The Cardinal

Nature London

“To Preserve and Enjoy Nature”

Virginia Rail
Estela Quintaro-Weldon
permission must be secured for reproductions of photographs and illustrations.

Thanks to Gail McNeil, Hugh Casbourn, Leslie Rockwell, Glen Winegarden and Mike Channon for looking after the mailing, and to the artists, photographers, authors, reporters, Editorial Committee members, webmaster, and many others who helped to produce this issue of The Cardinal.

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1 September 2019 — 31 August 2020
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APPOINTMENTS
A full page of all appointments in the Nature London organization can be found online.
www.naturelondon.ca

Editors of other newsletters are welcome to copy any articles appearing for the first time in this publication. Credit should be given to authors and The Cardinal. Written
From the President

As we continue to adapt to the ongoing demands of the coronavirus world it is good to see that opportunities are opening up to enable us to enjoy nature safely. For example, Parks Canada (Google: Parks Canada How to visit during COVID-19) has provided comprehensive guidelines on how to protect yourself and others and Ontario has published A Framework for Reopening our Province (Google: Ontario a framework for reopening our province).

I’ve so far restricted most of my botanizing to nearby locations where it is easy to maintain social distancing and, as a Nature London member, I’ve been visiting Cedarcroft more frequently than usual, where on several occasions I’ve come across our Cedarcroft management team diligently pulling up Garlic Mustard and performing other maintenance tasks. Perhaps it is a function of not having been at Cedarcroft at quite the right time previously, but this year appears to have been an excellent year for the Sharp-lobed Hepaticas.

Like many other organizations, we have been learning to conduct meetings using the video-telephony service Zoom. While this is no replacement for face-to-face meetings and gatherings, until such time as these can resume safely, Zoom does enable us to have presentations and board and committee meetings. Going forward, even after face-to-face meetings can resume, I expect Zoom, or another equivalent service, will become part of our communications armamentarium since it is an option for use when inclement conditions make travel risky and it provides an opportunity to have presentations by speakers for whom the costs or time commitment to travel to a venue in London would be prohibitive.

This edition of The Cardinal is missing the talented contributions of our Layout Editor, Tom Reaume, who has had to step down for health reasons. Thanks, Tom, for your dedicated service to our flagship publication and best wishes for improved health and wellbeing. Mike Channon has kindly taken on the Layout Editor’s duties for this edition and I think you will agree he has done a fine job. Recruitment of new members for The Cardinal Editorial Committee is a priority issue for Nature London and I would encourage anyone with an interest in writing or illustrating to consider joining The Cardinal team.

One of the difficult decisions the Nature London Board of Directors had to make at its June 16th virtual meeting was, that in view of the current uncertainty caused by the pandemic, we would not have an Awards Banquet in 2020; however, there are still people who should be recognized for their service to Nature London and their contributions to environmental conservation so we are going to arrange a virtual awards ceremony. We will also arrange for a speaker to give us an entertaining and inspirational address.

While field trips and indoor gatherings are still in abeyance, Nature London continues to be active in the community through the Eco-Grants Program, the Chimney Swift monitoring program which is underway again, the action alerts (most recently concerned with the Bank Swallow issue), and collaboration with other environmental organizations, all aimed at addressing our mission “To preserve and enjoy nature.”

We are also looking at ways to polish and enhance our communications with our members, allied organizations, and the general public. If you have some thoughts to share on this subject, please let me know. One of the first tangible products of this initiative is an attractive new Nature London display banner. Thanks especially to Bernie VanDenBelt, Hugh and Sylvie Casbourn, Betsy Baldwin, and Ryan McNaughton for their work on developing the banner. We are looking forward to a chance to display it!

In closing, on behalf of the Nature London Board of Directors, I continue to wish you and your friends and loved ones health and safety. The board also continues to express thanks to our medical personnel and first-responders, and all the other front-line people who are working to keep our community safe and functioning.

Gordon Neish

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Be an Advocate For Nature

Nature London members can play an important role in advocating for the protection of nature in Ontario. As an Advocate For Nature, you will receive, by e-mail, conservation action alerts when your help is urgently needed. Each alert will include an issue summary and a recommended action.

Your involvement can make an enormous difference. Join today by going to Ontario Nature's website at www.ontarionature.org click on Act, then Advocate For Nature, and fill in the online form.

Books
Naturally
by Ron Martin

Spiders of the North Woods 2nd Edition

By Larry Weber
Kollath + Stensaas Publishing
232 Pages, available from the publisher for $18.95 US

I have an abiding interest in field guides and require them to be small enough to carry and robust enough to survive continuous use. Naturally over the years I’ve managed to cover the usual suspects: birds, mammals, trees, insects etc. and have now moved to more exotic species. I must confess the ones on whales and seashells get little use. It should be no surprise that a book on North Woods Spiders caught my attention. This one is fascinating. The first forty odd pages describe spider anatomy, biology, webs and silk as well as observation techniques. The following richly illustrated text is divided according to families with a brief description followed by numerous examples.

I found this book to be full of surprises. The Dark Dwarf Spider is tiny, the male typically 1 mm, the female 3 mm, and are often found on snow. Fishing spiders are best observed at night because their eyes will reflect a flashlight beam. There are wasps which specialize in predation of spiders. The list goes on.

If you’re curious about spiders, especially those likely to be present in our neighborhood I can recommend this little guide. If you suffer from arachnophobia as some of my friends do, not so much, though they might be converted.
Highlights of Recent Board Meetings

2020 April
Items Noted, Discussed and/or Decided

New Appointees to the Board
Stacey Jaczko and Dan Tigchelaar were appointed Directors at Large for 2019-2020 in accordance with the Manual of Procedures (No. 2, Sec 2.2).

Grounds Maintenance Equipment for Cedarcroft
The Cedarcroft management team was given approval to buy a new lawnmower. The cost will be within their approved budget.

Waiver of Audit
As the Indoor Meeting in April was cancelled due to the pandemic, we were unable to vote on the waiver dispensation motion. It was decided to see how everything with regards to the pandemic unfolds as we do have until the end of August to pass the motion. A decision will be made at a later date (see also the June 2020 notes).

Community Engaged Learning (CEL) Update
We received the information that the students at Western University had researched with regard to the CEL survey, analysis, and comparison of the missions, mandates, programs and activities of environmental organizations in the London area. There were some good observations overall and in particular with the groupings of various organizations. We should be looking at the group in which Nature London has been slotted. There is some useful information in the package which could be used going forward.

Eco-grants
The Eco-grant Funding Recommendations for 2020 as put forward by the Eco-grants Committee were approved. Funding will be given for the following projects: Thames Talbot Land Trust Meadowlily trail bridge, ReForest London/Climate Action London pollinator garden, and ReForest London Meander Creek naturalization project.

2020 May
Items Noted, Discussed and/or Decided

Go Wild Grow Wild Sponsorship Opportunities
The Go Wild Grow Wild exhibition that was to take place at the Western Fair complex was cancelled due to the pandemic, but plans are underway to launch an interactive website (My Wild Green Home). The idea is to attract people to the site and encourage them to have a “green garden” by planting native plants etc. They are partnering with the City of London and the London Environmental Network (LEN). Further discussions will take place before a Nature London sponsorship commitment is made.

Nature London Display Banner
The board approved the design of the new display banner and granted permission for it to be made. No approval was needed for payment as it will come in under budget. The Thames Talbot Land Trust is in the process of designing a banner and has asked if they can look at ours to have an idea of the concept. Permission was granted by the board.

Replacement of the Stonehills’ Memorial Bench at Cedarcroft
Barb Kaiser has contacted a daughter of the Stonehills to see if they are interested in replacing the bench as it has fallen into disrepair.

Other News from Cedarcroft
A team of Nature London women has been clearing a lot of Garlic Mustard from the property whilst maintaining social distancing protocols. Six large garbage bags were put out at the front for pickup.
Herb Bax has planted the following on the property: 12 Sycamore trees, 7 Cottonwood trees, 10 Tulip trees, and 15 Black Cherry trees.

Conservation Action Committee (CAC)
The CAC continues to monitor Eastern Meadowlarks at Parkwood Hospital. So far, two have been seen.
At the CAC meeting on April 17th, conversations centred on the Conservation Award. The committee is still looking for someone to take charge of the Enviro-Hero award.

Work is being done on some of the local Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) -- Meadowlily Woods, Medway Valley Heritage Forest, and Kilally Meadows.

Van Luyk Greenhouses and Garden Centre have agreed to pay for the printing of the Invasive Species brochure.

2020 June
Items Noted, Discussed and/or Decided

Communications/Branding Strategy
The board decided to form a working group to review and make recommendations on the club’s communication and branding strategy taking into consideration The Cardinal, social media, the e-Newsletter, mail-outs (by post or e-mail), telephone, in-person meetings, video conferences, webinars, and other relevant communication tools.

Audit Dispensation
It is hoped that, as we are unable to hold indoor meetings at this time, a Zoom meeting can be arranged so that we can address the audit dispensation. A quorum, which is 30 members, would be needed.

2020 Awards Banquet
In light of the current situation, the board made the difficult decision to cancel the Awards Banquet planned for November 2020. It is hoped that some arrangement can be made to hold a virtual awards ceremony, possibly with a guest speaker.

Opportunities to Join the Nature London Board

Nature London is a vibrant organization thanks to the efforts of dozens of committed volunteers. Currently, the club is seeking to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors for Directors at Large, and Vice-President.

Members of the Board of Directors are responsible for the overall operation of the club.

Directors are expected to attend the monthly meetings of the Board and, based upon the information before them, to participate in discussions and decisions to advance the best interests of the club. Directors also serve as a liaison between the Board and those appointed to various areas of responsibility within Nature London.

In October of each year, Directors coordinate the submission, to the Past President, of the reports of their respective appointees for inclusion in Nature London's Annual Report.

In addition to Directors at Large, Nature London is seeking someone to assume the responsibilities of Vice-President. The duties of the Vice-President include becoming familiar with all aspects of the club’s operation in preparation for assuming the responsibilities of President. This includes chairing the club’s Finance Committee and, in the absence of the President, performing the duties of the President.

If you are interested in serving the club at the Board level, please contact Bernie VanDenBelt: pastpresident@naturelondon.com. Previous experience on a Board of Directors is not required.

Print The Cardinal at home

The online The Cardinal is interactive (click on blue hyperlinks), is in full colour and can be enlarged to make reading easier.

For those members wishing to have a paper The Cardinal, you can easily print one page or all the pages from the online pdf version.
Conservation

Conservation Action Committee Report

London’s Environmental Management Guidelines

As noted in the Autumn 2019 issue of The Cardinal, the City is undertaking an update of its Environmental Management Guidelines (EMG). The EMG provide a framework for environmental studies that occur within the City. The guidelines are used to evaluate planning applications, municipal infrastructure projects, Conservation Master Plans, Secondary Plans, Area Plans, Subject Land Status Reports, and Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Studies. The guidelines describe standards for ecological inventories, the assessment of natural features and functions, the determination of ecological buffers during development, and monitoring of ecological features and functions post-development. The City has retained a consultant, AECOM, to carry out this review. The Conservation Action Committee (CAC) is participating in the review. It is hoped that through this process the revised and updated EMG will lead to better protection of environmental features and functions during future development. A first draft of the revised guidelines has been received from the consultants and is under review by City staff. Because of the suspension of meetings of City advisory committees caused by the novel coronavirus restrictions, the draft was not presented to the City’s Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee (EEPAC) at its regular meeting at City Hall scheduled for April 16.

