

Stratford Field Naturalists Newsletter

December 2018



Presidents Message

by Ken Clark

Have you seen any partridges in pear trees lately? How about turtle doves? French hens? Colly birds? (Yes, apparently, according to the Library of Congress scholars its "colly" birds. That is, they are coal-coloured birds - European Blackbirds, according to the 1565 original version).

You are not likely to see any of these birds around here. But you might find a Snowy Owl, or a Mute Swan, or a Ring-necked Pheasant, or a Pileated Woodpecker, or a warbler. These are all birds we have seen in our Christmas Bird Counts in recent years.

You might be even more lucky to see an Evening Grosbeak, a Common Raven, a Northern Shrike or a Winter Wren. These are all birds seen recently in southern Ontario.



Come help us, the Stratford Field Naturalists, look for these birds during our annual Christmas Bird Count on December 29th. Contact me or Sharon MacKay if you wish to participate. People of all levels birding experience are welcome and I

especially invite novice birders to come and learn from your more experienced club members. This is an opportunity for you.

Save the Land You Love

by Don Farwell

Land trusts are designed to protect, in perpetuity, land that is of natural significance or cultural, heritage, or agricultural significance. They are community based nonprofit organizations managed by volunteer boards. We all know that loss of habitat is one of the biggest factors in the reduction of wildlife populations. There are a number of programs which are designed to assist landowners in transferring property to a land trust. They may reduce or eliminate capital gains tax on the disposition of property. Donations can be made in cash, land, or through estate planning.

Two Land Trusts operate locally. The Thames Talbot Land Trust and the Huron Tract Land Trust Conservancy are available. Further information is available from their websites or from the Ontario Land Trust Alliance or from the author.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, Dec 11, 2018 @ 7:30 **Travels in Papua New Guinea with Doctor Ann.** Our very own Ann Griffin will share her recent adventure in PNG. (Donations to the Salvation Army Food Bank welcomed.)

Sat, December 15, 2018 **Nature London Christmas Bird Count:** anyone interested in participating contact Ken Clarke (address below)

Sat, December 29, 2018 **Xmas Bird Count** Participate in the Annual Christmas Bird Count and get together afterwards to tally numbers and compare stories. Contact: Ken Clarke at 519-272-4188 or kennclarkebirds@hotmail.com

Summer 2018 - Rare birds in Southern Ontario

by Steve Thorpe

Great Kiskadee, Little Blue Heron, Reddish Egret, and Swallow-tailed Kite, Calliope Hummingbird are birds you normally associate with Florida, Texas,



Costa Rica, BC and Panama. This summer these species and more were found in southern Ontario. Many SFN members took road trips to see them. Closest to home was an immature Little Blue Heron at the Harrington berm. This bird was found by New Hamburg birder Norm Holden on August 9 and seen by birders and bird photographers over the next three weeks. The bird was actively and successfully feeding on small fish in the shallow



water on the mudflats. It was the main attraction for the annual SFN shorebird outing on August 15.

In Hespeler, along the Speed River there was a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron that was easy to see right beside the Beavertown Bridge. Perhaps the bird of the summer was a Reddish Egret at Oliphant west of Warton. This was the first ever record of this species in Ontario. Birders from all over the



province went to see it. A couple from Vancouver flew to Toronto, rented a car and drove up to see it. After 15 minutes they drove off to Wasaga Beach to look for the Swallow-tailed Kite that was seen sporadically for several days. Other good finds were a Snowy Egret near Rondeau and a Purple Gallinule in Essex County. Just when we thought things couldn't get any better they did. A Great Kiskadee, a colourful, vocal and active bird that rarely moves north of the Rio Grande valley showed up at Rondeau Provincial Park. This was another



first record for the province. Many SFN members went to see it and weren't disappointed. The large flycatcher decided frogs were on the menu. It would drop down to the edge of the lake, pick up a frog, return to its perch, bash it against the branch and swallow it.

Rare birds often show up in unexpected places but don't stay long. The rare birds of summer 2018 were very cooperative, they stayed around for days or weeks, were easy to see and exhibited interesting behaviour. As someone who went to see a number of these birds I won't soon forget summer 2018. Many other SFN members probably agree.

Westminster Ponds - London

by Harald Scholz

There were fifteen of us who met by the old stable on Western Counties road, on a pleasantly brisk, beautiful sunny day, - with more painted leaves



overhead than there were to scuff with our feet. Tourism London had sent detail maps to find the centuries old Heritage-tree, a huge healthy oak - a massive plant! We ambled and birded our way on the trails of the roughly circular forested berm, containing Spettigues Pond("isn't somebody supervising these people?"). and.. 'Too soon', we headed back past the WW II rehab foundations with views and birds of more open landscape, with a different pond - you could also see an overview of the "city" from here.

