

Peninsula Naturalist

Peninsula Field Naturalists

Box 544

St. Catharines, Ont.

L2R 6W8

No. 112

Jan/80

HAPPY NEW YEAR

May 1980 be a Year of Health, Happiness and Prosperity
to all our members.

JANUARY MEETING

MR. FRANK FOLEMSBEE - BANDING HAWKS IN ONTARIO

8.00 pm. Monday, January 28. Lakeport Secondary School, Lake St..

Mr. Folemsbee has been banding birds for many
years. He will speak about his experiences
banding hawks and other species.

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February Meeting: Mr. Russ Tilt, Prov. Parks Dept., Ministry of
Natural Resources.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS are due in January. Fees are, family \$7.50;
single \$6.50; student \$3.00. Nel will be available to accept
renewals at the January meeting. Because of increasing costs cards
for renewals received by mail will not be returned by mail unless
a stamped addressed envelope is included. Nel will have the cards
at the regular meetings.

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FON CONVENTION which is being hosted by the Peninsula Field Naturalists,
will be held at Brock University [redacted] May 29 to June 1.

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Peninsula Field Naturalists - Officers.

Pres. Dr. P. Peach 685-6667

Vice pres. Mrs. B. Simpson [redacted]

Secretary Miss N. Rempel [redacted]

Treasurer & Membership
Mrs. N. Dekker [redacted]

Directors:-

Miss J. Bernet 6 [redacted]

Miss M. Janzen 6 [redacted]

Rev. A. Kaellgren [redacted]

Mr. D. Nasmith 6 [redacted]

Mr. S. Rossetto [redacted]

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Editor: Mrs. Audrey Barnsley, 9 Ghent St., St. Catharines. L2N 2C5
phone 935-5848

OUTINGS: With our uncertain weather, outings at this time of year are difficult to plan, so Outing Chairman Bryan Joule has scheduled just two outings, one in January and one in February, with the final decision as to whether we walk, or drive and bird from the cars to be made when we meet.

SUNDAY JAN 27. SCHOOL OF HORTICULTURE. Meet School parking lot.
1.30 pm. Leader Mr. Bryan Joule

SUNDAY FEB 24. MEET BROCK UNIVERSITY parking lot at Drive-in side.
1.30 pm. Leader Mr. Bryan Joule.

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NOVEMBER MEETING: With the aid of graphs and maps, Mr. Eric Nasmith illustrated his 8 year study of the bird population of Moore Park Ravine, Toronto. For the serious naturalist this proved to be a fascinating evening, leaving more than one seriously thinking of starting a similar project.

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NIAGARA RIVER OBSERVATIONS, Sunday, Nov. 18. During the early morning a thick fog blanketed the Niagara Peninsula, the trip from St. Catharines to the old fort at Ft. Erie was one which required slow driving. Visibility was down to a hundred feet or less.

I was concerned that this trip would be poorly attended under these conditions, however, sixteen persons showed up at the fort to start the trip north along the Niagara River Road.

Before we had travelled very far, we came to areas where there wasn't any fog, in fact where the sun was actually shining and observations of waterfowl were excellent. There was a large naturalist group from Mississauga that we met on the River Road. I suppose several of them were enjoying the freedom to travel after their forced evacuation for five days from their city due to the train disaster and chemical spill and fire.

Our trip was generally more for bird identification than for a count of numbers, some observed species such as buffleheads ducks, Bonaparte's gulls, and ring-billed gulls, were in the thousands. Other species of waterfowl were completely absent, not yet having arrived for their winter sojourn. In small numbers were great black-backed gulls, herring gulls, black ducks, mallard ducks, American mergansers, baldpate ducks, greater scaup ducks.

At Niagara Falls our party became separated but most of us joined up again shortly afterward. Two cars went as far as Niagara-on-the-Lake, but here the fog was again very heavy. With the nice warm air, and in between clouds of fog, it was a very pleasant trip. Best of all we parked to eat lunch at the river's edge, and got a real close-up viewing of many waterfowl, particularly the very handsome and large great black-backed gull.

Frank Kingdon.

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Migrating birds of the Northern Hemisphere tend to follow land as far as possible, but in the Southern Hemisphere some birds travel long distances over water. Two of the longest are species of New Zealand cuckoo. One, the Bronze, flies north over 2000 miles of ocean to winter near the Solomon Islands, while the Long-tailed cuckoo crosses as much as 4000 miles of open seas to various Pacific islands.

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THE BLUE JAY

Just about everyone knows the Blue Jay. Handsome, noisy and aggressive, the Blue Jay is a familiar sight and sound, it's loud cries frequently warning other birds and mammals of an approaching predator, whether fox or man.