Meadowlily Area Conservation Master Plan (CMP)

Members of the CAC and other interested parties met with City staff on March 10 to hear City staff’s response to comments submitted on the draft of the CMP Phase 1. The City plans to consult with area First Nations and to add lands north of the south branch of the Thames River before proceeding further. In the interim, the City plans to increase enforcement of rules in place to protect the Environmentally Significant Area (ESA).

ESA Team

The ESA Team operated by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority under contract with the City of London is continuing with as much enforcement of policies protecting ESAs as possible under provincial novel coronavirus restrictions.

Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA

At least one Eastern Meadowlark has been seen in the part of the Parkwood grounds that is to be left unmowed for nesting purposes through an agreement with London Health Sciences Centre and its contractor, Clintar.

Meadowlarks at Parkwood Hospital

Bill Maddeford and Sandy Levin

Meadowlarks have nested in the area near Parkwood Hospital for a number of years. The Conservation Action Committee contacted the London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC) which owns the land, and its grounds maintenance company Clintar, to put up signage and leave an area uncut so that the birds, a species at risk, could still nest. For this support, the Conservation Action Committee awarded Clintar and LHSC an EnviroHero award.

This area is probably the largest meadow in a busy part of the city that isn’t slated for immediate development. While it isn’t a corner where I’d want to put my home it appears this species has found a way to put up with us and get the job done. They can handle the noise and light pollution, as long as the grass stays uncut for the nesting season.

Eastern Meadowlark
- Mike Channon -
female later. The meadow gets its first cut the end of May about when the young had arrived.

Given that the birds (not us) decide where the nest goes, this year it was decided to try to ensure the nest was not in the area to be cut since this year we had two pair arrive. With the help of NL members Gail McNeil, Hugh and Garth Casbourne, Betsy Baldwin and Stacey Jacko, (who stayed socially distant), a line was walked back and forth with ropes over the area to be cut. No evidence of nesting was found. This was done with Clintar staff present so that they could see the area to be left uncut.

This is also a great example of how a large organization like LHSC along with their property management team at Clintar have seen the environmental positives of leaving a large meadow while trimming the edges for appearance.

We thank them for their patience and cooperation with us and hope to continue this until the days of new hospital developments occur.

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**Ontario Nature Report**

**Anita Caveney**

**Carolinian West Spring Regional Meeting**

April 25, 2020

The Carolinian West (CW) Spring Regional Meeting of the Nature Network was conducted by conference call, due to coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions. It was hosted and chaired by Lisa Richardson, Ontario Nature’s Nature Network Co-ordinator, and other participants included representatives from ten CW member groups and guest presenters Sonya Richmond and Sean Morton. The meeting lasted approximately 2.5 hours. Lisa welcomed all participants on the call, including a new group, Lakeshore Eco-Network.

**Group Activities Highlights**

**Essex County Nature (ECN)**

Hosted 4 events of the Junior Egrets in 2019. Created the Lynda Corkum Essex County Nature Bursary for university students. Donated $15,000 to Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) for the Pelee Island Wetland restoration project and the Marianne Girling Nature Reserve. Upgraded its website to create a kid-friendly Junior Egrets page, and started uploading slides from guest speaker presentations. Coronavirus pandemic restrictions resulted in more online resources being used.

**Lakeshore Eco-Network (LE-N)**

LE-N’s tree festival and plant sale were postponed because of coronavirus pandemic restrictions.

**Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group (LSPCG)**

Since partnering with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) in a crowd-sourced fundraising project, LSPCG has participated in 3 events with DUC and St. Clair Region Conservation Authority. LSPCG has connected with Forrester Ecologic to have species inventories conducted in the wetland complex in order to better position itself in grant applications. Organized a “Phrag Challenge” between Ipperwash and Port Franks, which was highlighted in the Great Lakes Phragmites Collaborative “Phrag Phriday Newsletter”. LSPCG is very concerned about spread of Phragmites due to roots and rhizomes being ripped out by high water levels and winds and then transported to other areas along the Lake Huron shoreline. Large clumps have been observed, but beaches are not accessible for cleanup during the coronavirus emergency.

**Lambton Wildlife Inc. (LWI)**

All events are on hold until further notice. LWI is involved with a duskywing project in Pinery Provincial Park. LWI oversees the Karner Blue Butterfly Sanctuary, and is working towards the recovery of the species in Ontario.
Nature London (NL)
Together with other environmental organizations, NL raised concerns with the Ontario Govt. about proposed legislative and regulatory changes or amendments to 1) mandates of Conservation Authorities (CAs); 2) the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS); and 3) the Rondeau Prov. Park Management Plan. In October, NL endorsed an Ontario Nature letter to the Ontario Govt. regarding changes to the PPS (2014) Review relating to aggregate extraction. NL representatives appeared before the province’s Special Committee on General Governance on Nov. 21, 2019 to express concerns about proposed amendments to numerous laws and regulations as presented in Bill 132. Through its Eco-Grants Program, NL awarded a total of $6,900 for three projects to be undertaken by the Thames Talbot Land Trust, ReForest London, and Climate Action London. A collaborative project involving NL, London Environmental Network, and students from Western University’s Environmental Health Promotion course has completed analysis of the current scope, range, and depth of the London and area environmental community as a contribution to improving inter-organizational cooperation and collaboration to raise community interest, involvement, and engagement in addressing environmental issues. NL’s Board created a Commemorative and Bequest Giving Program Co-ordinator position to improve the visibility and handling of donations, and to facilitate the donation process. NL received a second donation of $1000 from Ken Willoughby towards improvements/management at its Cedercroft Nature Reserve. The annual ‘Nature in the City’ series of 6 illustrated talks co-hosted by NL and London Public Library in January and February, 2020 was very well attended. All NL indoor meetings and outdoor events in March through July 2020 were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Otter Valley Naturalists (OVN)
OVN has built more than 50 Eastern Bluebird houses. It participated in an Owl Prowl event, and gave stewardship assistance to Long Point Basin Land Trust and Bayham Municipal Beach Drainage Area.

Sydenham Field Naturalists (SFN)
SFN planted trees at Pawpaw Woods in Wallaceburg, in partnership with the Municipality of Chatham-Kent. Seed collection and seed planting at Sydenham River Nature Reserve are being done in partnership with Ontario Nature and Lambton Wildlife Inc. SFN organized a controlled burn at the Pawpaw Woods prairie on March 6, 2020, in partnership with Ontario NativeScape and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

West Elgin Nature Club (WENC)
Conducted a Christmas Bird Count on December 27, 2019. All indoor meetings and outdoor events have been cancelled during the coronavirus pandemic.

Ontario Nature (ON) Update
Lisa Richardson

- ON and the COVID-19 Crisis:
  - ON is still operating, with all programs /campaigns running, and continuing advocacy on behalf of nature
  - The Toronto head office and Thunder Bay Boreal office are closed; all staff are working from home. All ON Nature Reserves are closed at this time.
  - All spring events cancelled; field season on hold until restrictions lifted
  - See ON’s response to Covid-19 on media page of the ON website

- New Nature Network Member Group:
  - Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs (Lake Ontario North Region). Visit www.shoresh.ca for more information

- 2020 Annual Gathering
  - The 2020 Annual Gathering has been cancelled. Plans for the 2021 Gathering in Sudbury are underway
  - 2020 AGM and Conservation Awards will be held in 2020; date, venue (real or virtual), and time to be determined
  - For more information, contact Anna Dipple at annad@ontarionature.org

- Youth Circle for Mother Earth
  - Co-ordinating Circle retreat held at YMCA Cedar Glen on Feb. 28-Mar. 1, 2020
  - 13 youth from the GTA, Thunder Bay, Walpole Island First Nation and Eastern Ontario met to build relationships, learn from one another and Elders, formulate a mission statement, and prepare for upcoming nature outings planned and led by members of the Co-ordinating Circle in their communities
  - For more information, contact Christine Ambre at christinea@ontarionature.org

- Youth Summit for Biodiversity & Environmental Leadership
  - Proceeding as usual, with room to adapt; sponsorship packages circulated in April
  - Working with Indigenous partners, Youth Council, and Co-ordinating Circle to run a unique cross-cultural event for youth aged 14–20, Sept. 25—27, 2020 at YMCA Geneva Park, Orillia. The summit may be cancelled if circumstances warrant it; all Nature Network sponsors will be notified if the event is cancelled
  - For more information, contact Christine Ambre at christinea@ontarionature.org

- Ontario Nature’s Nature Reserves
  - Closed until further notice, due to coronavirus restrictions
  - Direct any questions by email to info@ontarionature.org, or call 1-800-440-2366
• Nature Reserve (NR) Planned Activities
  - All activities are dependent upon easing of current coronavirus restrictions
    ◦ Acquired Gananoque Lake NR and expanded Lost Bay NR (including one easement)
    ◦ Surveying Gananoque Lake NR and the new Lost Bay parcels in summer 2020
    ◦ Sydenham River NR native-tree planting was supposed to start in spring 2020, and seed collection in fall 2020
    ◦ Stone Road Alvar post-burn monitoring of the following taxa: bee community, butterflies, plants, snakes, gastropods, lichen, small mammals and Gray Fox
    ◦ Community butterfly event
    ◦ For more information, contact Smera Sukumar at smeras@ontarianature.org

• Ongoing Environmental Advocacy
  - ON thanked member groups for support through joint letters, and action alerts relating to Rondeau Provincial Park cottage lot leases; proposed cormorant hunt; proposed spring bear hunt; and mandates of Conservation Authorities
    ◦ For more information, contact Anne Bell at anneb@ontarianature.org
  - Citizen Science Planned Activities
    ◦ Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas (ORAA): Contributors are asked to submit observations through other citizen science programs, including Herps of Ontario project in iNaturalist, or to send spreadsheets of Species at Risk observations directly to the Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC). Interactive species range maps will continue to be available through the Atlas webpage, and will be updated for the final time at the end of April 2020. ON is working with the ORAA Atlas Steering Committee and other partners on the ORAA Publication, which will include analyses on the data collected by the thousands of Atlas contributors over its 10-year lifespan, and is expected to be released later in 2020. An ORAA Publication event will be held at the H.N. Crossley NR this summer, and ON will lead a Herp Walk on the property, to promote the importance of citizen science projects and share some initial findings from the ORAA Publication.
    ◦ Long Term Monitoring Protocol (LTMP) for Ontario’s Snakes: ON will create its final LTMP by spring 2020, based on feedback provided by experts, conservation professionals, and landowners involved in the LTMP during the pilot and development stages (2018-2019). People interested in applying the LTMP in their area may contact Brittney Vezina at britneyv@ontarianature.org for more information. The final LTMP will be implemented in 2020 at more than 20 sites across Ontario. These include privately-owned, Ontario Parks, Parks Canada, CA, and university lands. ON will continue implementing the LTMP in Norfolk County, applying the protocol to research the impacts of prescribed burning on habitat use by species-at-risk snakes. Fire suppression and the spread of non-native vegetation are making some areas of Ontario unsuitable for snakes. Prescribed burning is a habitat management tool to address these threats. The research in Norfolk County is focused on Eastern Foxsnake, Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, and Milksnake, and ON is currently in the pre-burn data collection phase. For more information about citizen science activities, contact Smera Sukumar at smeras@ontarianature.org.

• Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) 2020: Good News and Bad News
  - Good news: The proposed new policy which would have allowed aggregates extraction to override the protection of significant and at-risk natural heritage features was removed from the PPS. The vague proposal which would have opened the door to offsetting for wetlands not protected in policies 2.1.4. and 2.1.5 was removed. A new policy was added to promote the co-location of linear infrastructure, where appropriate — 1.6.8.5. (though language saying “should” instead of “shall” is weak). Proposed policies regarding climate change were included — 1.1.1(i), 1.6.1, 1.6.6.1(b) and c), 2.2.1(c), and 3.1.3. The proposed policy requiring municipalities to take action to support increased housing supply and fast-track priority applications was removed (was 4.7 in proposed changes). The new policy 4.7 is a modified version of part of the former 4.11 and parts of the Preamble regarding integration of approvals under other legislation, but specific references to the Environmental Assessment Act have been removed.
  - Bad news: Proposed changes which weaken requirements for compact development, efficient use of infrastructure, integrated land-use planning and achievement of intensification and redevelopment of targets went forward — 1.1.3.6, 1.1.3.7, 1.6.7.2, and 1.6.7.5. Proposed changes went forward which removed requirements to apply the policies of Section 2 (Wise Use and Management of Resources) and Section 3 (Protecting Public Health and Safety) when directing intensification and redevelopment and expanding settlement boundaries — 1.1.3.3 and 1.1.3.8. For more information, contact Anne Bell at anneb@ontarianature.org.

• Boreal Office Outreach
  - Created two learning kits for schools to borrow, viz. Wild for Wildlife, and Become a Birder. Indigenous-led Conservation Event: On Nov. 25—27, ON went on tour with land defender and chef, Art Napoleon (co-host of the popular APTN TV show “Moosemeat and Marmalade”) to talk to in two Indigenous communities and Thunder Bay about forests, food, and the fate of boreal caribou. For more information, contact Juliee Boan at juleeb@ontarianature.org.
  - Protecting the Black Bay Peninsula Event: ON invited local stakeholders to a presentation and discussion at the ON office on Feb. 15, 2020. Knowledge (compiled from >30 interviews with local experts and >35 reports) was shared about the cultural and ecological significance of Black Bay Peninsula, and pathways were suggested for future protection. The 25 attendees included representatives from Metis Nation, commercial fishermen, trappers, hunters, environmental NGOs, and biologists. For more information,
contact Julee Boan at juleeb@ontariornature.org.

Carolinian West Regional Business

- **Presentation on Sydenham River Nature Reserve Restoration**, Larry Cornelis, Sydenham Field Naturalists
  - Species surveys were conducted in 2018 and 2019, with more planned for 2020
  - Native-tree planting was to start in spring 2020 and continue to 2023
  - All restoration work will be on hold until the coronavirus restrictions are eased/lifted
  - For more information, contact Smera Sukumar at smeras@ontariornature.org

- **Presentation on Come Walk With Us Initiative**, Sonya Richmond and Sean Morton
  - A PDF of the presentation was circulated to the member groups prior to the virtual meeting
  - Website: www.comewalkwithus.online
  - Email contact: comewalkwithus@hotmail.com

Next meeting
The fall 2020 regional meeting will be held on October 31, and will be hosted by the St. Thomas Field Naturalist Club.

Report submitted by Anita Caveney, Ontario Nature Representative, with input from Lisa Richardson, Ontario Nature.

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**Articles and images for The Cardinal**

If you like to write, draw, or take photographs, etc., submit your best prose and images (photos and pen-and-ink drawings) to The Cardinal. An article can be up to 3,000 words or longer if necessary.

Photographs should be jpegs about six inches long and 300 ppi (pixels per inch). Ink drawings can be up to nine inches long and tiffs at 600 ppi.

Send articles to members of The Cardinal editorial committee.

Mike Channon, outings editor@naturelondon.com
Ron Martin, features editor@naturelondon.com
John Berry for images, director.jb@naturelondon.com

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**Volunteers Needed for The Cardinal**

_The Cardinal_ Committee is in dire need of new members! Without a vibrant committee, at some point in time it will be difficult, if not impossible, to continue producing _The Cardinal_.

The committee is excited and grateful to be welcoming new volunteer Layout Editors to _The Cardinal_ team. Their inaugural edition will be the Autumn 2020 _The Cardinal_. Many thanks to _The Cardinal_ Committee member Mike Channon for taking on the layout of the Summer 2020 _The Cardinal_ in the interim!

Although the need for a new _The Cardinal_ Layout Editor has been resolved, the following additional volunteers are required to maintain the current content of _The Cardinal_.

**Club Info Editor**
This volunteer editor is responsible for receiving and editing _The Cardinal_ content related to the ongoing business of Nature London. Examples of regular items include: the Nature London Events Program, From the President, New Members, Highlights of Recent Board Meetings, and Items for Sale.

**News & Notes Editor**
The News & Notes Editor is responsible for gathering and editing timely information related to club members, current events, and other news items of interest to the general membership. Information may be received directly from Nature London members and/or from other sources such as the websites of environmental organizations.

**Also of Interest to Naturalists Editor**
The Also of Interest to Naturalists Editor is responsible for gathering and editing information on mostly local events hosted by other organizations.

Please note: The News & Notes Editor and Also of Interest to Naturalists Editor could be combined into a single editing position.

All of the work for these positions is home-based and requires access to a personal computer and e-mail.

Please contact the Nature London Volunteer Coordinator at volunteers@naturelondon.com if you're interested in volunteering with _The Cardinal_ Committee. Thanks!
Spotlight on Tom Reaume

Tom is a knowledgeable and passionate naturalist. His interest in the natural world is evident in his prolific writing, photography and art. Tom’s art and photography can be found in collections in Canada and abroad. Tom has written and illustrated the book, 620 Wild Plants of North America. This book is meticulous in its detail and was Tom’s project for many years. As demonstrated by the 10,000 sketches in this encyclopedic book, Tom is not only a writer but is also a gifted artist. Tom has written and illustrated other books including Pure Abstract Photography: The Creative Moment, Wild Plants of the Great Plains, and Manitoba’s Tall Grass Prairie: A Field Guide to an Endangered Space.

For those of you who do not know, Tom Reaume has been the Layout Editor of The Cardinal for the past two years plus. The Spring edition of The Cardinal was Tom’s swan (Cardinal) song. The search is on for a new Layout Editor as Tom has signaled his departure.

Tom is the fellow who brings all of the many pieces together to create the four yearly editions of The Cardinal. Before Tom rides off into the sunset, we want to take the opportunity to shine a light on this multi-faceted Nature London volunteer.

Tom joined The Cardinal Editorial Committee in November 2017 and jumped into the role of Layout Editor for the Winter 2018 edition. Fortunately for the committee and the Nature London membership, Tom landed his enthusiastic jump with both feet!

Tom not only brought along his expertise and experience with InDesign and Photoshop, he also generated beyond-the-box thinking and promoted innovation in the look and layout of The Cardinal. Tom was instrumental in coordinating the linking of The Cardinal with the Nature London website. He has always been a strong proponent of members accessing The Cardinal on-line for not only conservation reasons, but also because of the splendid colour features of the website The Cardinal.

Tom has also authored several e-books, two of which are available free through the Nature London website; Gadwall A Natural History and the Chipping Sparrow Its Natural History. Other e-books include The American Crow, Naturally and Photography Traditions.

Examples of Tom’s excellent writing, photography and sketch work can be found in several editions of The Cardinal. One of Tom’s many The Cardinal contributions has been a regular column highlighting women naturalists. Tom has an active and busy mind that always seems to be working on a creative endeavour! On that note, Tom has a couple of project iron in the fire as we speak!

Tom’s technological expertise, “why not try it” attitude, lively sense of humour and creativity will be sorely missed by his The Cardinal committee comrades and all those who enjoy The Cardinal. We imagine that Tom will continue to celebrate nature in all of its diverse and vast beauty. Tom’s many nature observations, writings, sketches and photography will be enjoyed by many naturalists for years to come.

The Cardinal Editorial Committee
**Hullett Marsh**  
Tom Reaume

On Saturday, 14 June 2020, Trevor and I traveled to Hullett Marsh to visit the plants and animals, and video some of their activities. The weather was ideal, with diaphanous white clouds that poets and photographers picture, painters not so much. Sunshine was almost continuous. The wind was ideal for walking and looking. It formed ripples on the water’s surface and waves in tall grasses along the edges of ponds.

The shades of green were at least 50, with the shrubs and trees fully leaved. Some grasses, Smooth Brome and Bluejoint, were preparing to bloom. Phlox, mostly with pinkish flowers, formed tall patches here and there along the paths and berms. An Eastern Tiger Swallowtail briefly danced among its blossoms.

Our footsteps forced a Leopard Frog to jump and a Garter Snake to undulate out of harm’s way through low vegetation. To our left, Trevor saw movement. A white-spotted fawn and then its white-tailed mother walked into view on a small island among tall, dead flooded trees. The fawn was running and jumping, as most young mammals do. They soon walked into the water and disappeared behind shrubbery.

A few late-nesting Blue-winged Teal (length 40 cm) occupied two small ponds. White Water Buttercup formed tangled mats along shore, their 5 white petals forming flowers 10–18 mm wide, rising slightly above the water’s surface. Blue Flag formed a large clump with mostly erect, sword-like leaves at the land’s edge. A few ostentatious flowers watched the marsh change each minute. From a flat, light-grey stone, a Blue Dasher dragonfly, rose vertically, rotated 180° and sailed away, only to return in a few minutes and softly land, its dark shadow preceding its arrival. Minnows schooled in a narrow 3-meter wide cut between two large marshes.

Two families of Canada Geese were on the road ahead of us. They took to the water and swam single file. The front group held 7 goslings with whitish-grey cheek patches. Right behind were a pair of adults with 26 young of various sizes and ages. Where we turned to return to the car, Trevor pointed to a Tree Swallow perched on the tip of a dead branch. I recorded it preening, stretching its wings, fanning its tail, and scratching the side of its head with a foot reaching over a slightly lowered left wing. My 4.5-minute YouTube video—https://youtu.be/F2XHlJ8-dgg

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**Along the Thames River**  
Tom Reaume

On Friday, the 22nd of May, 2020, Trevor and I traveled to St. Marys in the late morning for some wildlife spotting. After enjoying Chinese takeout in the Milt Dannell Park "The Flats" near deserted playground equipment for kids, we drove west along hwy 139 to the small town of Rannoch. Reaching the middle of town we turned south onto Perth Road, Line 5.