A quick stop at Tim's for lunch and then on to the Ontario Museum of Archeology, to one of the numerous access trails down into the Medway Valley, and more forest. When scouting this area, I'd worried footing might be tricky, so we 'all' had



walking sticks(or found one) - so when a tributary creek got in the way (the child in all of us, from

however many years ago, came to the fore) we never learned how to walk on water! ...and we had to do it again on the way back!



This area had a different mood, likely due to the trees forming the canopy were all the same height. Also on the way back, past the large glass wall of the Museum, we commiserated with a Golden-crowned kinglet, which gave us quite a thrill from being so close. There was some very fine sharing(and pictures) of this, with other hiker's small children. Twelve of us were game to sample one more attraction, at another access point to this heritage forest.

The Elsie Perrins Williams site lets you look down into the Medway Valley, and across the tall tree-tops, from the perimeter lawn of the estate residence (which is still in use for special events).





**We the people
are for the environment.**

Dear Nature Lover,

The Government of Ontario announced plans on November 15, 2018 to eliminate the office of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (ECO) and transfer much of its responsibility to the jurisdiction of the Auditor General. This misguided decision effectively undercuts the power and independence of Ontario's environmental watchdog.

The ECO provides independent, non-partisan oversight of government policies. Simply put, the ECO holds the government accountable when it makes decisions that impact the air we breathe, the water we drink and the natural environment of the people of Ontario. Transferring applications for review of existing or new environmental policy, law or regulation to the relevant government minister instead of an independent Environmental Commissioner is like putting the fox in charge of the chicken house. All independence is lost.

The decision to drastically cut back the office's independent oversight comes just two days after the ECO released a critical report about sensible solutions the government should take to protect our water, wetlands and wildlife that would yield big rewards. Absorbing the Environmental Commission of Ontario into the office of the Auditor General seems like an attempt to silence the voices that urge Ontario to better protect our lands, air and waters. Dressed as an act of fiscal discipline, it is in fact an unabashed attack against the environment and its defenders.

We urgently need you to let the government know that the ECO's vital and independent role enables public participation and government accountability for decisions that significantly impact the environment. These rights are enshrined in our Environmental Bill of Rights. We will not stand by as our remaining natural environment is made vulnerable to be squandered for the short-term benefit of the few.

Please add your voice to tell Premier Ford, Finance Minister Fedeli and Cabinet Ministers that Ontarians need the office of the ECO and reject the slashing of this essential oversight and accountability role. copy this link to your browser so you can make your voice heard <https://ontarionature.good.do/>

Sincerely

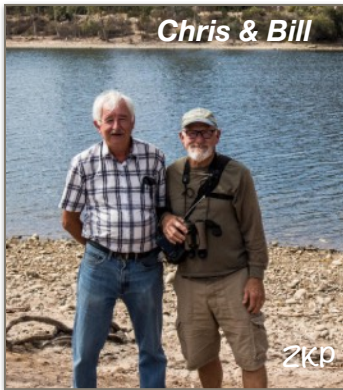


Caroline Schultz
Executive Director

BirdingPal

by Chris Polkiewicz

On a recent holiday trip to San Diego California, I wanted to see and photograph some of the local birds that would not be seen in Ontario. Doing some online research turned up BirdingPal, which connects you to local enthusiasts in the area you plan to visit. The home page lets you select which country you are travelling to. For ten dollars U.S. per year, you become a member, which allows you to connect with different contacts in the area you plan to visit. Each contact has a description giving the area they cover, interests, birding expertise, languages spoken, and when they are available.



Looking at the San Diego area I came across a husband and wife team. This would give my wife some company. Also, Bill was a photographer, so I knew he would be willing to take the time to allow me to get some good

photos while experiencing this beautiful area.

With that, I contacted Bill through BirdingPal. All of the initial communication is through the website for both you and your contact. We decided on the date and time to meet. Once in San Diego my contact suggested regular email communication. Bright and early Wednesday morning Bill picked us up and drove to Lake Murray. We spent six hours finding and photographing birds in the area. Bill was an excellent guide who made us feel as if we had known him for years. From my positive

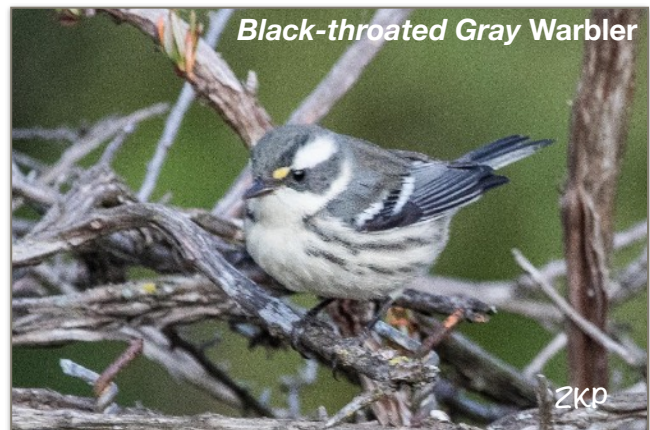


experience I would recommend this service to anyone.