The Blue Jay occurs from southern Canada south to Texas and Florida, but it is only a straggler on the open plains. It breeds in the mixed-wood forests of central Alberta, Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba, and from there east through central and southern Ontario to southern Quebec, the Maritimes and Newfoundland,

The Blue Jay belongs to the crow family, Corvidae, a group of 100 related species including ravens, rooks, jackdaws, crows, magpies and jays. Male and female corvids are nearly alike in appearance, and both sexes help to build the nest and care for the young. Most corvids are non-migratory, but some wander about, often in small bands, after the breeding season. In keeping with their omnivorous habits, all corvids are bold and aggressive and often prey on the eggs and young of other kinds of birds. Because of these habits, some of them are unprotected by game laws.

Audubon's famous painting of this species shows a group of three lively Jays feasting on freshly-laid eggs from some other bird's nest. The egg and young of other birds are, at times, an important food source. The bulk of its diet, however, consists of vegetable material such as wild food from a feeding station.

The Blue Jay occupies a variety of habitats within its large range, from the pine woods of Florida to the spruce-fir forests of northern Ontario. It is less abundant in the heavier forests, preferring mixed-wood and deciduous forest areas, especially where beech, oak and hazel are found. It builds a bulky nest, about 7 inches in diameter, of small twigs and a variety of other materials such as lichens, moss, grass and paper. The inner cup of the nest, about four inches in diameter, is shaped with mud and lined with fine rootlets and feathers. Most nests are 20 feet or less from the ground in dense coniferous thickets. The Blue Jay often nests in settled areas, sometimes close to buildings. During the nesting season it may be quiet and unobtrusive, even near its nest.

As do many species in which the male feeds the incubating female, the Blue Jay practises courtship feeding. This begins prior to the nest building and continues through egg-laying and incubation. The incubating female sometimes is fed on the nest, but more often she joins her mate in a nearby tree, assumes the begging posture of a juvenile, and is then fed. There are also reports of some group displays in which several jays hop stiff leggedly from branch to branch, but little else is known about their courtship habits.

Four or five eggs are laid in a clutch. From one clutch to another, the eggs vary in colour from buffy to greenish to bluish, spotted and blotched with brown. Incubation lasts from 17 to 18 days. When hatched the young are entirely naked and helpless. Seventeen days later they are well feathered and ready to leave the nest.

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NEW SAND AND GRAVEL OPERATION PROPOSED IN FONTHILL

The Steed and Evans Company limited has presented to the Niagara Escarpment Commission a proposal to open a 125-acre sand and gravel pit, west and adjacent to Fonthill's Lookout Point Golf Club, in the Town of Pelham.

On this 125-acre site is a sizeable stand of Carolinian forest, with Tulip trees, Sassafras, White Oak, and one of the few remaining stands of Eastern Flowering Dogwood.

Deep, rich, well drained soils provide prime agricultural land and at present are used for strawberries and corn, but would also provide for future needs for a variety of small fruits and vegetables. The high hills provide frost protection for a large surrounding area.

Few examples of a Kame Moraine remain in Southern Ontario. This geological formation, being the highest point in the Niagara Peninsula, provides a view of both Lake Erie to the south, and Lake Ontario to the north.

Fort Wellington at the time of the War of 1812 was never realized, but plans and scale drawings exist with the Niagara Historical Society for it to have been constructed on this designated land. Local residents have discovered arrowheads dating back 2000 years. Neutral Indians met and camped at the foot of the hills. An Indian burial ground could possibly exist in the high surrounding area - yet to be discovered.

Rehabilitation proposals by Steed and Evans may look and sound impressive, but for a horror story and disturbing view, walk north a few paces from Highway #20, or drive along Tice Road between Effingham Road and Cream Street and you will see the destruction of the natural landscape. Here are huge, long-abandoned excavations where nothing is growing.

The Carolinian forest along the escarpment, unique agricultural land, and our historical heritage are gradually being destroyed in order to satisfy the commercial interests of gravel companies and the local construction industry. Is it not time to actively protest these expansions and demand that aggregate be brought in from less sensitive areas?

Lois MacKenzie

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Blue Jay cont'd....

They are usually fledged by about 21 days of age. About three weeks later they begin searching for food for themselves, but they continue to follow their parents and are fed occasionally for one or two months longer.

The Blue Jay is partially migratory, withdrawing several hundred miles in some winters from the extreme northern parts of its range. It migrates quietly by day, usually in loose flocks of 5 to 50 or more. Occasionally up to 3,000 have been seen in one day at Point Pelee, concentrating before crossing Lake Erie.

Adapted from the Muskoka Vacation Guide,
contributed by Marg & Bob Millman.

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THE PITS OF PELHAM

The strawberry fields are green and lush
But the woods have a worried hush
As they await the quarry plan
That calls for millions of tons of sand.