Arriving at the Cade Tract, we took a brief rest before walking the trail. Unfortunately, two carloads of hikers arrived so we decided to forego the trail and continued along the road following the river. The road was several meters above the river. We saw ragged clumps of tan vegetation, from the previous high water, caught in shrubs and trees along the bank. Slowing to a stop, we left the car and sat in grass along the side of the road. Luckily, a pair of Red-winged Blackbirds occupied this section of shoreline and within a few minutes Trevor spotted a nest in the upper of two clumps of vegetation in a border of tall slender willow shrubs. No cattails, the usual plants used by nesting redwings, were in sight. The nest was slightly below our eye level and 2 to 3 meters above the water line of the river. This is the first nest I’ve seen in a high-water clump of debris. Having recently purchased a Canon R800 videocam, I began filming the nest. I edited about 7 minutes down to three, which you can view via https://youtu.be/-0nu4r7Xkk. We were surprised by the amount of movement and singing she did while incubating.

Continuing along the river, a Great Blue Heron was fishing near shore. One strike came up empty. Two other attempts were incomplete. Farther along we noticed a large collection, probably two broods, of young Canada Geese led across the shallow, quickly flowing river from the far shore. When they got within range, I recorded the paired adults and 13 or 14 young in slow motion to allow the eye to absorb details of washing and preening by the adults. The young were feeding between them. https://youtu.be/mg4dxSgg8sM.

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My dad and I were at the driving range at Adelaide & Windermere this eve and this was in one of the sand trap
- Jason McGuire -
Song of a Fledging Birder
Estela Quintero-Weldon

For the last three years, I have been learning about the world of birds through the wonderful efforts of Nature London, while enjoying the outdoors and birding on a daily basis, in Middlesex and beyond.

Having retired from full-time work, I now have more time to enjoy nature and embrace new ways of learning by doing. Birding offers me a fantastic opportunity for physical exercise. I have acquired new knowledge on how to effectively use parks, trails, and most importantly, how to reach birding hotspots to see different species during the different seasons. I have learned more about the environment, climatic changes, different bird species and habitats, as well as the dynamics of migratory movements and bird conservancy throughout the world.

During the past three years, I have benefitted greatly from the knowledge that more and less experienced birders from a diversity of geographic and cultural communities have shared with me. While birding, I have met wonderful people who contributed to my growth as a birder by assisting with bird ID issues, and/or offered me tips on where to find rare birds. I have been developing new sensory capacities to identify birds I see and hear, and have used the on-line resources offered by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to better my understanding of birds, their looks and ways. I enjoy using the eBird database, and have contributed to it by documenting all of my sightings, whether with pictures, videos or/and voice memos.

The 2020 spring migration has been my busiest since I started as a birder.

From Nature London’s website, e-Bird and other birding sites, I have learned and feel more competent at identifying bird species, about where and how to check out local hotspots, and about bird migratory movements in general.

During late March, the end of the winter season, I had encounters with Common Ravens nesting in North Middlesex, Sandhill Cranes nesting in the Strathroy, and a Common Loon I saw at the edge of Komoka Pits along Glendon Drive. My sightings this month, also included the Ospreys nesting at Labatt Park, whose arrival in London is promptly reported by John Berry, each year.

My spring migration engagement on April 5th, included seeing a Northern Mockingbird in the London airport area. I had encountered one of these birds, while birding in the same area, the year prior. I noticed this beautiful bird perching on a wire. This bird likes wires! Being familiar with the Tropical Mockingbirds I had seen in Colombia, where I am originally from, I recognized the rarity of this presence in Middlesex.

Another great birding moment was my encounter with a Virginia Rail on April 13th at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons. I walked along the middle lane, between the two lagoons, and just before I arrived at the end of it, I was pleasantly surprised to hear the calling ... at my feet, was this small bird with a long orange bill, gray cheeks, and short white eyestripe, in plain sight! Knowing this is usually a furtive bird, I was surprised it was very close to me. As a result, I had a challenging time trying to get my camera to focus on it so that I would have a picture. I was fortunate to make a short video (https://youtu.be/MUU18vJ0cfo) and take a few pictures though. One of those pictures is featured on this issue of The Cardinal.

On April 20th, while I was birding at The Coves, I met a young birder from BC a graduate student at UWO. We exchanged birding experiences, exchanged emails, and parted ways. A few minutes later, he emailed me saying he had seen an American Bittern in the wetland, in the lower part of the Coves where we had met. On his email, he included a picture he took of the bittern; a sighting he said, he did not submit on eBird. I immediately went back to The Coves, walked along the upper ridge (parallel to Wharncliffe Rd.), hoping to see the bird from the other side. It was too dark by then, and although I saw the bird fly off from the wetland towards the North, it flew so fast that I could not photograph it. The following morning, I went back to The Coves, hoping I would see the bittern again. I camouflaged myself in a bush at the edge of the river, and a few minutes later, I heard the bittern’s call. I also felt the branches of the bush move, so I looked to my side. I had quite a surprise, as a fellow birder was also standing by the same bush I was. She heard the call as well and we both looked at each other in shock! We waited for quite a while, but were not able to spot the bird, and left the site.

However, four days later, on April 24th, I arrived at the London Uplands Wetland, and stood very quietly by a small pine tree to start my waiting exercise, hoping for a good catch. A minute after, I had a very exciting, and long encounter, with an American Bittern (I wondered if it was the same seen and heard at the Coves, 4 days earlier). While I was standing on the Northwest corner of the wetland, I sensed a big bird flew over my head, and saw it land in the reeds, a few meters in front of me. I did not move for the next several minutes. I took pictures and made a few short videos of his comings and goings, catching fish and engaging in territorial exchanges with the local Canada Geese. I left before the bird
hid or flew away. A rare sighting in an urban corner of London, although a place surrounded by farm fields and Weldon Park to the North!

I had also the opportunity to see and photograph the rare Lesser Black-backed Gull on April 7th, at London-Westminster landfill site & surrounding fields, to photograph Wilson's Snipe, and to see Lapland Longspur flying over fields in the Lucan area. I spotted a Sora and a Northern Waterthrush, as well as two Virginia Rails at Westminster Ponds Park, during the later part of April.

May arrived, and I had the most vibrant experiences with spring migration, throughout the month. I did not miss going back to various local lagoons and wetlands. On May 1st, while birding in the Veterans/Bradley area early in the morning, I found a juvenile Black-crowned Night-Heron, and on the same day at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons, I stumbled onto 7 Willets quietly standing on the mud flats. These birds only stayed the night in the area, as I went back the following morning and did not find them again. Of this particular sighting, I commented on my eBird checklist of 01 May: “All together on the mud flats. They looked exhausted. Barely moved. One of them (the one on the far right side on the pictures), tried to walk, but was limping. A very sad-looking group of new arrivals, today.” At this site, I also saw Dunlin and a Short-billed Dowitcher, as well as Semipalmated Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper (on May 24th), Least Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. At Cuddy Woods, I encountered a Solitary Sandpiper moving slowly, along the border, in the back of the lagoon.

Swallows I saw during May include Bank, Tree, Northern Rough-winged, and Cliff, and also Purple Martins; I saw most of these at Strathroy Lagoons.

My most fruitful birding days happened at Kilally Meadows. In total, within a few days in May, I saw 24 warblers, while out with a young birder, a graduate student originally from Sri Lanka, whom I met at a presentation organized by Nature London last December. Warblers I saw this season include Canada, Bay-breasted, Yellow, Tennessee, Cape May, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, Wilson’s, Nashville, American Redstart, and also Northern Parula, a wood warbler. At Westminster Ponds Park, I also encountered Black-and-white, Cerulean and Palm Warblers. At Komoka Provincial Park I had the opportunity to see Blue-winged Warbler and a Brewster's Warbler (hybrid), perching briefly on the same tree.

To add to my checklist during the spring migration, I also saw Yellow-throated, Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos, as well as Scarlet Tanager and Ruby-throated Hummingbird, at Kilally, and Summer Tanager at Westminster Ponds.

I continued to take advantage of trails and forests, took long walks around home and neighbouring farms, travelled in different directions within Middlesex, and beyond, and marvelled at the increased number of species I was fortunate to see and hear this season. On May 15th, I saw an Upland Sandpiper standing on a fence post on a cloudy and chilly day, on Winter Drive in Strathroy.

Flycatchers were also arriving. I saw Eastern Wood-Pewee at London–Gibbon’s Park, Eastern Kingbird, and heard the Alder Flycatcher at Kirk Cousins. I saw also Willow and Great Crested Flycatchers at London Kilally Meadows as well as Least Flycatcher at The Coves.

Grasshopper Sparrows were playfully jumping about the fields with Savannahs and Bobolinks, in the Switzer Drive and Longwoods area.

Thrushes I saw included the Wood Thush, and also the Swainson’s Thrush, which I saw at Meander Creek Park, and Gray-cheeked Thrush at Gibbon’s Park; in addition to these, I encountered Ovenbird and Veery at Westminster Ponds Park, Common Yellowthroat at Cuddy Woods and Indigo Bunting at The Coves. Furthermore, I saw Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, and Red-headed Woodpeckers, as well as Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, two Lincoln's Sparrows, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks.

A great encounter was with a Common Gallinule at Westminster Ponds Park. I found it staying in the shade, underneath brush, then swimming slowly, back and forth in a small area, while feeding, very close to the edge on the Southwest corner of Saunders Pond. I was impressed to see it so close, with long legs and toes, and such a small head with a huge and colourful bill, which shone so beautifully as the bird turned its head.

On May 23, after I received an alert from a fellow birder about the sighting of a Connecticut Warbler, seen and heard the previous evening by an experienced local birder, at Kilally. I was at the location where the bird was seen for almost two hours, standing very still, hoping to see the bird. I made voice memo recordings of a few birds calling. I was very interested to find one of my recordings, according to a few birders I consulted with, sound “Definitely a Connecticut ... like a Carolina Wren ... just a Redstart.” I was advised to submit my recording to eBird, so it could go through a sonogram. I am still waiting to hear from eBird experts about this bird I could not see, but heard well!
In late May, I observed Chimney Swifts going into the Labatt chimney, Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos at Westminster Ponds Park, as well as two Red-necked Phalaropes that stopped to feed at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons on the evening of May 25th. They were very active beautiful birds, in the water, going back and forth amidst Wood Duck chicks and shorebirds standing on the flats.

I continued to follow with interest, the sightings of more and less experienced birders on a daily basis, and have been pleasantly surprised at how even a young birder can find an extremely rare bird, as is the case of Sawyer Dawson, a 14-year old enthusiastic birder, who reported seeing a Wilson’s Phalarope. So, I also, was fortunate to see this rare bird on May 31st at an undeveloped area behind North London Toyota, a new hotspot in the Northeast area of London.

June came with new species arriving in Middlesex. I had a nice encounter with a playful Marsh Wren, on the evening of June 12th. A very small bird, singing beautifully while skillfully balancing between towering reeds bordering one of the Strathroy lagoons. It was a sunny and cool evening.

