



Thickson's Woods Land Trust

Spring 2016
Newsletter 49

Come Celebrate Spring in the Woods and Meadow!

An Enticing Birding Opportunity!! by Dennis Barry

Want to brush up on your birdsong skills and explore parts of Thickson's Woods not usually accessible to most visitors? Here's your chance!

This spring I'd be happy to sit down with you as we listen to sounds of the woods, migrants passing through, and resident songsters laying claim to breeding territories for a new season. Early in my birding career more experienced birders helped me by pointing out subtle differences in tone and cadence among a number of confusing species, and suggesting word associations to aid in recall. I always remember Winnifred McRae when I hear a magnolia warbler singing "Truly, truly I do."

Chipping sparrows, pine warblers, dark-eyed juncos and swamp sparrows all have songs with a somewhat similar sound and pattern. But with practice, it's possible to learn to tell one from the other. If you're a less experienced birder, you'll want to be able to distinguish among the songs of robins, rose-breasted grosbeaks and scarlet tanagers, or those of northern mockingbirds, brown thrashers and gray catbirds.

Habits and habitat help. A buzzy song from the top of a white pine is most likely to be a pine warbler. But on cool May mornings as the sun rises, juncos may also be singing from the treetops as they feed on midges. A similar song from the cattails in Corbett Creek Marsh is more likely to be a swamp sparrow.

Before you consider this educational opportunity, you'll want to know what my qualifications are to be offering to help you learn bird songs. For twenty-five years I conducted Forest Bird Monitoring surveys in our sugar bush near Minden. Since there is dense leaf cover in late spring, nearly every bird recorded was identified by song. At least once I forgot my binoculars as I left the farmhouse at 5:00 a.m., but that wasn't really a handicap.

I was Regional Coordinator in Haliburton for the first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, and part of the team for the second atlas. Margaret and I travelled to remote parts of the province conducting point counts and identifying birds, mostly by song.

If you'd like to spend some time learning bird songs in Thickson's Woods this spring, call me at **905-725-2116**, or email dbarry@interlinks.net and we'll arrange a mutually convenient time to get together.

Oh yes, there is one requirement. We're going to spend a little time sitting quietly in a garlic mustard patch listening to birds as we remove a few plants of this invasive intruder. I promise this will be no more physically challenging than you want it to be. Everyone can find a way to remove some plants without undue strain.

And you'll hold your breath when a singing male black-throated blue warbler appears beside you, picking midges from spiderwebs as it flits through the undergrowth.



Swamp Sparrow (Mike McEvoy).

Thickson's Woods Land Trust, Box 541 Whitby, Ontario L1N 5V3

Tel: (905) 725-2116. Email: nature@thicksonswoods.com. Web Site: www.thicksonswoods.com

Charitable Registration # 11926 3176 RR0001

COMING EVENTS

Saturday April 30

Garlic Mustard Hunt

Rain Date: Sunday May 1.

Meet at the entrance to the woods on the Waterfront Trail at 9:00 a.m. to help in the annual spring blitz against garlic mustard. The later date for this year's dig, combined with an earlier snow melt and ground thawing, should mean that next year's crop of this biennial plant will have sprouted, so that we can brush the tiny plants away easily with garden gloves to get a head start on next year's outbreak.

The later date should also mean you could be serenaded by white-throats, winter wrens, ruby-crowned kinglets and pine warblers while you work. Bring snacks, water, sturdy work gloves and whatever tools and equipment you favour for the task. I like to use a small round-mouthed shovel with a long handle so I can sit in one spot and reach under nearby shrubbery to uproot and retrieve scattered plants.

We're making good progress in this battle. We just have to be persistent and thorough, so we really need your sharp eyes and enthusiastic assistance.



Pine Warbler (Jim Richards).

Saturday June 11

Dog-strangling Vine Removal

Rain Date: Sunday June 12.

Meet at the gates to the meadow along Thickson Road at 8:00 a.m. We're starting early since the sun rises shortly after 5:00 a.m. on these longest days of the year, and it can get hot by mid-morning. **Bring water, snacks, sunscreen, a small, strong, sharpened round-mouthed spade, perhaps a lawn chair, and determination** to defeat this unwanted intruder.

Swallow-wort or dog-strangling vine is related to milkweed. However, monarch larvae hatched from any eggs laid on the plant aren't able to survive feeding on its leaves. So not only does the plant proliferate to choke out desirable native plants, resulting in a smelly, impenetrable monoculture, it's a hazard to the breeding success of monarchs already under stress in many other ways.

Saturday September 17

2016 Birds, Beavers & Butterflies Nature Festival

This year's festival is scheduled for **Saturday September 17 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.**

We're very excited to announce that two of the most popular attractions, missing last year, are expected to be back.

