survey be conducted to document archaeological deposits, and thus development to the site would have to protect such areas. "Should human remains be encountered, a much more involved process will be required, involving the Native community, and the... Cemeteries Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations". The timing of the letter from MCC was nothing less than miraculous for at this very time an unforeseen crisis had exploded at a golf course in another part of Canada; native peoples at Oka, Quebec, were armed to the hilt and in a stand-off with the Canadian Armed Forces to protect their ancestral burial grounds from a proposed golf course.

The great debate scheduled for the Full Authority in September proved to be anti-climatic. The developer, Norbert Trepanier, faced insurmountable odds not only against the "environmental terrorists" as we had been dubbed, and a questioning public, but now he would be asked to bear the costs of both an independent Environmental Assessment, an Archaeological Survey, and other unforeseen costs associated with mitigation for protection of artifacts. In early September 1990, Mr. Trepanier withdrew his proposal, and the golf course scheme was laid to rest.

With the arrival of 1993, we can mark fifteen years since RSCA was purchased, and the same fifteen years of debating its Master Plan. If the new Master Plan is passed in December 1992, the possibility exists of actually getting on with restoration of the site in the spring of 1993. Such would bode well for a new cooperative working relationship between ERCA and the ECFNC. The two letters following demonstrate that we are quite capable of working together for the benefit of RSCA, and for that matter, all Conservation Areas.

by Mike Malone

**Essex County**  
**FIELD NATURALISTS'**  
**CLUB**

P.O. Box 2211, Walkerville P.O.  
Windsor, Ontario  
N8Y 4R8

Oct. 30/92

To: Ms. Chris Allsop, Land Management Supervisor  
Essex Region Conservation Authority

Re: Preferred Concept for Master Plan,  
Ruscom Shores C. A.

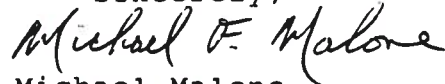
Dear Chris:

I would like to pass on to you recommendations from the executive committee of the ECFNC meeting of Oct.28/92 regarding the Ruscom Shores CA "preferred concept" for the RS CA Master Plan. The ECFNclub highly commends the objectives and direction ERCA proposes for management of this C A, and we recommend the following:

- 1) that the road to the parking/picnic site be kept as short as possible to help reduce construction and maintenance costs, and to allow more land in the C A to be available for restoration.
- 2) that the RS CA become an ERCA Natural Habitat Restoration Program demonstration site.
- 3) that the ECFNC be allowed to comment further on the wetland management proposals when such planning takes place in the future.
- 4) that while we recognize the difficulty of funding this Master Plan, we oppose in principle the severance or sale of Conservation Area lands for fund-raising purposes.
- 5) that the neighbouring property owners be encouraged to plant or protect native species of flora on their lots in order to enhance this small Conservation Area.

Please feel free to contact me should there be any questions re the above. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,



Michael Malone

Executive Member/ERCA liason  
Essex County Field Naturalists' Club



360 fairview avenue west  
essex, ontario  
nem 1y6  
519-776-5209

1992.11.10

file no.

Essex County Field  
Naturalists' Club  
P.O. Box 211  
Walkerville P.O.  
Windsor, Ontario  
N8Y 4R8

**Attention: Mr. Michael Malone, Executive Member/ERCA Liaison**

Dear Mr. Malone:

Thank you for your comments on behalf of the Essex Field Naturalists' Club regarding Ruscom Shores and Tremblay Beach Conservation Areas.

You provided a number of useful comments regarding the proposed wetland management, picnic areas, viewing towers, trails, etc. for both areas. I would be pleased to meet with you and obtain further input when the specific plans for these projects are done.

The issue regarding the severance and sale of the proposed lots at Ruscom Shores will be presented to the Full Authority at the November 12, 1992 meeting (as per you agenda, mailed separately). Based on the outcome of this meeting, I am then hoping to finish both plans for presentation at the December meeting.

Once again, please thank the Club for their continued interest and input which has proven valuable to me in the revision of both Master Plans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Allsop". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Allsop,  
Land Management Supervisor

CA/sl

# Environmental assessment proposal being praised

By Gary Rennie

the golf course project would be do...

## Wetland golf course on hold indefinitely

Gail Robertson/Star Essex Bureau

Environmentalists may have won the first round against a golf course pro...

Wetland area, but they aren't about to let down their guard. For Star has learned that the controversial proposal — targeted for...

Shores Conservation Area — accepted by the Essex Region Conserva...

earlier this year has been deferred indefinitely. They are to be informed of the move, at their Thursday night meet...

anager Ken Schmidt, who refused to comment on the issue. "At the end of it," said Betty Learmouth, vice-president of the...

Environmentalists.

she said her group won't give up the fight. "I have the opportunity to look at it and make the right decision," said...