Novel sightings included a Clay-colored Sparrow I saw the morning of the 13th in the Napier Rd. and Winter Dr. area of Strathroy, and an Acadian Flycatcher on the evening of the same day, at Mystery Falls Trail in North Middlesex.

As the spring migration slows down, and having seen 191 species out of 227 already reported in Middlesex, I was enthusiastically looking for Mourning, Golden-winged and Kirtland’s warblers, or the Red-breasted Merganser, which I was not fortunate to find. My wish was that they had stayed a little longer in the area. I am still hopeful to see Dickcissel, Tufted Titmouse, Fox Sparrow, and others, this year.

I have taken my husband, children and grandchildren as well as friends, on short birding excursions, and continue to encourage others to appreciate the beauty of birds and to take better care of the environment.

The Labatt Ospreys
John Berry

For several years I have been monitoring the osprey nest located on a light standard at Labatt Park. It is possible to do this through a scope from my window, about 300 metres away. Some Nature London members may recall that several years ago, in the fall, city workers destroyed this nest and erected a platform on a much shorter pole nearly, hoping the osprey family would relocate. The ospreys returned the following March and I watched as they landed at the light standard and discovered that their home was gone. Within an hour or so, the male began bringing sticks from nearby which the female started inspecting and arranging on the light standard. Within a couple of days they had a rebuilt nest! Since then it has of course grown and is now bigger and better than ever. The city’s platform has never been used, except one year by a goose.

Each spring the ospreys return from their southern migration on cue, within a day of March 23. They arrive separately but just a few hours apart. How do they do this? I have a calendar, but they don’t!

This year they have raised two young. The chicks are difficult to see at first but by June they are peeping out of the nest. Here is a photo of the parents with one of the youngsters, taken on June 17. One of the adults is always around the nest, keeping watch for crows, hawks or the occasional eagle that they would see as a threat. The other one is often away fishing, presumably at the nearby coves, and brings back food to the nest on a regular basis.

Watching all that goes into raising an osprey family is a real delight!

Osprey Watch
Kate and David Kirkpatrick

So far we have visited the nests on Gainsborough, Labatt Park and Dakota. In each nest there was activity. I believe there was a lot of “cooking” going on! What spectacular birds! Important Note: we had a very nasty situation at the Dakota nest with an extremely unstable woman with aggressive dogs. I do not recommend anyone going there.
Introducing London’s largest colony of Bank Swallows
Brendon Samuels & Leanne Grieves

When North American migratory birds return to their breeding grounds in Canada each spring, what they expect to find when they get here is informed by their individual experiences. In this respect, birds are a bit like humans: they recognize the places they know as home. For instance, if you think back in your own life, you can probably recall a place that holds personal meaning for you. Perhaps it is the street you grew up on, the faces of people in your community or your favourite meal at a local restaurant. The sights, sounds and smells of “home” are irrevocably part of your identity.

For migratory birds, memories of places are critical for survival. It makes sense for animals that migrate across whole oceans and continents, that have evolved specialized diets and that live in large, complex communities to remember the places they have been. Indeed, research has shown that many bird species have extraordinary spatial memory. Today, birds’ memories are increasingly at odds with the bleak reality they face: places they once knew as home are disappearing at an alarming rate. For some species with specific habitat needs, there are simply no other places to go.

The Byron gravel pit, located on Byron Baseline Road in London Ontario, contains the largest reported colony of Bank Swallows in the area with almost 2,000 individuals. The authors visited the site on June 9, 2020 and counted Bank Swallow nest burrows using both binoculars and by photographing the entire length of the east and west cliff faces where burrows were visible. These photos were then stitched into a panorama view and burrows were counted digitally. We counted 1783 burrows using binoculars and 1913 using the more accurate digital count.

According to Ontario’s Bank Swallow Recovery Strategy, Bank Swallows breed across the entire province, but most nests occur in southern Ontario. Large colonies (i.e., 1000 or more pairs) can be found along the shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario and the Saugeen River, where the species’ preferred nesting habitat still exists. The province’s Bank Swallow population has shown an annual decline of 6.2% since 1970 and 4.8% since 2002. The total population size in Ontario is estimated as 409,000 individuals.

Apart from the size of the Byron pit colony, its location is not unusual for the area. Local knowledge indicates that Bank Swallows have been present in large numbers for quite some time, with nearby sightings reported on eBird as far back as 1956. In 2017, 100 individuals were reported foraging along the Thames River at Springbank Park. While some evidence suggests that Bank Swallows may nest within Springbank Park, one report from June 2016 describes a Bank Swallow at the park carrying nesting material and flying in a southwest direction. The Ontario Bank Swallow Recovery Strategy lists foraging habitat as any open terrestrial or aquatic habitats within 1000 m of a colony that have been used by Bank Swallows during a breeding season at least once in the last three years. The Byron pit colony is located about 875 meters south of Springbank Park, suggesting that the park provides important foraging habitat for the Byron pit colony.

The decline of Bank Swallows is attributed to widespread habitat loss. Today, over half of Ontario’s remaining population nests in artificial banks such as those found in aggregate pits. The Ontario Bank Swallow Recovery Strategy acknowledges that aggregate pit habitat is important for the continued breeding success of the species. Even so, protections for critical habitat in aggregate pits are complicated and subject to conflicting regulations under different provincial ministries, as we will discuss later.

Under ordinary circumstances, the discovery of such large numbers of a bird Species at Risk would be a cause for celebration. But here in London, where development historically led to the killing of Bank Swallows and elimination of their habitat, the future of this colony is uncertain. Below, we summarize the findings of our research into what we believe is a priceless natural heritage feature for London and an irreplaceable source of breeding habitat for the region’s threatened Bank Swallows.
The Byron gravel pit is located at the site of a large mineral aggregate deposit nestled within a deltaic geological formation – a once flat area at the mouth of an ancient river system where sediment was deposited and distributed by the flow of water. With depths of up to 65 metres (213 feet) of unconsolidated sand and gravel, this is a rare feature in southern Ontario.

The gravel pits first came into operation in the 1940’s. At peak production, the site provided 50-60% of the aggregate used by the City of London. According to a study of the area from 1992, over 1,636,000 tonnes of aggregate were extracted from the site in 1988 alone! While extraction activities at the site began winding down in the 1990s, many of London’s roads and buildings in operation today were built using aggregates extracted from the Byron gravel pit.

Today, the site features a large limestone quarry largely surrounded by wetland plants such as willows and cattails. The quarry is filled with the songs of breeding green frogs and birds such as Mallard, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher, Red-winged Blackbird and Yellow Warbler. The northwest side of the site features a riparian corridor winding from the west towards the quarry, from which Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Northern Flicker, Northern Cardinal, Gray Catbird, Blue Jay and Black-capped Chickadee can be heard, as well as a sloping grassy meadow filled with native and introduced European wildflowers that support a variety of native bees and butterflies, including Red Admiral, Viceroy, skippers and crescents. Meadow-breeding birds include American Goldfinch, American Robin, Song Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow. To the south of the quarry is the old extraction site, a deep valley that drains into the quarry and features ephemeral pools filled with tadpoles, bordered on the east and west sides of the pit by steep cliff embankments. Turkey Vultures soar overhead while breeding Red-tailed Hawks call to one another atop the cliff. Wild Turkey roam across the valley and even climb the cliff faces. Tree Swallows and a dazzling number of Bank Swallows forage all day long over the grassy meadow and the quarry. The site, now on private land, is truly an urban wildlife refuge.

In recent years there have been discussions about plans to develop the area, now split into multiple parcels of land. In 2016, the Terms of Reference for a secondary plan of the site called for an overall review of Species at Risk (section 5.1). In fact, the existence of Bank Swallows at the site was documented in 2018 by an environmental consultant, AWS Environmental Consulting Limited, contracted by the City of London and Harrington McAvan Limited to assess the site as part of a Subject Lands Status Report. According to the report presented by AWS in June 2019, “Bank Swallows have been confirmed within the Study Lands, with a large nesting colony (70-75 burrows) within the steep east facing slope of the southwest Study Lands corner.” If this assessment was accurate, it seems to us that the colony somehow increased in size by twenty-fold over the following two breeding seasons!

The report included the following recommendation, “Consultation with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to ensure protection of the species and their habitat in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, 2007 … prior to any site alterations for the rehabilitation of the pit.” To the best of our knowledge as members of the City’s Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee who reviewed this file, the consultation with MECP never occurred. In 2019 the City of London published a draft secondary plan providing an overview of the proposed development to convert the Byron gravel pit.
site into a residential community with an outdoor recreation area. Three land-use concepts from the secondary plan can be viewed here. At the time of this writing in July 2020, the site is still in pre-development phase. Although much speculation has surrounded the future of the site, development plans are not yet approved. An updated secondary plan for the Byron gravel pit is expected to be reviewed by the City later this year.

At the time of this writing in mid-July, the Bank Swallows are nearing the end of their breeding cycle. This year’s fledglings have left their nests and will soon be departing the area to begin their fall migration. Whether these birds will have a home in London to return to breed in again next year is unclear.

**What happens next?**

In response to inquiries from media spurred by the petition, the City (via the Parks Planning and Operations division of the Parks and Recreation Department) indicated that it will undertake efforts to mitigate the risk of harm to the colony of nearly 2,000 Bank Swallows by “incorporating an alternative site for the animals within the secondary plan for the area.” A statement released by the Mayor indicated, “as part of the secondary plan review, the City is looking at opportunities to recreate the natural habitat in future open space and recreational lands.”

Unfortunately, creating new artificial habitat for Bank Swallows is not so simple. According to the Ontario Bank Swallow Recovery Strategy, section 1.4, “In Ontario, very limited or no success has been achieved with [artificial] nesting structures.” Despite the statement from the City of London, to the best of our knowledge no government or conservation group anywhere has ever successfully provided compensation for Bank Swallow habitat that could accommodate a breeding colony of 2,000 birds. Bank Swallows have specific habitat needs and will breed successfully at sites that meet specific criteria (see the MNRF habitat description for more details).

We consulted an environmental lawyer to find out what laws exist to protect Bank Swallow habitat in aggregate pits. At the federal level, because the Byron gravel pit is located on private land, the Bank Swallow colony is not subject to enforcement of Canada’s Species at Risk Act (SARA). The federal Migratory Bird Convention Act (MBCA) does technically apply to Bank Swallows and their habitat, but offers weaker prohibitions than the SARA and provincial regulations, and we could not find much precedent for its enforcement in an aggregate context. At the provincial level, aggregate pits in Ontario are regulated by the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF). The ARA is a powerful piece of legislation that usually trumps other laws. Lastly and most pertinent to our case, bird Species at Risk and their habitat are protected under Ontario’s Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Before development at the Byron gravel pit site can proceed, certain steps under the ARA must be completed, namely that the aggregate license holder – the company with authorization to extract aggregate – must rehabilitate the site to a level comparable to its former topography. What this means, in practice, is that many tonnes of fill must be brought into the site from elsewhere and standing artificial cliff faces

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**London’s Bank Swallows are at risk**

In June 2020 a group of concerned citizens, including the authors, made several visits to the Byron gravel pit site after receiving reports from residents in the area who observed large equipment operating within 50 meters of the southernmost portion of the cliff face occupied by the Bank Swallows. We immediately contacted the City of London’s parks planning office to request a status update about the development and to reach out to the landowner. However, we did not receive a reply from City staff for several days – after we had circulated a petition, launched a social media campaign, spoke to the media and escalated the matter to provincial and federal authorities. In the petition, we urged the developer to pause activities at the site while the Bank Swallows completed their breeding, or to move activities further from the colony. The petition has collected over 17,000 signatures to date.