Amazing magician **Warren Toaze** will confound and astound one and all with his sleight of hand.

Geologist **Norbert Woerns** has moved from Richmond Hill to the tip of the Bruce Peninsula in Tobermory. Nevertheless, he's considering making the long trek south to share his extensive knowledge of rocks and minerals with all the budding rock hounds at this fall's festival.

Of course there will be many other exciting things to experience in the out-of-doors. We've put in a request for warm sunny weather for September 17, and we hope you'll all enter a similar plea.

The popular "Bat and Moth Nights" will continue this year, when weather allows. If you are interested in learning about the bats and moths of the reserve, or wish to get involved in our research, please contact Phill at hawkowl@bell.net.

IN MEMORIAM

Recent donations have been made in memory of these special people:

Alexander James Adams
William Robert Hambley
Ann Wray Hampson
Nan James
Shirley Johns
Winnifred McRae
Fern Munns
Kathleen Nickson
Jerry Tessler
Maisie Robertson
Marguerite Thomas
James Zlukosky



We join their families and friends in mourning their passing, and acknowledge their unique contribution to the rich web of life on planet earth. On our website we recognize all past donations made in memory of friends and loved ones.

News from the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund

by Phill Holder

Since the last Thicksen's Woods newsletter, we have continued to be busy. The **Birds, Beavers and Butterflies Nature Festival** was very successful, and our booth attracted many participants who wanted to get up close to the live bats on display. Experts **Toby Thorne** and **Nigel Parr** explained bat anatomy and how Vampire Bats do not live up to their frightening reputation. I was thrilled to see the reaction from visitors of all ages as Toby and Nigel held the bats and allowed people to touch the Jamaican Fruit Bats and feel the balloon-like texture of the wings. I think most visitors gained a better understanding of these fascinating creatures. Many thanks to **Chris Ketola** for loaning us his Jamaican Fruit Bats, Egyptian Fruit Bats and Common Vampire Bats.

At the other end of our booth we gave folks a glimpse into our moth research. We had captured moths the previous night and **Mike King, Mike McEvoy** and **Phil Reyanga** identified them and demonstrated how we use macro photography to record them before release. Kids especially were struck by the variation in shape, colour and size of these beautiful insects.

To our amazement, during 2015 we identified a total of 650 species of moths in the Thicksen's Woods Nature Reserve. Illustrated copies of the moth checklist are for sale through our website. A pdf version can be downloaded free of charge.

Bat research for 2015 concluded with a remarkable six of the eight Ontario species being recorded. A report will be published in our next Aquila Newsletter. Many thanks to **Jessica Kroes** for conducting the surveys.

We recently published a checklist of the Vascular Plants of Thicksen's Woods using data from the late **George Scott**, as well as **Doug Lockrey, Dennis Barry** and **James Kamstra**. The checklist will be updated as new plant species are discovered, but I thought it important to document known plants as a baseline from which to work.

The list unfortunately includes some invasive plant species that pose serious problems for the natural flora and fauna, not just of Thicksen's Woods but all of Ontario and in some cases Canada.

Not all foreign plants are invasive; most are benign or just a nuisance and do not pose a threat to native plants. However, within the Thicksen's Woods Reserve there are several problematic species: Garlic Mustard, Dog Strangling Vine, Japanese Knotweed, Manitoba Maple, Norway Maple, Common Buckthorn and Common Reed (Phragmites). **Dennis Barry** has been coordinating the battle against Garlic Mustard for years and more recently, helping find the best approach to control Dog Strangling Vine. Japanese Knotweed has also established a foothold. The Thicksen's Woods Board met recently to discuss controls for these species.

This wonderful reserve also has three plants considered as “species at risk:” Bitternut and Cucumber Tree, which are endangered, and Common Hoptree, which is threatened.

Illustrated copies of the checklist are for sale through our website. A downloadable pdf version is available free of charge.

This spring we will be sponsoring the Brooklin Home School Group, Roots & Wings, as they replant a section of the meadow into a pollinator garden. Last fall we staked an area southwest of the platform. Planning has been under way during the winter and a fund-raising event is scheduled for May 5. Contact me for details.

In 2016 we will continue documenting the biodiversity of the reserve by expanding research already under way. This year we hope to find out more about the mammals that live in Thickson’s Woods.

There is a list of mammals seen over time, but no formal studies have been undertaken. We’re especially interested in finding out what small rodents, shrews and moles are resident. These are usually nocturnal, hard to find and often hard to identify. We hope to be able to get a better understanding of their populations this year. If you have any small mammal sightings from Thickson’s Woods and vicinity, please let me know.