Fear not ...
Operational disturbances will be slight
And the noise and dust will be alright
Everything will be minimized
Even the soil will be stabilized
And drainage won't be compromised
So there's nothing left to be criticized.

Relax ...
The operation is so viable
And Steed and Evans so reliable
Aggregate is what's wanted
Let's be undaunted
Sand is valued and the payroll's high
But the residents of Pelham give a sigh.

Hold it!
The trees react with reasoned fear
Because their time is getting near
Quarry experts dismiss this trash
It's only dogwood, tulip and sassafras
But the beauty and bounty they display
Will soon be lost lest we have a say.

Act ...
Save this land while you can
And defeat the sand and quarry plan
Slow up the unrelenting pace
Stop the sand blowing in your face.

John MacKenzie.

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WE WELCOME the following new members:-

Mr & Mrs. D. Akitt	R.R. 2, Mud St.,	Beamsville.	LOR 1B0
Mr & Mrs. J. Hale	30 Norris Place,	St. Catharines.	L2R 2X2
Mrs. L. Smylski	8 Aiken St.,	St. Catharines.	L2N 1V8
Miss M. Heatherton	83 Albinson St.,	Sudbury.	P3C 3V7
Miss M. Dennis	38 Thomas St.,	St. Catharines.	L2N 6L9
Mr & Mrs. M. Lister	R.R. 1,	Niagara-on-the-Lake	
Mr. G. Novosel	158 River Rd.,	Welland	L3B 2R9

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GREETINGS FROM SLEEPY HOLLOW

by Margery Coffman.

In November we spent several days in the Nipissing area, and while it wasn't very productive as far as bird-watching goes, we had several delightful walks in the woods. Since there were no flowers to admire, though I was glad to find that the orchid had developed a healthy-looking seed pod, we were forced to observe the less spectacular beauty at our feet. I was reminded of a quotation in a current issue of Harrowsmith, "mosses, the first small mercy of the earth," heading an article on mosses and fungi. The ancient gray rocks fairly glowed with patches of "British soldiers", sparkling red, with dainty pixie cups tucked in between, spread out on thick layers of reindeer moss. In Manitoba, we had noticed moss hanging from the scrub oaks, like the old man's beard of Florida Everglades, but we've never seen that sort of moss in Ontario.

Then there were patches of luscious green lychopodium, like little Christmas trees, some with spikes of spores sticking straight up like candles. Wintergreen added a touch of vibrant colour, with its red berries tucked in between the dark green leaves. I read somewhere that wintergreen leaves are poisonous, but I've always chewed them with no ill-effects. And of course, carpets of low mosses, which repay closer examination to examine their intricate patterns. On the way home along the fence rows, dry fluffs of pampas grass waited to be garnered for winter bouquets.

"Take beauty - it is not far to seek" even in drab November!

Here at home, we've put the garden to sleep, and the greenhouse is full of green stuff. Squirrels and chipmunks seemed to know the snow was coming, for they were furiously busy for a day or two before, and one small chipmunk spent hours stuffing his cheeks with seeds the chickadees dropped. We were getting swamped with blue jays at all the feeders, basket, javex bottle, suet, everything, and though they are so beautiful, and extremely interesting characters, the nuthatches found them offensive, so David hung the javex seed dispenser close to the window, hoping the activity at the sink would deter the jays. The chickadees and nuthatches didn't miss a meal, and I can wash dishes and carry on a conversation with the chickadees, while the nuthatches simply turn a bright eye kitchenward, as they peck out their lunch. Their beaks are perfect for that job. David felt a bit sorry for the jays, who were wary of the new location, and made them a batch of porridge out of the dust from the grain bird feed.

They seemed to appreciate that, the rascals!

This seasons pair of cardinals seemed a little bewildered by the snow, but the downies don't change their meal times, snow or no snow!

David reports veritable swarms of tiny moths hovering about the boles of trees in the woods, and we've seen a few in the valley. Any idea what they are?

These wintry days I think often of that little rhyme, "I heard a bird sing in the dark of December, A magical thing and sweet to remember, We are nearer to spring than we were in September"..... a cheery thought!

Happy New Year to all of you! May your days be filled with bird song and the scent of flowers!

ONTARIO HERONRY INVENTORY PROGRESS REPORT

The 1979 season has been both a productive and an interesting second year for the Ontario Heronry Inventory. One hundred and sixty six new colonies were reported in 1979, bringing the total number of colonies registered to 595. Of these 92% (554) are great blue heron colonies, 1% (7) cattle egret colonies, 1% (6) great egret, and 6% black-crowned night heron colonies.