During a visit to the site on the afternoon of June 26, 2020, we observed dump trucks and heavy machinery continuing to operate within 50 meters of the southern portion of the colony, as captured in the photo above. It is our understanding that the MECP has contacted the company contracted to deliver fill to the site, the aggregate license holder overseeing rehabilitation of the pit and the landowners. The nature of those discussions is not known to us, but we trust that all parties have been reminded of their responsibilities under the law.
such as those used by the Bank Swallows must be levelled. After rehabilitation is complete, only then may the aggregate license holder surrender their license to the MNRF. The landowners and City may then proceed to design and implement plans for development.

What happens to the ARA rehabilitation requirement if there are species present that are protected under the ESA, such as Bank Swallows? As it turns out, this is not a straightforward question to answer since the ESA is enforced under a separate ministry, the MECP, from the ARA (under MNRF). Ontario’s policy for rehabilitation of aggregate pits includes the following guiding principle: “While the regulations, through the Aggregate Resources of Ontario Provincial Standards, sets out minimum rehabilitation standards, it may be appropriate to enhance or vary these requirements on a site-specific basis to attain higher quality rehabilitation to meet objectives such as: ... d) encouraging biodiversity...”. Under its rehabilitation standards, the policy reads: “there may be opportunities to encourage proponents to have regard for biodiversity values. Consideration should be given to the aesthetic suitability and compatibility with the surrounding landscape.”

The ESA’s main prohibitions against killing Bank Swallows and destroying their habitat are contained in sections 9 and 10 respectively. On their face, sections 9 and 10 would prohibit an aggregate pit operator from killing Bank Swallows or destroying nests as a result of activities including rehabilitation and/or development. However, there is an exception to these two prohibitions for pits and quarries in section 23.14(3)(b) of the ESA which applies if the pit began operations (i) before Bank Swallows were listed on the Species at Risk in Ontario List, (ii) before Bank Swallows appeared at the location of the pit, or (iii) after Bank Swallows were listed so long as the criteria under section 23.14(3)(b)(iii) are met.

Bank Swallows were listed as a Species at Risk on June 27, 2014. Therefore, the species falls within section 23.14(3)(b)(iii) of the ESA. Because the Byron gravel pit began operating many years before 2014, it seems to us that the exception to the ESA prohibitions for pits and quarries applies in this case. To summarize: the Byron gravel pit began operations before Bank Swallows were listed as a Species at Risk, so an exception applies to the ESA prohibitions on killing the birds, or destroying the nests in the Byron gravel pit. Unless we can confirm otherwise, it is our understanding that the aggregate license holder is free to destroy the colony while the Bank Swallows are not actively nesting. London’s Bank Swallows may soon not have a home to return to.

We believe the existence of this colony presents a unique opportunity for the Byron and London communities that could actually benefit the site owner. The cliff face frequented by Bank Swallows could become a key feature of the development planned for the Byron pit site: a place where Londoners and tourists will have a unique opportunity to experience, enjoy and learn about this charismatic threatened species. We also envision an opportunity to restore the base of the gravel pit into a wetland that supports indigenous plants and animals, including the swallows, that were historically present at the site. We believe our recommendations align with the developer’s stated intention to create a passive outdoor recreation area offering public access to green space.

For our part, we will continue to pursue discussions with the appropriate provincial ministry offices about protecting the Byron gravel pit Bank Swallow colony. We hope that the City of London, as part of its upcoming review of a secondary plan for the site, will consider our proposal to retain the colony and to leave a portion of the site naturalized in recognition of its natural heritage value.
Summer is a Great Time to Observe Grassland Bird Species

Paul Nicholson

I observed a pair that were variously flying, perching on fenceposts, and settling into the grasses. Unlike most sandpipers that need to be near a body of water, grassland is the preferred habitat for Upland Sandpipers. At 30 cm in length, it is a surprisingly large bird. Its pointy wings might even bring to mind a Kestrel, however the long beak, the plummage, and larger size are useful identification clues.

Eastern Meadowlarks have also been plentiful at this location. Again, keep an eye on the fenceposts. You may well hear their sweet call from the grass before you see these birds. When they do take flight, note the fluttery wingbeats and flashes of white on either side of the tail. I will always drive a few kilometres further west on Winter Dr. In 2016, Dickcissels and Grasshopper Sparrows were seen just past Napier Rd.

After birding along Winter, nip south on Napier. Jog left back onto Calvert then south onto McArthur Rd. The fields along the first three of four kilometres of McArthur can be productive, depending on whether or not grasses have been harvested. In early July, on the east side of the road I had Bobolinks and more Savannah Sparrows. Again, your ears can help you here. With your windows down, listen for the wheedle-wheedle-wheedle of the Bobolinks as they cavort about the fields. Photographers will find that Bobolinks are better posers than Meadowlarks.

A Brown Thrasher was flitting around in the scrub along McArthur. Watch and listen as well for Eastern Kingbirds, Horned Larks, and of course Killdeers.

To complete the little loop, you can head north on McArthur, then right on Calvert. Retrace your steps back to London, or head off from here to your next destination. The Strathroy lagoons, for example, are on Pike Rd. that runs north off Melbourne Rd.

It makes sense to check your eBird alerts or to search current eBird postings before heading out, and you can brush up on grassland birds’ vocalizations on allaboutbirds.org or xenocanto.org.

In the comprehensive 2019 State of Canada’s Birds report published by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, grassland birds were characterized as a group in rapid decline and in need of urgent conservation action. Habitat loss has been a particular threat. Generally, we have witnessed a 57% decline in populations of these birds (300 million birds) since 1970. To read the report go to stateofcanadasbirds.org.

Just because spring migration is now a COVID-tinged memory and fall migration is still ahead of us, we shouldn't toss our binoculars into the trunk and ignore them. Most avid birders know the joys of doing a deep dive and paying closer attention to our nesting species. Among these in Middlesex County is a good range of grassland birds.

You can have success north, south, or east of London, but fields to the west of the city have proven to be particularly good this summer. The roads south-west of Strathroy have yielded some nice highlights, including Dickcissels in the Winter Dr. and Kerwood Rd. area.

Here is how a little birding loop might look. Heading south-west on Melbourne Rd. beyond Strathroy, watch the telephone wires for Eastern Bluebirds before the road veers south-east. After turning right off Melbourne Rd. at the Cairngorm crossroads, take Calvert Dr. 7 km then turn right onto Winter Rd. It's here that you might have the best success. As ever, your ears will be helpful in locating a variety of species.

Dickcissels were seen and heard on the north side of this road in June.

Listen here for the busy call of the Savannah Sparrows as well. Their vocalization and a small yellow line by each eye set them apart from Song Sparrows. These birds should be easy to spot on the fencing and fenceposts as well as the wires. They are photogenic as well.

Certainly scan the fenceposts here for Upland Sandpipers. These birds can be vocal, so listen for their unique call. In July,
CEDARCROFT LAWNMOWER STORY

Evelyn Rogers

While out at Cedarcroft cutting the grass, along came Dave Daugharty who decided he would take a picture of me and my husband, Wayne, with my new lawnmower. Since silly me told Dave a few stories about our old lawnmower that I used out here, he thought it would be a good idea to tell some of them to you. Something a little different than always talking about COVID-19.

About five years ago I was hiking with Barb Kaiser and Daisy McCallum and they kept talking about needing to find someone who would cut the grass out at Cedarcroft. Little did they know that they were talking to a person who likes to cut grass! So, we met at Cedarcroft to check out this old, and I mean old, lawnmower. They did not know the last time it was used and whether it would work. This mower used a gas and oil mix, so that is one hint as to its age. It had no safety features, like a release bar to automatically shut the mower down if you let go of the handle, or a rubber safeguard to stop the twigs from being thrown out the back of the mower. I bought soccer shin guards to protect my legs, safety glasses and ear protection.

With fingers crossed and a little prayer I tried to start it with Barb, Daisy and Wayne all cheering me on. After about the 10th pull you could hear it trying to start, just one more pull, I thought. Out jumped a mouse from somewhere in the machine. I jumped at least a foot in the air and squealed like a frightened child. The poor little mouse ran away terrified! When I finally landed, I looked up and there were Barb, Daisy and Wayne doubled over in laughter. After my heart started beating again, I couldn’t believe I squealed like that over a little mouse and I couldn’t stop laughing. After one more pull the mower started.

The mower did a great job cutting the grass. I knew I had to pull the cord 10 times. Also, if it stopped for any reason, I had to wait an hour before it would start again. I had lots of fun with that mower. I did my last cut with it in the fall of 2019. I went back to clean it up for the winter and what little gas was left in it was on the floor. I don’t know whether a hose gave out or if it was my little mouse back in there chewing on something, but I decided it was time to get another mower.

So here is a picture of my new mower, with all the safety features and it starts on one pull.

If you are thinking about visiting our little piece of paradise this summer, please follow the available public health advice, including physical distancing by keeping at least two metres from others, wearing a face covering when physical distancing is not possible, and washing or sanitizing hands regularly. We want everyone to stay safe and healthy.
Thames Talbot Land Trust Report

Dave Wake

Thames Talbot Land Trust (TTLT) is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2020. This article will give readers an overview of TTLT’s accomplishments in 2019, and an update on the progress of the Vision 20/20 Campaign.

2019 – The Year in Review

During 2019, three new properties were added to TTLT’s portfolio. Two of these are located in the Skunk’s Misery Natural Area, in Southwest Middlesex. Skunk’s Misery has been a priority area for TTLT for many years. A complex of high-quality upland forest, swamp and prairie, Skunk’s Misery is one of the largest and most significant forested blocks remaining in the Carolinian region of southwestern Ontario.

- The Bebensee Tract extension adds 75 acres to TTLT’s existing Bebensee Tract reserve, more than doubling its size.
- Sitler Woods is a 50-acre parcel of woodland, with mature trees and excellent songbird habitat.
- The first TTLT reserve in Oxford County is the 104-acre Mud Lake Nature Reserve, which came to TTLT as a most generous gift from Don and Ruth Bucknell (see The Cardinal, Autumn 2019).

The three properties above are all featured in the Vision 20/20 campaign, which is discussed later in this article.

On the restoration front, TTLT organized 16 workday events throughout the year at several properties, adding up to more than 600 volunteer hours. Species at risk projects took place at six properties, and removal of high-priority invasive species continued at 11 reserves. At the Bebensee Tract, restoration work was initiated to establish native savannah on two acres of fields formerly used for agriculture.