Members scheduled to attend the ERCA meeting will go...

Thursday says: "...because of delays to date and with the current economic conditions, the...

Story and photo  
By Gail Robertson  
Star Essex Bureau

# Wetland golf course battle for wetland's

## Golf course no assessment

Environmentalists  
the project depends. Township council  
reported to favor the project.  
and 80 per cent of its  
and continues to  
to two per

This letter concerns the dubi-  
decision of the Essex Region Coun-  
Authority to turn part of one  
County's last remaining wet-  
com Shores Conservation  
course. Conservation  
agree that the  
last chance  
of natural

the Essex Region Conservation Authority to "fully  
explore" concerns about the project that have been  
raised by local environmentalists, who  
course would have a negative impact  
Wetland area.

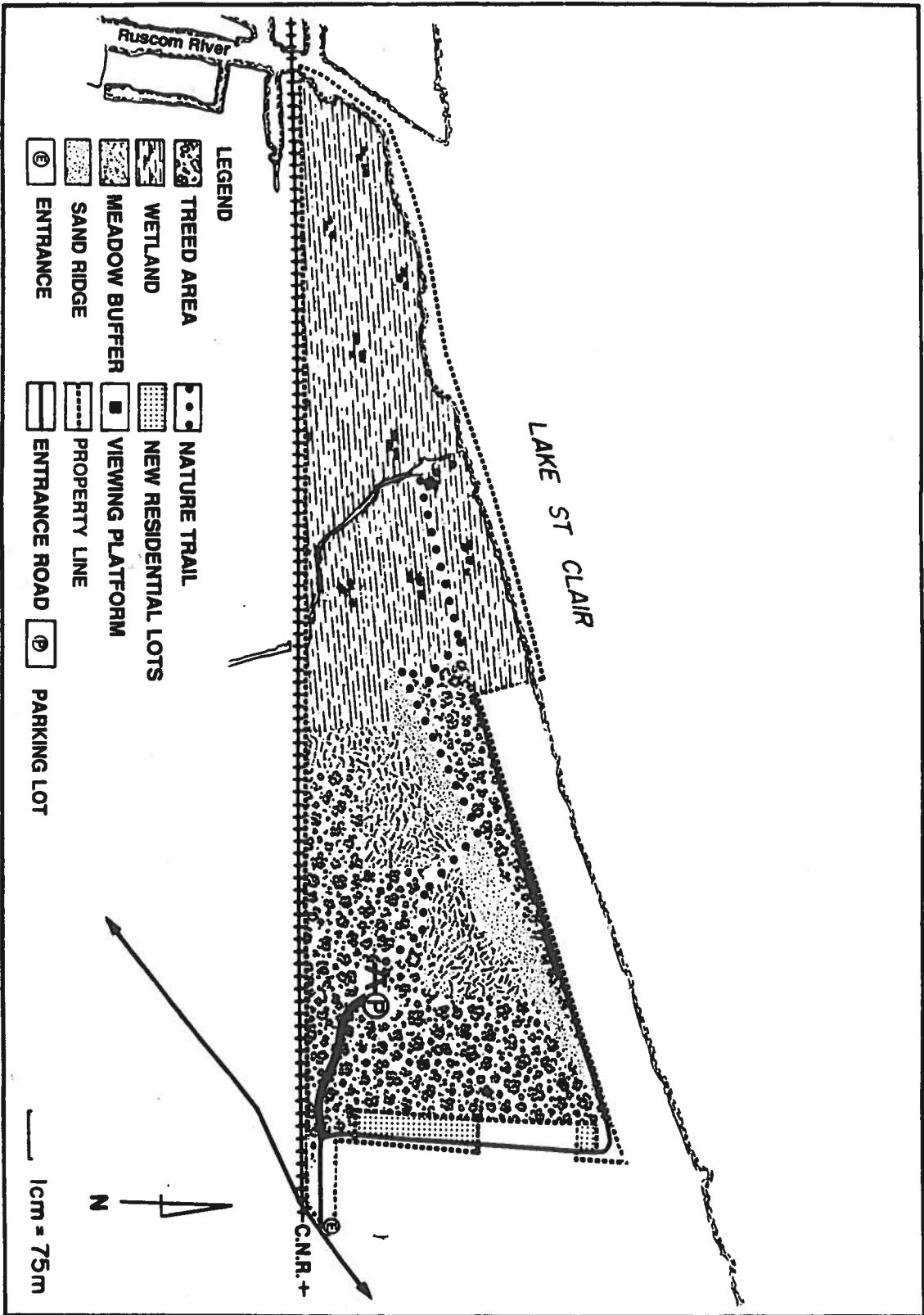
Wetland area.  
The minister said the ministry ex-  
with environmental groups and  
as possible before the go-  
The cabinet has final a-  
because it involves a long  
The minister wants to build a