Sixty-two percent of the great blue heron colonies can be classified as active (nesting birds present during at least one year since 1974), 2% are inactive and 9% as extinct.

Some interesting facts have become apparent from the information collected. The size of great blue heron colonies on the Canadian Shield (north of 45° latitude) is approximately 1/3 the size of those colonies located south of the Shield, but colonies are more numerous on the Shield. The mean size for 209 great blue heron colonies was 28.4 nests. Size for the 58 colonies south of the Shield was 49.3 nests/colony and 18.64 nests/colony for the 151 colonies on the Shield. There are three colonies recorded as being greater than 200 nests in size, and these may be the largest in Canada. Preliminary estimates indicate a healthy population size for the great blue heron, although the concentration of birds in large colonies south of the Shield makes the southern segment of the population more vulnerable, should even a few colonies become endangered.

A pilot census of nests in great blue heron colonies was conducted in 1979, involving the OHI biologists and several censurers. The trial census was conducted in order to develop census techniques for use by volunteers in a more complete census planned for 1980-81. We have now developed a set of census techniques similar to those used by the British in their censuses of the grey heron for the past fifty years. The instructions were designed to avoid disturbance to courting and incubating great blue herons and to provide counts of active and inactive nests.

There are, we learned, a few essentials every censurer should take with them: their instructions and field sheets, an accurate sketch map to the colony, a compass, binoculars, an ample supply of mosquito repellent, hip waders (and a dry set of clothing should chest waders prove more appropriate), flagging tape, determination and a good sense of humour. Counting nests in a heronry isn't difficult, provided you are prepared to do it while looking upwards through binoculars while swatting at mosquitoes and walking through about two feet of water.

We are currently preparing for the 1980-81 census of large sample areas in Ontario. We require competent volunteers. While experience isn't necessary, a willingness to follow instructions and to produce accurate results is. It also helps if you like swamps. Anyone interested should let us know now, so that we may be sure you receive the relevant information. We would particularly like to hear from anyone willing to co-ordinate efforts in their region.

The OHI is a joint project of the Long Point Bird Observatory, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Canadian Wildlife Service.

Joanne Siderius, OHI Biologist,
Long Point Bird Observatory.

PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS'

WINTER BIRD COUNT 1979

Date: Dec. 26th. 1979. (7½ mile radius of Brock University, but not east of the Welland Canal).

Canada Goose.....	37	Red-headed Woodpecker.....	1
Mallard.....	107	Hairy Woodpecker.....	5
Black Duck.....	60	Downy Woodpecker.....	37
Canvasback.....	13	Blue Jay.....	61
Greater Scaup.....	236	Common Crow.....	200
Lesser Scaup.....	2	Black-capped Chickadee.....	97
Common Goldeneye.....	13	White-breasted Nuthatch.....	15
Bufflehead.....	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch.....	3
Common Merganser.....	22	Mockingbird.....	4
Red-breasted Merganser.....	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet.....	7
Marsh Hawk.....	1	Cedar Waxwing.....	87
Red-tailed Hawk.....	15	Common Starling.....	497
American Kestrel.....	7	House Sparrow.....	187
Common Pheasant.....	1	Eastern Meadowlark.....	1
Gt. Blue Heron.....	2	Red-winged Blackbird.....	2
American Coot.....	1	Cardinal.....	50
Gt. Black-backed Gull.....	13	Purple Finch.....	3
Herring Gull.....	139	American Goldfinch.....	80
Ring-billed Gull.....	1099	Dark-eyed Junco.....	109
Bonaparte's Gull.....	63	Tree Sparrow.....	46
Rock Dove.....	12	Chipping Sparrow.....	37
Mourning Dove.....	4	White-throated Sparrow.....	2
Belted Kingfisher.....	1	Song Sparrow.....	6
Common Flicker.....	1		

Total species: 47 Total individuals 3388

27 Observers in 7 field parties and/or 7 feeders.

Observers: R. Augustine; J. Bacher; Mr & Mrs. F. Barnsley; Mr. & Mrs. P. Chapman; L. Dalicandro; N. Dekker; B. Farnan; Mr. & Mrs. K. Furness; F. Goldring; W. Honsberger; R. Hill; M. Janzen; F. Kingdon; B. Lowe; D. Nasmith; J. Nasmith; G. Novosel; P. Peach; S. Rossetto; I. Sauer; L. Simpson; M; Stewart; D. Stringer; E. Tyrrell.

Weather: Temp. 2°c. No frost in ground; lakes, streams & ponds free of ice. No snow. Cool wind in exposed locations. Heavy overcast resulting in very poor light. Ground heavy and muddy as a result of heavy rains on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Notes: This is the first time that a robin was not recorded on the Count, and only the third time that a brown creeper was not reported either.