I would like to thank you all for your support since we started the biodiversity studies of Thickson’s Woods through the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund. I hope what we learn will make Thickson’s Woods a model to show the importance of saving urban areas for wildlife far into the future. We have already uncovered incredible biodiversity and have barely scratched the surface.

If you have a particular interest and would like to provide expertise, we would be thrilled to have you on board. Please contact me at hawkowl@bell.net and visit our website at www.mattholderfund.com

Eastern Chipmunk (*Mike McEvoy*)..



My Distinguished Detention

by Mary Lund

One evening when I was in high school, many years ago, my friend Peggy called to say “A White-Eyed Vireo has been seen in Victoria Park...let’s see if we can find it in the morning.” She lived right in London, while I lived on the outskirts; it would be easy for her to get there by 7:45 a.m., giving us time to look for the bird and still get to school by 9.00 a.m. For me, it meant catching a bus that left earlier than my usual 8:00 a.m. departure, but if there were any chance of seeing this rare bird, it was more than worth the effort.

We met at the park at 7:45 a.m., binoculars around our necks, and began looking and listening. We had both studied the bird book so that we would know all the identifying marks in case we had only a brief glimpse, and the song, in case we heard but could not see it. We looked a long time...and at last we spotted a small bird flitting about and singing high in a tree. It was our bird. It came down lower so that we both had a good look at it. We were over the moon with excitement.

Of course, we could not hurry away from such an exciting experience...we had to look at the bird again and again, and follow it as it moved to another tree, and then another. And so we were late for school. We had to go to the office and confront the quite stern and intimidating secretary, who viewed lateness for whatever reason as

a serious offense. We tried to explain: “But this is a very unusual bird in our area and we had such wonderful looks at it...and it was singing....we could not let this opportunity pass...we may never ever see one again.” We even showed her a picture of it in our Peterson guide. No luck. We were both given detentions.....which meant sitting for 45 minutes after school in the detention room with students who had offended in other, less understandable ways.

I had never had a detention before, being a quiet, well-behaved, rather serious girl. But this detention, rather than unnerving me or making me feel ashamed, gave me a glow of pride. I KNEW I was right in putting the sighting of an unusual bird high above punctuality in importance. Besides, I was still riding a cloud of satisfaction about seeing the White-Eyed Vireo. I have been proud of this little defiance ever since.

On another occasion, Peggy and I bicycled to Saunders’ Pond, a favourite London birding location, especially during warbler season. Again, it meant leaving home very early in the morning so that we would have time there before school. I suspect that we were overly optimistic about our chances of getting to school by 9:00 a.m....but in any case, soon after our arrival shortly after 7:00, we found ourselves in a “warbler wave,” a wonderful



Black-throated Blue Warbler (Jim Richards)

richness in numbers and species that has become very rare in my experience in more recent years. As we trained our binoculars on one beauty after another and flipped frantically through the bird book to identify the many that were new to us, we became more and more euphoric. Our birdwatching careers were just beginning, and we were in love with this new world of wonder, colour and song.

It was rather a shock, in a moment of relative stillness among our bird friends, to look at our watches and see that we would have to leave at once to even

have a chance of getting to school on time. There was no discussion. We simply looked at each other and knew we were in complete agreement that one could not possibly leave a warbler wave....and spent the rest of the morning in this warbler paradise.

We cycled back to Peggy's home in time for lunch, and described our predicament to her mother. How could we explain our absence from school to the dreaded secretary? Not that we would have minded another detention...

"Never mind, I will write a note for you," said her mother.

The note read: "Peggy and Mary were unavoidably detained outside the city." And she signed it. The secretary gave us a funny look when we handed it to her, but she accepted it.

I was surprised that Peggy's mother would write a note like that, and felt sure that MY mother would not have done so. Obviously, I believed literal honesty was of high value in my family.

I know differently now. My mother would have written an equally ambiguous note and taken a quiet pride in our values (though she might not have told me so at the time). And after all, the note was quite accurate.

Warbler Survey 2015

by Dennis Barry

For many years, **Margaret Bain** conducted a warbler survey on May mornings in Thickson's Woods. As part of the Matt Holder Fund's efforts to establish baseline data about the flora and fauna of Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve, Margaret and **Phill Holder** suggested that we resume May warbler counts in the woods. It sounded like fun, so I agreed to undertake the project for 2015.

I established a route within the reserve to be followed each time. The area was divided into sections, and birds seen or heard were recorded accordingly. Winds from one direction push insect food such as midges to the lee side of the woods and birds follow. On bright days with a north wind, birds will congregate early in the morning on the sunny south side of the woods, since it warms first. On cool cloudy days with a strong east wind, it's not unusual to find flocks of many hundreds of swallows hawking for insects low over the road on the west edge of the woods.