Golf course  
meeting  
gets chippy  
By Gail Robertson  
Star Essex Bureau

ST. JOACHIM — Two sides at odds  
over plans to put a golf course in a wet-  
land area almost came to blows at the  
site Monday night.  
Amid heated arguments, finger  
pointing and at one point even shoving,  
there appeared to be little give in the  
debate over the Ruscom Shores Con-  
servation Area.  
The battle springs from the Essex  
Region Conservation Authority's plan  
to lease land abutting the marsh, now  
being farmed, to a developer to build a  
nine-hole golf course.  
"Most of these people don't live  
around here and they're trying to tell  
us what to do," said an irate Betty Mill-  
er, who lives near the conservation  
area in Rochester Township.  
"I love nature, but not all these mos-  
quitoes. I have to load myself down  
with insect repellent... and the nature  
See GOLF COURSE, A4



PREFERRED CONCEPT



## **Ruscom Shores Conservation Area - Preferred Concept**

### **Goal and Objectives**

#### **Goal**

To protect and enhance the site's natural features while providing compatible human uses.

#### **Objectives**

To protect existing natural features and their associated flora and fauna,

To increase biodiversity of the site, such as by restoring historic plant communities,

To maintain and enhance the wetland,

To integrate the site with the surrounding landscape and improve its natural linkages,

To provide passive recreational and educational opportunities that are compatible with the site's natural features and complement existing facilities in the Region.

### **Resource Management Strategies**

#### **Vegetation and Wildlife Management**

##### **Entire Area**

Given the changing lake levels and their effect on the marsh ecosystem, management will be required if its diversity is to be maintained on a continuous basis. Management will consist of passive improvements such as ponds. Funding for wetland management will be pursued through a number of agencies and private corporations. A wetland management plan must look at Ruscom Shores as an ecosystem and include management of the wet meadow, sand ridge and upland areas, as well as consider its role in the Ruscom River Watershed and the Great Lakes Basin.

Hunting and trapping will not be allowed at Ruscom Shores.

Sensitive habitats supporting rare plant and/or animal species will be protected. Human use will be allowed in

small portions of these areas and only on the trail system.

#### Wetland

Visitor use and impact on the wetland must be minimal. Viewing opportunities will be provided only through the trail system.

Exotic species, such as Purple Loosestrife, will be removed whenever feasible.

#### Wet Meadow

The wet meadow was expanded in 1992 to include an additional 11.25 acres (4.5 ha) of agricultural land. This area will be prepared and seeded with native grasses in the fall of 1992. It may be mowed for one growing season to promote grass establishment after which native woody shrubs and marsh species will be allowed to regenerate naturally.

Opportunities to view and interpret plants and wildlife will be provided in a portion of the wet meadow, via a low impact trail system.

#### Sand Ridge

Small plots of prairie species were planted on the sand ridge in the spring of 1992. These will be monitored to determine the viability of reestablishing prairie species on a larger scale.

Aggressive, exotic species such as the Siberian Elm will be controlled whenever feasible.

Opportunities to view and interpret plants and wildlife will be provided in a portion of the sand ridge, via a low impact trail system.

#### Agricultural Areas

Upland areas will be reforested with native tree species. The areas (refer to Map) closest to existing and proposed residential lots will be reforested first. Low lying agricultural areas may be reforested pending the outcome of monitoring the area's drainage regime for a minimum of two years without pumping and preparation of a detailed wetland management plan. If the area is not reforested, it will be managed as part of the wet meadow complex/buffer zone. Agricultural land that can be tilled without pumping will continue to be farmed until the area is reforested.

## **Agricultural Drains**

The system of drains will be left in their current state unless there is a need to alter some in a wetland or wildlife habitat management program.

## **Cultural Resources**

The archaeologically rich and environmentally sensitive sand ridge will be protected from future development.

## **Development Strategies**

### **Access and Parking**

The entrance to the Conservation Area will be moved to the Southeast corner of the property (refer to Map). The current entrance and parking lot will be closed leaving Surf Club Drive for use by residents who have a right-of way over it. A gently winding road will lead to a new parking lot and picnic area.

### **Picnic Area**

The picnic area will be located so it is adjacent to, yet screened from the parking lot. It will be designed and planted to create separate picnic area nodes, providing a sense of partial privacy or enclosure as well as shade. Picnic tables, barbeques, vault-style privies and a small pavillion will also be provided. Running water will be available at an outdoor tap spring through summer.

### **Trail System**

The trail will begin near the parking lot and will pass through portions of the various ecosystems including the reforested areas, wet meadow, sand ridge and wetlands (Refer to Map). It is recognized that wetland portions of the trail will be completed as part of The Wetland Management project and routes will depend on its purpose and design. The system will be designed to minimize impact on vegetation and wildlife through the use of boardwalks in wet areas and natural surfaces protected by stone screenings where necessary. A viewing platform will be situated at the end of the wetland trail to provide further viewing opportunities of the wetland and Lake St. Clair. In the event that Canadian National Railway moves the remaining railroad track at the southern end of the property, the berm may be incorporated into the trail system to provide additional viewing and walking opportunities.