Guides are volunteers, so it is recommended on the site that you contribute to gas costs, and take out



your host for lunch as a sign of appreciation. The site also lists professional birding guides for each area. Professional guides charge for their services.



List of Birds Seen:

Bushtit; Annas Hummingbird; Munia; Black-throated Gray Warbler; California Towhees; Female Nuttall's Woodpecker; Says Phoebe; Grackle; Black Phoebe; Wren Tit; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; Clark's, Pied-billed and Western Grebes; Snowy Egret; Great Blue Heron; Song Sparrows; Doves; Cormorants. Also Marbled Godwits and Whimbrels while biking on a different day.

Link to Birding Pal: www.birdingpal.org/

Environmental Observations

by Terry Crabe

I recently read an interesting article in the Beacon Herald where a group of volunteers were awarded \$3500.00 from the TF friends of the Environment Fund which stated the following "Stratford's birds, butterflies, and bees will have a new favourite hang-out when they return to the city next year. Earlier this month, staff in the city's parks department finished clearing a swath of land north of Guelph Street and south of the train station where they planted nine new trees to form the first leg of a pollinator pathway. "It's taking otherwise useless land, it's cleaning it up, it's putting in pollinator trees that will help all kinds of pollinators, depending on the tree type, and it's just beautifying our city and making things looks better," said Barb Hacking, a member of Stratford's Communities in Bloom committee, the group that spearheaded the project with \$3,500 in funding from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. Just before the snow fell last week, city staff planted three Tulip trees, three Ornamental Pear trees, and three Ornamental Lilac trees, stretching from south of the train station to Downie Street. In the spring, Hacking and a group of volunteers will fill in the pathway with other pollinator-friendly plants such as Ice Ballet, or Swamp Milkweed."

Earlier this fall I sent a letter to the Upper Thames Conservation Authority identifying some very destructive environmental damage that had occurred along the south side of a stream that runs from Mornington to Romeo just south of Vivian. The reply that I received is as follows. "Thank you for your email regarding the work that has been done on the Court Drain in Stratford. The work that was done on the drain was brushing to clear the watercourse of debris that was, or could potentially, impede flow, and/or upstream drainage. This is **NOT** the work of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA), it is the responsibility of the Municipality or in this case, the City of Stratford."

Unfortunately, this area before the recent onslaught was a very effective natural corridor for all types of wildlife to move through this area. I do understand the need to clear drains to support water flow, however, the actual work on the drain was almost non-existent but it seems that this contractor spent more than a week along this side of the drain clearing a strip of vegetation up to 100 meters wide which makes absolutely no sense. The resulting disturbed earth will be an immediate host for garlic mustard and every other invasive plant that is now moving into our area. It also eliminates the possibility of a home or corridor for any type of wildlife.

I find it interesting that an Environmental Fund will provide money to plant both unsuitable trees (tulip trees need a lot of water) as well as ornamental trees and plants (not native to this area and many of which do not support native wildlife) and expect to create corridors or "hang-outs" for wildlife.



Stratford Field Naturalist Upcoming Events

Tuesday, Dec 11, 2018 at 7:30pm
Salvation Army, 230 Lightbourne Ave.

Travels in Papua New Guinea with Doctor Ann.
Our very own Ann Griffin will share her recent adventure.

Saturday, December 15, 2018
London

Nature London Christmas Bird Count:
anyone interested in participating contact Ken Clarke 519-272-4188

Saturday, December 29, 2018
Stratford & Area

Participate in the **Annual Christmas Bird Count** and get together afterwards to tally numbers and compare stories.
Contact: Ken Clarke 519-272-4188 to register

Tuesday, Jan 8, 2019 at 7:30 pm
Salvation Army, 230 Lightbourne Ave

100 years of the Migratory Bird Convention: the need for more ambition in Bird Conservation with Steven Price - President, Bird Studies Canada who will be our guest speaker.

Feb 12, 2019 at 6:30 pm
Salvation Army, 230 Lightbourne Ave

Annual Potluck Supper and Annual General Meeting
Bring your own plates, utensils and appetite for the potluck. There is short business and the elections of officers followed by a presentation

"What a century of weather observations can tell us about climate"

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the predecessor agency of Environment Canada encouraged its daily weather observers to make remarks about the changing seasons, extreme weather, etc. With the Environment Canada collection of weather observations now at Western University, Prof. Alan MacEachern is studying what they tell us about Canadians and climate.

A Saturday in February, 2019

Chris and Terry's Snowy Owl Adventure

Join us for a day of searching out Snowy Owls in the area. This should be of interest to those interested in photographing or just observing Snowy Owls in our region. It will take place on a Saturday in February. Further details will be given at our February meeting. Contacts: Terry Crabe, Chris Polkiewicz

Harald - our London Hike Leader



Sunday Hike in the Dolan





Sandhill Crane, Bald Eagle and Red-headed Woodpecker - Herman Veenendaal
Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Gray Catbird, Hermit Thrush - Chris Polkiewicz
Hiking in the Dolan - Terry Crabe