Inspired by the success of other land trusts, in 2019 TTLT launched its initial Passport to Nature program – Passport booklets promoted 13 free, nature-themed events. Most took place on land trust properties. The program was very successful, with 5000 booklets distributed, 140 participants, and $14,000 raised through sale of sponsorships. The 2020 edition of Passport to Nature is available at https://www.thamestalbotlandtrust.ca.

Also in 2019, TTLT’s schools program provided educational opportunities for more than 350 students from nine different schools. Among other activities, students helped with restoration work by planting native plants, pulling garlic mustard, and conducting inventories of vegetation plots.

At the end of 2019, TTLT said farewell to Suzanne McDonald Aziz, who retired after serving as the Trust’s Executive Director since 2011. During that time, Suzanne made significant contributions to the development of TTLT, with one highlight being the successful completion of the campaign for Hawk Cliff Woods. At $1.6 million, this was the largest campaign the Trust had undertaken in its history. We wish Suzanne the best in her well-deserved retirement.

Vision 20/20 Campaign

The Vision 20/20 Campaign was launched quietly in 2019 and is continuing this year. The campaign is focused on seven high-value conservation properties that are located across TTLT’s area of interest, including the three mentioned earlier in this article. Each property has its own unique attributes (geography, habitats, species) and, combined, they protect 32 at-risk species, 10 of which are not found on other TTLT holdings. Four of the properties have been, or will be donated to TTLT, while three have been purchased. For each new property, whether purchased or donated, TTLT sets aside funds for future management in an Endowment Fund, and income from that fund is used for long-term management. In addition, money raised through the Vision 20/20 Campaign will support the purchase of three properties, and replenish the Opportunities Fund, a fund that allows the Trust to move quickly to purchase significant properties as they become available. This campaign will also refresh the Jane Bowles Legacy fund, which supports staffing for property management.

The properties featured in this campaign were discussed in an article in the Summer 2019 issue of The Cardinal, and descriptions are available on the TTLT website. The following table provides an overview.

### Vision 20/20 Campaign - Properties

| Name                          | Municipality             | Size (Acres) | Category
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lusty Family Woods Extension</td>
<td>West Elgin</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Purchase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meadow Woods</td>
<td>West Elgin</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Donation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillies Family Wood</td>
<td>Southwest Middlesex</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Donation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bebensee Tract Extension</td>
<td>Southwest Middlesex</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitler Woods</td>
<td>Southwest Middlesex</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auzins Nature Sanctuary</td>
<td>Middlesex Centre and City of London</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Donation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud Lake Nature Reserve</td>
<td>South-West Oxford</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Donation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your support for the Vision 20/20 campaign will help TTLT to protect and restore the ecological health of the increasingly imperiled Carolinian region of southwestern Ontario. Nature London members have generously supported TTLT’s work in...
the past. Writing as an active member of both Nature London and Thames Talbot Land Trust, I encourage you to support the Vision 20/20 Campaign.

All donors who contribute $1,000 or more before December 31, 2020 will have the option of being recognized on property signage at each of the seven properties and on the TTLT website. In addition, there will be a donation matching program and draws for prizes. Please check for details at https://www.thamestalbotlandtrust.ca/vision2020_campaign.

The fundraising target for this campaign is $1,623,245. At time of writing, TTLT has already reached 55 percent of this objective. This means that an additional $722,000 is needed to wrap up the campaign by the end of 2020. This period of the COVID-19 pandemic is a challenging time to be raising funds. Yet, it is essential for TTLT to continue its work of creating a legacy of healthy landscapes. Please contribute as you are able, and help spread the word about this important campaign.

Dave Wake served as President of TTLT from 2016 to 2018. He is a long-time member of Nature London and serves as Nature London’s liaison to TTLT.

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Nature London Member Videos

Tom Reaume

A 3-minute video on the Stoney Creek Valley in London, Ontario, Canada on 21 May 2020, a warm spring day.
https://youtu.be/R9WwhQ_cvLU

This 6-minute video is about the flora and fauna (milkweed, mallards, great blue herons) found at a small wetland on 24 June 2020 in London, ON Canada.
https://youtu.be/CGdzEGCIduU

Tom is doing a series of one hundred one minute videos. Here are four of them:

1) Pond Mill
https://youtu.be/3MzP8xulOY
2) Mallards
https://youtu.be/vydh-z_35Wg
3) Swamp Milkweed
https://youtu.be/pclB8UwY0hU
4) Cottonwood
https://youtu.be/oUApmlF47g

Tim Carroll
Backyard Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4yyOoep7Qc&feature=youtu.be

Downy Woodpecker at work

Mike Channon

A few images of home construction.
Dear Cardinal,
Recently a female cardinal visited my safflower feeder in the morning. She would be eating, then suddenly stop and fan her tail out. She seemed “spaced out” during the fanning of the tail – she would sit quite still for a number of seconds and then resume eating. She repeated this behaviour a number of times, always ending the fanning with a fluffing of all her feathers. Two days in a row I observed her doing this but only in the morning. My windows face east so the morning sun hits the feeders and it was quite beautiful to see the sunlight streaming through her tail. I wondered if she was sunbathing. Any ideas?
Cardinal Fan

Dear Cardinal Fan,
Now here’s a question I can relate to! And I have to say that I have a Cardinal Fan-tail from time to time myself!

Yes, she was sunbathing. We Northern Cardinals like to sunbathe and lots of other birds do too. If the day is cool, sunbathing helps us to warm up, so we don’t have to eat quite so much to generate heat. Your cardinal was probably using that nice morning sun to warm up after a cool night. Fluffing afterwards gets every feather back in its place.

We have other reasons for sunbathing too. It can help us dry more quickly if we’ve been in a birdbath or a rain shower. Less water on board makes us a tiny bit faster and more maneuverable should a quick exit be called for. Sunlight can help to convert compounds in our preen oil to vitamin D, which I understand you humans need too. Most important, sunbathing can help us get rid of those pesky feather parasites. The heat can make the parasites move around, which makes it easier for us to catch and dispatch them while preening.

When your cardinal was sitting still, she may have fluffed some of her feathers to let the sun reach her skin. As for that “spaced out” look, on a cool morning sunbathing just plain feels good!

Waiting for an invitation,
The Cardinal

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Ferns as Food
Dear Cardinal,
This spring, I saw fiddleheads in the grocery store, and some people pick them in the wild. I know that fiddleheads are young ferns. What kind of fern are they? Are all ferns edible?
Fern Fan

Dear Fern Fan,
In my personal opinion, no ferns are edible! But you humans do eat some odd things, so here’s some advice.

The fiddleheads that most people pick, and that are sold in grocery stores around here, are the young, furled leaves of Ostrich Ferns. They are called fiddleheads because of their curled shape. It resembles the curled ornament, called a scroll, on the end of a fiddle or other stringed instrument.

Other fern species can be eaten, but it’s not recommended. They are usually small or bitter, and some species may be poisonous. If you want to try picking fiddleheads yourself, be sure you know what you’re looking for! And please pick only one fiddlehead per fern plant. Otherwise you will weaken the plant.

The Cardinal

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Ostrich Fern
Hugh Casbourn
News and Notes

The White-throated Sparrow Changes Its Tune

A 20-year research study spearheaded by Ken Otter out of the University of British Columbia and Scott Ramsay from Wilfrid Laurier University suggests that the White-throated Sparrow is singing a different song across Canada. The familiar three-note ending of “Oh sweet Canada, Canada, Canada” has switched to a two-note ending variant. The new song was first identified in British Columbia and then, from tracking over the next 20 years, was discovered to have arrived in Western Quebec by 2019. Usually, bird song variants are rare and localized and this was first thought to be the case with the White-throated Sparrow. However, the research shows that this song change moved across the country with unprecedented speed. The suspected cause of this quick transference is over-wintering locations being shared between White-throated populations from western and central Canada. In an interview, Ken Otter recognized the efforts of citizen scientists saying that the study could not have been done without the help of hundreds of naturalists who uploaded field recordings of birdsong to online databases such as eBird. For more information and an update on findings visit: https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/how-new-birdsong-went-viral-across-canada

City of London Budget, COVID-19 and Funding for Environmental Initiatives

A Staff Report outlining budget recommendations made in light of the financial impact of COVID-19 was submitted to the City of London Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee on June 23, 2020. Some of the recommendations for dollar amounts to be deferred from the budget will have an impact on several environmental initiatives. These initiatives include: capital projects related to enhancing woodland management planning and woodland features, implementation of a proposed Bike Share Program, tree planting through the Urban Forestry Strategy and efforts designed to manage the Emerald Ash Borer. There is particular concern about the budget not advancing the creation of woodland management plans since this area is already sadly lacking. Additional costs and cost-saving measures resulting from COVID-19 for the Upper Thames River, Kettle Creek and Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authorities are also detailed in the report. To view the full report visit: https://pub-london.escibemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=73213

Update on Protecting Nesting Piping Plovers at Sauble Beach

The town of South Bruce Peninsula is once again pursuing the ability to mechanically groom the Sauble Beach terrain to enhance tourism. In October 2019, the town was convicted of failing to protect the endangered Piping Plover population by raking the beach. A judge involved in the ruling stated that the town had demonstrated “wanton disregard” for the birds’ habitat. The town is now seeking a permit through the Ford government revisions to the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The revised ESA allows for permits to be granted “for activities to achieve an overall benefit to the species.” The proposal by South Bruce Peninsula is listed on the Environmental Registry of Ontario and is now in the hands of Environment Minister Jeff Yurek for a determination. In its previous actions, the town has proven to be willing to jeopardize the endangered plover in order to groom the beach for visitors. In the permit request, the town promises...
to not rake within 30 feet of the historical dune used by the plovers, a standard it violated before. The town also promises to remove non-hazardous materials by hand “whenever possible.” Given the track record of the town of South Bruce Peninsula in regard to protecting the Piping Plover, this permit request is very concerning. Additionally, if approved, a precedent is set for the use of this ESA permit clause to circumvent the optimal protection of endangered species in Ontario. Unfortunately, in a response given to the Toronto Star’s Queen’s Park Briefing staff by Jeff Yurek’s office, it seems that Minister Yurek is supportive of the town’s request for a permit. To read more on this issue visit https://ontarionature.org/news-release/minister-faces-key-decision-on-conserving-endangered-species-environmentalists-say/

The Summer of Comet NEOWISE

Comet NEOWISE photo taken at 11 PM on July 19 at Dyers Bay
- John Berry -

Hopefully, many Nature London members have had the opportunity to view C/2020 F3, otherwise known as Comet NEOWISE, on its astronomical journey. The comet was discovered on March 27, 2020 using the NEOWISE space telescope, hence the name. By July, the comet had brightened and become visible to the naked eye, tail and all. In early July, NEOWISE could be seen pre-dawn near the northeast horizon and by mid-July, viewing of NEOWISE had shifted to sunset and the northwest horizon. The comet is recognized as one of the brightest and most visible to the northern hemisphere since 1997’s Hale-Bopp Comet. Warm, clear summer evenings (and mornings!) are ideal for star-gazing and we’ve been fortunate to have Comet NEOWISE to add positive excitement to a somewhat trying 2020.