## Residential Lots

An application will be made to sever six residential lots on the east boundary of the property, along Surf Club Drive (Refer to Map). The proposed lots will meet or exceed Municipal and Ministry of Environment standards. Five lots will be located south of the existing residences allowing for a buffer zone between the entrance road and the southernmost lot. One lot will be located north of the existing residences, with a buffer zone between it and Surf Club Drive. Funds obtained from the sale of these lands will be allocated for wetland management, and improvements at Ruscom Shores. Any remaining balance will be used to purchase environmentally significant areas in the Essex Region or to fund natural area enhancement programs in other Conservation Areas.

## Operations Strategies

### Visitor Services

Since Ruscom Shores is a relatively small area, visitor services will be strictly day use and all facilities will be unstaffed.

### Information and Interpretation

Information on Conservation Areas and the Conservation Authority will be conveyed to visitors through a system of signs and kiosks used consistently at all Conservation Areas.

Specific information provided on Ruscom Shores will include interpretation of the new buffer zone (wet meadow) between the marsh and agricultural lands, the reforested areas, and any wetland management. Interpretive events may also be held to help visitors both enjoy and learn about the site's natural features.

### Marketing

Ruscom Shores will be marketed through a general package that promotes all Conservation Areas. The major objective of this package will be to increase residents' knowledge, use, and stewardship of Conservation Areas. An ERCA Communications Plan, outlining in detail proposed messages, and marketing methods, for all ERCA programs and Conservation Areas will be prepared in the fall of 1992.

Ruscom Shores will also be marketed as a birdwatching site in conjunction with the other important spring birding Conservation Areas, including Tremblay Beach and Hillman Marsh.

## **Research**

Research will be permitted in the Conservation Area, provided it is approved and conducted in accordance with guidelines agreed to by ERCA administration. Research opportunities may include study in the control of Purple Loosestrife or other exotic species, or in wetland management and its effects on wildlife. Archaeological research will not be permitted in the sand ridge unless authorization is received from the Ministry of Culture and Communications and ERCA administration.

## **Operations**

The nature of the site and the proposed facilities will allow administration, maintenance, and enforcement to continue to operate from the main offices in Essex.

### **Maintenance**

#### **Mowing:**

Mowing will continue to be done on a regular schedule and will include the picnic area, the immediate area around the parking lot, along internal roadsides, and at the entrance. This will reduce maintenance costs and encourage natural revegetation.

#### **Herbicides:**

Herbicides will be applied only when necessary to control aggressive exotic species, or to promote establishment/regeneration of trees or other native plants.

#### **Roadways:**

Regular maintenance will be undertaken on the new access road and parking lot.

### **Enforcement**

Conservation Authority staff will continue to periodically patrol Ruscom Shores to enforce Conservation Area Regulations.

## Implementation

### Phasing

Natural area management programs and development will be implemented over a five year period in the following priority:

Begin plans for wetland management including approaching various organizations to form partnerships for funding. Plans will be implemented as soon as funds are in place,

Plant trees, establishing buffer zones first, then in the balance of agricultural lands,

Construct new entrance road and parking lot,

Install new entrance sign,

Grade, seed, and plant trees and shrubs in new picnic area,

Provide picnic tables and barbeques,

Install water tap and privy,

Install kiosk,

Construct trail system (depending on completion of any wetland management project),

Construct viewing tower.

## Costing

Wetland Management	20,000.00
Reforestation	10,500.00
Entrance Road and Parking Lot	15,000.00
Entrance Sign	3,500.00
Picnic Area	800.00
Picnic Tables	875.00
Barbeques	360.00
Waterline and tap	1,600.00
Privy	10,000.00
Pavillion	8,000.00
Kiosk	1,000.00
Trail System	21,000.00
Viewing Platform	6,000.00
Contingency	11,365.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110,000.00</b>

John DeMarco

We've all heard the depressing numbers: less than 5% of Essex County remains as natural areas, less than 3% as forest. Much of what's left is still under threat from development. Only a few weeks ago, one of the oldest woodlots in the county, within the City of Windsor, was levelled for truck parking. And most municipal councils still believe that woodlots are needed mainly to provide the habitat requirements of estate homes.