To help interpret the data, weather information was recorded for dusk the prior evening, midnight, dawn, the start of the count and the end. I also recorded sunset the day before, sunrise, moonrise and moonset, and the current moon phase.

I also noted the percentage of deciduous leaf cover in the canopy and the understory.

To make recording data simple, the various choices were preprinted, so the correct ones could be quickly circled.

Surveys were conducted as early as possible after sunrise. Each took a little more than an hour, depending on the number and variety of species present. Times with steady rain or strong winds were avoided. Species encountered at other times during the day and by other birders were included to ensure that information wasn't lost.

While one year's data isn't enough to reach any conclusions, there were some interesting insights.

After an unusually cold winter and somewhat late spring, weather was remarkably consistent during May, 2015. Only one day was rainy enough in early morning to delay the count. Winds were generally light to moderate, and skies were often clear. Very few days were foggy.

The first count was conducted on April 17 to evaluate the procedures and route. Two Yellow-rumped and one Pine Warbler were recorded.

It was May 2 before any other species appeared. New warbler species that day were Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Palm and Black-and-white, none of which were found during the formal count. My notes indicate there were lots of midges, so any bird making it to Thickson's Woods would have been well fed. Leaves in the canopy were just starting to open and understory shrubby leaves were 25% to 50% unfurled.

By May 5 there were a number of male Yellow Warblers racing about the meadow trying to establish



Blue-winged Warbler (Jim Richards)

territories. By May 6 thirteen were recorded, with a peak of thirty-two birds found on May 12.

On May 8 **Brandon McWalters** had an early Tennessee Warbler and **Dan Kaczynski** reported the first Orange-crowned, a species that showed up more often than usual last spring.

By May 10 warbler diversity had increased to 16 species, with an early Canada being a highlight.

On May 11 the number of warblers had increased to 19 species, and with leaf cover now more than 50% both in the canopy and understory, 110 warblers were recorded as unidentified. The 122 that were identified included 7 Cape Mays, 18 Bay-breasted, an Orange-crowned, and a Wilson's.

May 12 was the top warbler day of the spring with thirty species found in the reserve, of which **Glenn Coady** spotted twenty-nine. Highlights included Cerulean, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Connecticut and the first of an unprecedented number of Prairie Warblers that appeared last May. As is often the case with big fallout days at Thickson's, there had been heavy rain and strong winds around midnight. My notes indicate there was plenty of

song at dawn, with a mix of male and female warblers, and lots of birds along the lakefront. Winds were southerly overnight, but had shifted to west by 6:55 a.m. when the count began. Due to the large numbers of birds present, it took ninety minutes to complete the count. 261 warblers were counted, but many more were certainly missed.

By May 20 species diversity had begun to drop. By May 31 the only warblers present were the resident Yellow Warblers in the meadow, three Blackpolls and a couple of yearling male American Redstarts singing near the north edge of the woods vainly trying to attract mates.

It's almost time for the first warblers to appear in Thickson's Woods this spring. Revised tally sheets are being prepared. Sunrise and sunset charts are being printed. I'm interested to see when the full moon will be this May, and how it might affect migration. I hope you'll come join us for some counts this year. And don't forget to record your sightings in the binder in the green box along the south trail. You might be the lucky one to spot the first warbler of spring. **dbarry@interlinks.net 905-725-2116**

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

Many thanks to **Phill Holder** for producing the digital version of this newsletter, and to **Phill and all volunteers from the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund** for their ongoing research into the flora and fauna of the reserve.

Thank you to **Mary Lund** and **Anne Fox** for handling correspondence so capably.

Thanks, as well, to **Karin Fawthrop** for mailing the printed version of the newsletter.

Thanks to **Tom Crawford**, who makes sure the grass is mowed throughout the summer so the festival can happen in September.

Thank you to **the students and staff of Whitby Shores Public School** for their donation.

The activities of Thickson's Woods Land Trust are possible only because **so many of you** give of your time and resources so generously, donating items and volunteering time to make the Fall Nature Festival happen, helping out with control of invasive species, and supporting the Land Trust financially. Without your help none of this would be possible. **Thank you so much!! We really appreciate everything you do.**

Yes, I want to help protect Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve. It's a very special place!
We need spaces where plants and animals can thrive and people can relax in nature.

Here is my tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____ Date _____

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ Prov/State _____ Postal Code _____ Tel. _____

e-mail _____

Cheques can be payable to Thickson's Woods Land Trust.

Mail to: Box 541 Whitby, ON L1N 5V3 (Charitable Registration # 0674382-52-13)