Nature Conservation and COVID-19 Recovery

Nature Canada is spearheading a campaign to urge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the federal government to make nature conservation a central platform of its planning for COVID-19 recovery. Over 200 organizations representing millions of concerned citizens across Canada have signed a joint letter to the Prime Minister reinforcing a message of prioritizing conservation. For more information on this campaign and to view the letter and suggestions for writing your own letter visit; https://naturecanada.ca/a-green-recovery/?fbclid=IwAR3nz1uxeX6QgFDXAVFkYH183SZ3dVZM6WA-QoTTCIFoZQ1VQLQ4spg7Uo

The Government of Ontario, the Environmental Assessment Act, and Omnibus Bill 197

The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) is concerned about recent actions undertaken by the Government of Ontario to reduce requirements previously enacted through the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA). CELA is also worried about the recently introduced omnibus Bill 197, the government’s proposed post-COVID economic recovery legislation.

On July 1, 2020, Ontario exempted forestry activities from the requirements of the EAA. CELA feels that this will have negative impacts on Ontario’s forests, the Indigenous people who are in proximity to the forests and, given the environmental importance of a healthy forest ecology, to all Ontarians.

On July 8, 2020, the government tabled Ontario Bill 197, The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. This is an omnibus bill affecting several other pieces of legislation, many of which directly affect the health of communities and the environment. There is concern that Bill 197 falls very short in meeting the worldwide calls for green and just recovery planning by governments. As expressed by CELA, “Instead, the bill includes a smorgasbord of environmental deregulation. In particular, the bill removes numerous safeguards to ensure procedural fairness for involvement in environmental decisions that affect the public. Visit https://cela.ca/ for more information on these issues.

Nature London Program Update

Due to the ongoing severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty as to when the requirements for social distancing can be relaxed, please be advised that Nature London activities previously scheduled for 2020 are cancelled for the time being. This includes Birding Wing meetings and Field Trips. Sadly, the Nature London Awards Banquet usually scheduled for November has also been cancelled. See the information below for more details on this decision and alternative planning for a virtual event. There is also an update from the Indoor Meetings Committee.

To watch for additional updates, please check the Nature London website (www.naturelondon.com) periodically and sign up to receive Nature London’s News & Events e-Newsletters (“Nature London” info@naturelondon.ca) if you haven’t done so already.
Nature London Line: 519 457 4593

Call Nature London’s Information Line day or night to hear a taped message, updated weekly, about nature sightings and the status of planning for Nature London trips and meetings. However, at the moment, most Nature London events have been cancelled due to COVID-19. The club has hosted a couple of virtual presentations.

You may call to report your unusual nature sightings that might be of interest to others. You can leave a message without listening to the entire recording.

Please note: Nature London vehemently recommends that everyone accessing the Nature Line be aware of and act in accordance with local and provincial health and safety guidelines related to COVID-19.

We apologize for any inconvenience, but this is a situation where better safe than sorry certainly applies.

Thank you all for your continued understanding.

2020 Nature London Awards Banquet

Nature London’s annual Awards Banquet is a much-anticipated event for many club members. However, given the current COVID-19 restrictions and precautions in place, it was the consensus of both the board and the Awards Committee that a traditional “in-person” banquet is not a viable option in 2020. As such, you will not find an order for banquet tickets among the options with your membership renewal this summer.

Nevertheless, there remain many individuals and organizations whose conservation efforts continue to be worthy of timely recognition. As well, there remains a strong desire to continue to provide members with access to speakers on a wide range of natural history topics even while we cannot meet in person.

As such, efforts are underway to organize an online “banquet” featuring both an engaging speaker and an awards component. Please check the Nature London website, the Nature London News & Events e-Newsletter, and social media in September for further updates.

A Note about Nature in the City 2021

As is the case with many things, Nature in the City 2021 is also in COVID-19 limbo. Prior to the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic, the Nature in the City Committee was in the midst of planning a crackerjack 15th season of the series. Future decisions about planning for Nature in the City 2021 will reflect local and provincial public health guidelines and recommendations. Since the program is co-sponsored with the London Public Library and is held at the Wolf Performance Hall, moving forward will also be contingent on venue availability and limitations. Please stay tuned to Nature London information outlets – website, Facebook page and Nature London News & Events e-Newsletter – for updates on the status of Nature in the City 2021.

Items for Sale through Nature London

New Items for Sale
The sale of new books and guides through Nature London is currently suspended pending developments with COVID-19 restrictions.

Used Nature Books for Sale from Nature London
Sales of used nature books at meetings are also suspended and will start again when Nature London meetings are able to recommence. However, until then, it is possible to arrange for donations or purchases of used books. If you have an inquiry regarding used items, contact Betsy Baldwin at 519 471 4450 or bookdonations@naturelondon.ca
Also of Interest to Naturalists

Many community events that take place from September to early December are usually listed in the Summer edition of The Cardinal. However, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations are cancelling or postponing their annual and stand-alone events.

The good news is that several organizations have super websites with interactive features and additional virtual content. Listed below are a few ideas to get folks started on exploring nature from the comforts of home. There are also many family-friendly activities and media available on these sites. The diverse information posted could very likely enrich future experiences wandering in the lovely outdoors! In no particular order...

Parks Canada
Going Wild at Home:

Ontario Parks
Blog:
https://www.ontarioparks.com/parksblog/loon/#more-16414

Birds Canada
The Roost:
https://www.birdscanada.org/the-roost/

Ontario Nature
https://ontarionature.org/

Thames Talbot Land Trust
Passport to Nature:
https://www.thamestalbotlandtrust.ca/passport_to_nature

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Photos and Videos:
http://thamesriver.on.ca/videos-and-photos/

Nature Canada
Enjoy Nature:
https://naturecanada.ca/enjoy-nature/

The Canadian Museum of Nature
Activities:
https://nature.ca/en/explore-nature/blogs-videos-more
You Tube Videos:
https://www.youtube.com/user/canadanaturemuseum
Museum Blog
https://canadianmuseumofnature.wordpress.com/

And last, but definitely not least....
Nature London!
http://www.naturelondon.com/

where you’ll currently find the Spring and Summer as well as past editions of The Cardinal in colour, two PDF presentations on moths by Eric and Karen Auzins, a PDF posting of Jan Cami’s June 26th presentation “Astronomy in Isolation: Fun Stargazing Activities for Those Stuck at Home”, the Daily Humour comic, feature stories, and much more!

Some of these organizations, as well as others, have hosted free Webinars on a variety of nature-related and environmental topics. Keeping tuned-in to websites and other social media can promote awareness of these opportunities as they arise.

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list and some of these sites may be familiar, if you’re enduring a bout of cabin fever or staying indoors to beat the heat, consider searching these options and beyond to customize your virtual explorations of the natural world. Have fun!

Drove over to the Port Stanley lagoons in early May and happened to get this shot of a female sparrow in a bush by one of the lookout stands.
-Jim White-

Ask the Cardinal

The Cardinal is always keen to exercise his little grey birdbrain cells - or those of his human friends.

If you have questions you would like him to tackle, please give them to any member of The Cardinal Editorial Commitee by email or directly at a meeting or field trip.
Vignette from Nature London’s Past

Peters’ Swamp at Oxford and Wonderland once a Hotspot for Wild Orchids

By Winifred Wake, Co-archivist for Nature London

During the early 1890s, London members of the Botanical Section of the Entomological Society of Ontario were out scouring the countryside for sites where interesting plants grew. Peters’ Swamp was a well-known hotspot.

Around that time, the Samuel Peters farm occupied an area bounded by Oxford, Wonderland, Riverside and approximately Proudfoot Lane. Mud Creek flowed under Oxford Street near Proudfoot Lane, then southwesterly across the Peters farm, before passing beneath railway tracks that bisected the property on a high embankment. Immediately upstream from the tracks a broad area of swampy forest extended along both sides of Mud Creek.

Despite decades of past disturbance (e.g., railway construction, altered drainage, and farming operations that included land clearance and cultivation, and quite likely harvesting of wood and pasturing of livestock), in the 1890s Peters’ Swamp was still a very significant natural area.

By 1895, members of the Botanical Section had documented 13 species of native orchids at Peters’ Swamp, an area described as being only a few acres in size. Even at a time when wild orchids were not as rare as they are today, this was a very noteworthy assemblage. The list consisted of Grass-pink, Early Coral-root, White Adder’s-mouth, Rose Pogonia, Northern Green Orchid, Small Purple Fringed Orchid, two Ladies’ Tresses (Nodding and Shining), two Twayblades (Loesel’s and Heart-leaved), and three Lady’s-slippers (Small Yellow, Large Yellow and Showy).

Much has changed at Peters’ Swamp in the past 125 years. The topographical map of 1913 and an air photo from 1955 suggest a swamp forest was still present along that stretch of Mud Creek, though details are not available as to how extensively or frequently the woodland might have been cut over. The mid-1960s, however, was a time when the decline and demise of Peters’ Swamp moved rapidly ahead. A shopping mall was erected on the farm and a sanitary sewer line was installed in the creek valley. Other infrastructure and developments followed. In the decades since then, the remnants of Peters’ Swamp and its environs have become increasingly degraded, characterized by a proliferation of informal trails, invasive species such as Garlic Mustard and Common Buckthorn, and the widespread dumping of garbage. Recent vegetation studies found no evidence of the 13 orchid species that once thrived there. The only orchid present today is Helleborine, an invasive non-native species.

The City of London is currently undertaking major work along this stretch of the Mud Creek corridor. Issues of erosion, sedimentation, water quality, and flooding in the vicinity of Oxford Street and Proudfoot Lane are being addressed. The undertaking involves upgrading culverts, removal of trees from the valley and adjacent slopes, and the widening, deepening and realignment of the stream channel. Planned “enhancements” include planting of native trees, improved aquatic habitat and the construction of a multi-use recreational trail system.

Perhaps an interpretive sign could also be installed. It might help trail users visualize Peters’ Swamp as it once was, a lush natural oasis that provided homes for a diversity of native orchids, all since sacrificed on the altar of “progress”.

Grass-pink Orchid
-David Wake-
Pandemic Birding

Nick Bell

We did not do much birding in the spring as we had to quarantine after a trip. As we came to the end of quarantine the numbers were just too high for comfort so we stayed close to home walking locally. We did however find an eagles nest and were able to watch as they raised a youngster to the point of fledging. We also saw Kingfisher and a Phoebe, a Bluebird and a Yellow Bellied Sapsucker.

This shot however is more recent taken at Strathroy lagoons, two Eastern Kingbirds disputing a perch!!

Turn west from Carriage Rd (County Rd 15) onto Westminster Dr (12th side road). Watch for 10736 on the right before the road slopes to the river. All Members of Nature London Are Welcome. Please enter through the wire gate by the “Private Property No Trespassing” sign.

New Members

Heather Arseneault, Marc Arseneault
Leslie Baker & Robert McKinley, Abigail McKinley, Clare McKinley
Ted Prez
Jeanne Thomson, Karen Joyce

Welcome To Our New Members!
Rose Pogonia Orchid - David Wake-