So what's being done about it? Not enough, of course. But amid the doom and gloom, there are a few rays of hope. For example, a little-known group operating under the name of "Essex County Field Naturalists' Club" actually has a secret mission of reversing the tide of environmental destruction in the county. For years, while club members have been meeting to talk about birds and frogs, they have been quietly channelling funds into a war chest, code-named the "Heritage Fund". By piecing together shredded documents from a club member's compost pile, the following details have recently come to light:

Up to now, about \$10,000 have been accumulated in the Heritage Fund, mainly from the auctions held at the Club's annual dinners. Last spring, the Heritage Committee recommended that this money should be used to fund the acquisition of natural habitat in Essex County. While the funds available may not be enough to purchase a significant property at this point, it was felt that a specific project should be identified, in order to generate interest among club members and the general public to raise additional funds. As well, there is a strong possibility of obtaining matching funds from other organizations.

Most of the Committee's activities for the past several months have been directed at identifying potential acquisitions. Presently, most of the sites being actively considered are among the priority sites identified by the Carolinian Canada project. (Carolinian Canada is a joint project of the Ontario Government and several national and provincial conservation organizations, formed to help protect critical remnants of Carolinian habitat in Ontario. Of the 38 priority sites chosen by a panel of experts, 8 are in Essex County: Ojibway Prairie, Canard River Kentucky Coffee Tree Woods, Big Creek, Cedar Creek, Oxley Poison Sumac Swamp, Stone Road Alvar, Middle Point Woods and Middle Island. Carolinian Canada has been providing matching funds on a 3:1 basis to groups who wish to acquire property in a priority site for protection. However, the initial funds have been nearly exhausted, and the provincial government has not as yet announced any additional funds. The Club has written to the Ministers concerned and to local M.P.P.'s, urging them to continue the programme.)

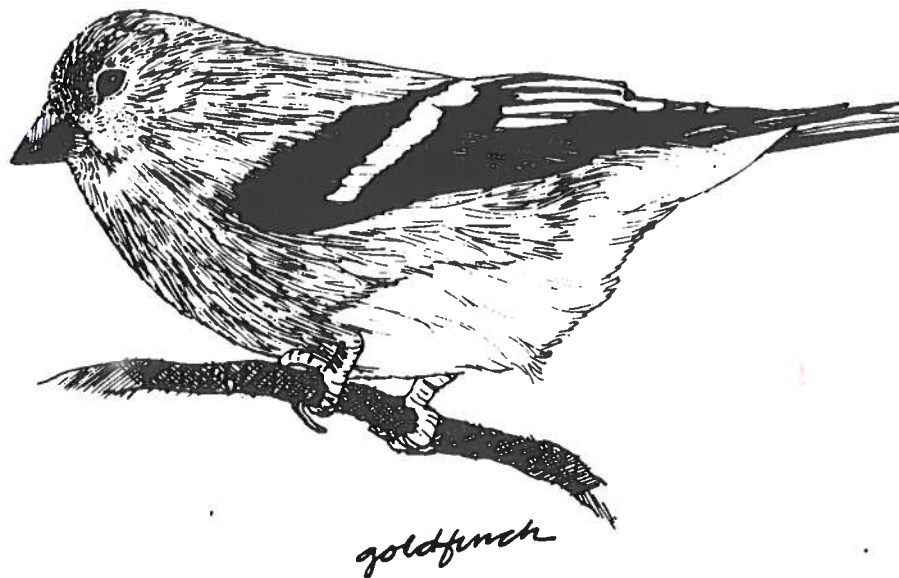
The Heritage Committee is keeping in close contact with other agencies concerned with protecting natural heritage, including ERCA, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The Committee feels that club funds should be used for a project which is clearly identified with the ECFNC. However, this does not preclude working in partnership with other organizations. The Committee is also flexible on the question of who should hold title and be responsible for the management of any property acquired.

The final choice of a site for acquisition will depend on finding a landowner who is willing to sell at an affordable price. Hopefully, the Heritage Committee will soon be in a position to recommend a specific project, at which time a fundraising drive will be launched.

In the meantime, the Club executive and the Heritage Committee have pledged support to the Friends of the Heinz Woodlot in their effort to save an important wooded area in Leamington from a planned housing development. (See full report elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Since the ECFNC's ability to protect properties through direct acquisition is limited, the Heritage Committee is also trying to promote the protection of natural heritage through other means. Some committee members have met with ERCA staff and with the municipal councils concerned to promote the concept of using abandoned rail lines in the county to create green corridors, possibly with walking and cycling trails. As of writing, the Committee is waiting to see the Town of LaSalle's new plans for the so-called Sandwich West Woodlot, prepared in response to the strong public reaction against a housing development in the heart of the woodlot.

Obviously, there is no shortage of worthwhile projects when it comes to preservation of natural areas. All club members are encouraged to join in this not-so-secret mission. Your input and participation is welcome and needed. Please contact Barb Ouellette, Chair of the Heritage Committee. The other hard-working members of the Committee are Betty Learmouth, Carl Maiolani, Mike Malone, Terry Ouellette, Cathy Watson and Peg Wilkinson.



## Natural Areas

Next spring the Essex Region Conservation Foundation, which is the fundraising arm of the Essex Region Conservation Authority, will launch its Islands of Green campaign.

The purpose of the campaign is simple - to raise money to help protect significant natural areas in the region. The campaign will take place over two years and will establish a trust fund of 2.5 million dollars. Only the interest will be used as required to purchase significant properties which become available.

The Essex Region is endowed with natural areas unique, not only to Canada but, in some cases, to North America. Our southern location and associated mild climate have enabled forests with a deep-south Carolinian character to flourish. In addition we have rich wetlands, unusual alvars and the best tall grass prairie remaining in Canada.

In the past areas have been lost simply because funds were not available to save them.

The beauty of establishing a trust fund and using only the interest is that the fund will last forever - money will always be available on an annual basis.

The Islands of Green Committee is enlisting the help - the commitment - of as many groups and individuals as possible who care about the future of our region's unique resources.

The Foundation's goal is raise or have pledges for 10% of the total campaign goal in place by the official kickoff in April. There will be no public announcement of the Islands of Green campaign until the actual kickoff.

The Islands of Green committee hopes that the Essex County Field Naturalists Club will enthusiastically support and be deeply committed to this vital project.

What will ECFNC's contribution be?

The executive would appreciate receiving ideas and suggestions from all club members.

**Volunteers Needed**  
**to Monitor Essex County's Vanishing Herps!**

Reptiles and amphibians, affectionately referred to as 'herps', are declining on a worldwide scale. In Essex County, this is illustrated by the fact that the Black Rat Snake, Blue Racer, Spotted Turtle, Blanchard's Cricket Frog, and other herp species have either completely disappeared or are extremely rare. Even our once common Bullfrog is virtually absent from mainland Essex County.

Habitat loss continues to be the major cause of a general loss of biodiversity. However, the recent formation of the Declining Amphibian Population Task Force (DAPTK) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Species Survival Commission (SSC) was triggered by the disappearance or drastic decrease in some populations of amphibians where suitable habitat appears to remain. Locally, this is illustrated by the recent disappearance of Bullfrogs from Point Pelee National Park.

Suddenly, things are even worse than once thought and scientists cannot explain these declines because worldwide, and Canada-wide, there is a lack of monitoring data on the changes and stresses of amphibian populations. Herpetologists and governments in all parts of the world are now beginning to work cooperatively to determine which species are declining, and the causes for these declines.



This presents an opportunity to 'think globally and act locally'. This past summer, 10 "Amphibian Calling Monitoring Routes" were established across Essex County. Each route consists of ten stops, .8 km apart, along mainly quiet county roads. Three times in spring, or early summer, amphibian calling activity is monitored at each stop. Identification of the species present, approximate numbers, and other relevant data is collected. These routes are intended to track changes in amphibian populations over a long term. Observed changes in amphibian populations can then be compared to changes in habitat, climate, pollution, etc. to hopefully gain some insight into the causes. Once causes are determined, then corrective measures can be investigated and initiated.

As is often the case, there is a lack of resources to fund this project. Volunteers are desperately needed to take over the monitoring of these routes. Monitoring one route, three times per year, only requires a total of about 4.5 hours. It is a small price to pay to help keep frogs and toads as part of our local fauna. Amphibians can be looked upon as our 'canaries in a coal mine' and if they disappear, other species are sure to follow.

Monitoring a route can provide the excuse to take an evening off from the chores and reruns. It allows some peaceful time with a friend to star-gaze and listen to the night-time activity of some of our county's wildlife. It provides the opportunity to learn the distinctive calls of our local frogs and toads while gaining the satisfaction of doing something to help our wildlife.

To adopt a route, and receive an information package for your route (including the loan of an audio cassette tape to learn frog and toad calls) contact:

David A. Kraus  
1351 Oxford Avenue West,  
Kingsville, Ontario,  
N9Y 2S8. (519) 733-2289

## A YEAR OF BLUEBIRD TRAIL MONITORING (Part 1)

Many have asked, "When do bluebirds begin nesting?", and "What's it like to monitor?".

Here is a yearlong look at the Harrow Ansi Trail. This should answer all the questions. Thanks to the monitor who kept records. The monitor visited his trail, twice a week. Anything new was recorded, with the date.

Just some background on the trail. The boxes were erected in May of 1991. Instantly, House Wrens and Tree Swallows moved in. Bluebirds did not nest in 1991. One pair nested in 1989, in a metal irrigation hydrant! Bluebirds had been spotted on the property, especially during the winter. Presently, the trail has 8 boxes numbered 1 through 8.

### HARROW ANSI TRAIL 1992

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| January   | 2 male bluebirds spotted occasionally   |
| Feb 18-25 | All 8 boxes inspected. A few minor carpentry repairs. Boxes 7 and 8 are located to better habitats.   |
| March 8   | A small flock of bluebirds is sighted. They roost in rotted cavities, in an old oak tree.   |
| March 28  | At box #7 - a pair of bluebirds here. The male is usually singing on the roof, or sometimes on a nearby tree. At box #8 - a male is here, on the roof. He is courting a female. What a sight! She's sitting above him, in a tree-top. She's playing hard-to-get, looking bored. He's a hyper ball of energy. Several feet from the box, is a stump. He flies back and forth, from the nest-box, to the stump. His colours flash in the bright sunshine. He sings constantly. He holds his head low, showing her his blue back. He holds his wings out, and his polished blue flight feathers shine. Occasionally he stands erect and swells his red breast. This is quite a sight, considering the background of late winter gray and brown. Occasionally he peeks into the nest box entrance. He sings all the while, as if to say, "Look Honey, here's the entrance!. Come and see! Isn't this a great place?!?!". She pretends not to hear, and looks the other way. |
| March 29  | At box #8 - his persistence paid off. She has accepted this package deal (house plus husband). No sign of any pre-nuptual agreement! Today, she is as hyper as he is. Together, they sing and fly about rapidly. Occasionally, they slip into the nest box for a quick inspection.  |
| April 5   | At box #8 - today, this pair is inspecting a cavity in a nearby oak tree. Will they forget the box, and go "au natural"?.   |

- April 10 At box #7 - this pair is building a nest. Both birds are sighted carrying dry grass to the box. At box #8 - the pair is back to the box. Their natural oak cavity is now occupied by a pair of Starlings.
- April 20 Boxes #1-6 - several tree swallows are inspecting these boxes. Box #7 - nest completed. Extremely tall, six inches high. Pair sighted nearby. Box #8 - nest completed. Pair not sighted, although the male is singing nearby.
- April 24 Box #7 - the female is on the nest. Her nest is so tall, her beak protrudes at the entrance. Male warbles a soft song, usually on the roof, sometimes on a nearby tree. Box #8 - same as box #7.
- April 29 Box #7 - the pair is absent. A quick inspection shows five eggs. Also, this high nest is packing down. Box #8 - this pair is absent. Also five eggs.
- May 4 Box #8 - still no sign of this pair.
- May 8 Box #7 - obviously, the young have hatched. The parents are carrying food to the nests, mostly slugs. A quick peek shows all five eggs hatched. Each time a parent sits on the roof, the ornery Tree Swallows dive-bomb the. Boxes #1,2,3,4,5, and 6 are now occupied by Tree Swallows.
- May 11 Box #8 - they're hatching. One youngster is out of the egg, his parents have already removed the eggshell. Three other eggs are in various stages of hatching.
- May 14 Boxes #1,2,3,5,6 - tree swallows busy building nests. Some pairs are almost tame, perhaps they were here last year. Box #4 - a pair of house wrens are here. Box #7 - adults busy feeding young. Box #8 - four young. The unhatched egg is removed.
- May 20 Box #7 - these five young are growing fast. There is no longer any elbow room in the nest. Box #8 - these four young are not growing at the same rate as #7. The nest is lifted, and there are 12 blowfly larvae on the nestbox floor. Blowfly larvae suck the blood of young birds at night. These larvae are removed and destroyed.
- May 21 Box #7 - the young are fledging! The excited parents are very vocal. The youngsters fly excellently. Upon leaving the box, they fly to a branch. Since Eastern Bluebirds usually fledge at 17 days old, we can estimate this brood hatched on May 4th.

- May 23           Box #7 - the nest is removed. Originally, it was 6" tall. However, under the five growing young birds, gradually it packed down to less than 2". Live beetles and a grasshopper are found in the nest. Each is missing an antennae, and a leg or two. The young bluebirds are heard calling, high in a tree.
- May 25           Box #8 - The last few days have been severely cold. One young bluebird is discovered dead, and is removed from the nest. That leaves only three young. The death is probably a combination of lack of food, cold, and stress caused by the blowfly larvae.
- June 1           Boxes #1-#6 - Tree Swallows and House Wrens busy feeding their young. Box #7 - adults spotted feeding near the box. Box #8 - two young have fledged. The male is in a treetop, singing. The female is on a fence, facing the nest. She is singing very loudly, encouraging the last youngster to leave the nest. Inside the box, he calls loudly. At 21 days old, these birds are fledging quite late. Their growth had been slowed, by infrequent feedings during the cold spell, and blowfly larvae. Had the larvae not been removed, they could have all died.
- June 2           Box #7 - the tall grass in the area was recently mowed. This pair is carrying this fresh mown hay into the box. The beginning of a second brood. Box #8 - removed the old nest. The nest also contains several live amputated beetles and grasshoppers.
- June 8           Box #7 - nest complete with one egg. Box #8 - the tall grass around the box was mowed a few days ago. Inside the box, is the beginning of a new nest.
- June 15          Box #2,#3,#4,#6 - the tree swallows have fledged. Boxes are cleaned out. Box #7 and #8 - both nests have four eggs. Male birds stay close to their boxes, singing softly. No sign of the fledglings.
- June 24          Box #1 - this brood of tree swallows must have fledged by now, so its time to clean the box. The box is opened, and WHOA! What do we have here?! On top of the tree swallow nest is a new cup nest, with four blue eggs. This trail now has a third pair of bluebirds! The adults are spotted, and a second surprise is revealed. This female is partially albino. Her throat is orange, but her entire breast is white. Box #3 - dummy wren nest. Lots of young tree swallows.

\_\_\_\_\_ by Don Bissonnette

Watch in the March 1993 EGRET, for the second half of this article.

Balances forward;	Reserve.....	1929.07	
	Heritage.....	9158.26	
	Current.....	885.97	
	Payroll.....	1400.78	
	Blue Bird .....	139.55	13513.63
Income;	Grants.....	4378.56	
	Raffles.....	50.67	
	Memberships.....	170.00	
	Donation.....	139.15	
	Auction.....	10.00	
	Sales, Hats etc. ....	13.00	
	" Tickets (camera)..	65.00	
	" " (scope)...	205.00	
	" " (dinner)..	420.00	
	Interest.....	25.79	5477.17
Expenses;	Payroll.....	2266.26	
	Workmans' Compensation....	33.21	
	C C P.....	296.38	
	Health Tax.....	79.80	
	U. I. C. ....	586.34	
	Income Tax .....	684.75	
	Telephone.....	38.69	
	Courses.....	235.00	
	Photocopies.....	25.50	
	Supplies.....	255.28	
	Postage.....	47.17	
	Grant Refund.....	1836.25	
	Kingsville Migration Fest.	50.00	
	Bank Charges.....	11.10	
	Donations.....	.02	6445.75
Balances;	Reserve.....	1996.06	
	Heritage.....	9294.73	
	Payroll.....	8.98	
	Current.....	950.73	
	Blue Bird.....	89.55	
	N. H. R. P.....	205.00	12545.05

## Calendar of Events - 1993

- Dec. 19 Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count. Contact compiler Paul Pratt at 966-5852
- Dec. 20 Rondeau Christmas Bird Count. Contact compiler Keith Burk at 676-2570.
- Dec. 21 Point Pelee National Park Christmas Bird Count. Contact compiler Scott Martin at 322-2365.
- Dec. 26 Rockwood (Amherstburg) Christmas Bird Count. Contact Paul Pratt for more info.
- Jan. 1 Detroit River Christmas Bird Count. Contact Jeff Larsen or Tom Hince for more info.
- Jan. 13 7:30pm Monthly Club Meeting at Union Gas. Speaker: Betty Learmouth on the "Natural Areas of Northern and Eastern Australia".
- Jan. 16 Ojibway Winter Birding Trips -contact Paul Pratt for details.
- Jan. 27 7:30pm Executive Meeting at Union Gas.
- Jan. 30 Ojibway Winter Birding Trips -contact Paul Pratt for details.
- Feb. 7 Ojibway Winter Festival and Open House (10-5). Contact centre at 966-5852 for more info.
- Feb. 10 7:30pm Monthly Club Meeting at Union Gas. Speaker: Dan Dupuis on the "Prehistoric Archaeology of Essex County".
- Feb. 13 Ojibway Winter Birding Trips -contact Paul Pratt for details.
- Feb. 24 7:30pm Executive Meeting at Union Gas.
- Feb. 27 Ojibway Winter Birding Trips -contact Paul Pratt for details.
- Mar. 10 7:30pm Monthly Club Meeting at Union Gas. Speaker: Gary Moulant, from Point Pelee National Park on "Ecological Restoration at Point Pelee National Park".
- Mar. 31 7:30pm Executive Meeting at Union Gas.
- Apr. 14 7:30pm Monthly Club Meeting at Union Gas. Michael Gilbertson of the International Joint Commission on "Eagles as indicators, Bald Eagle research on the Great Lakes."
- Apr. 28 7:30pm Executive Meeting at Union Gas.
- May 12 7:30pm Monthly Club Meeting at Union Gas. Cathy Watson will speak on "Telemetry Research on Fox Snakes at Point Pelee National Park".



The EGRET, December 1992, Vol. 9, #4 : newsletter of the Essex County  
Field Naturalists' Club; P.O. Box 2211 Walkerville, Windsor,  
Ontario. N8Y 2L5

Thomas Hurst,  
R.R. # 3,  
Cottam,  
Ont  
NOR 1E0