



THE BULLETIN

January, 2004 No. 433

2003 - 2004 EXECUTIVE

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Events calendar

Botany Group	Date: Monday February 2 & March 1, 2004
Executive Meeting	Date: Tuesday February 10, 2004 Location: McConaghy Centre
Bird Group	Date: Wednesday February 11, 2004 Location: Muriel Farrant, 905-889-7156
General Meeting	Date: Thursday February 20, 2004 at 7:30pm Location: Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church hall 10066 Yonge Street

See Details on Page 2

WILD TURKEY - Meleagris gallopavo

The return of the wild turkey to the forest of America is one of the greatest scientific wildlife management success stories of the 20th century. Once numbering in the millions during pre-settlement days, wild turkeys were reduced to a mere 30,000 birds by the time of the great depression.

The cause of the birds' disappearance was habitat destruction and unregulated hunting. But, by mid-century wildlife biologists saw U.S. forests starting to re-grow and wild turkey habitat gradually returning.

Through trap-and-transplant programs conducted by wildlife agencies and private wildlife conservation groups, wild turkeys were relocated to their former ranges by the thousands.

Today, nearly 6 million wild turkeys once again roam North America, and their numbers are increasing. Some birds are even living in areas where they were never indigenous. Flocks can be found in every state except Alaska (including Hawaii!), as well as Canada and Mexico.

continued on p. 5...



The Bulletin is published 9 times per year, from September to May inclusive, by the *Richmond Hill Naturalists*, and is mailed free to members. The Bulletin is the official publication of the Richmond Hill Naturalists, a non-profit organization, the objectives of which are to stimulate public interest in natural history and to encourage the preservation of our natural areas.

Address Correspondence to: **Richmond Hill Naturalists, P.O. Box 32217, RPO Harding, Richmond Hill, On, L4C 9S3**

Deadlines: The editor encourages submissions from any member on any topic related to nature or conservation, and in particular, any issue that might be of interest or concern to members of this club. e-mail: lhelferty@sympatico.ca Deadlines are the first day of each month.

Bulletin Advertisers have been selected because of their relevance to member interests.

Members are encouraged to patronize our advertisers and please mention that you saw their ad in our Bulletin.

Change of Address: Any change of email or street address should be sent to Mike Turk who prints the envelopes for the Bulletin mailing. See the Executive List for contact information.

MEMBERSHIP IN RHN

The *Membership Application Form*, is available at each General Meeting from Mike Turk, or in our club brochure, available from any executive member listed (see page 1).

NEW MEMBERS

The family of Rod & Denise Potter
The family of Mike Gurski and
Barbara Anderson
Meet our new members at club events and say Hello!

RHN Events:

EVENTS FUTURE

Upcoming RHN General Meeting Speakers:

Thurs. February 19, 2004 – Steve Varga, MNR biologist and amazing field botanist, will show us the beauty of the Oak Ridges Moraine and what all the ‘fuss’ is about. RH Presbyterian Church. 7:30pm

Thurs. March 18, 2004 – Douglas Skeates, ‘retired’ MNR forester and CESO member, will give a travelogue of his many environmental activities around the world. Exciting! RH Presbyterian Church 7:30pm

Thurs. April 15, 2004 – Dr. Theo Hofmann, our bird records secretary and volunteer extraordinaire, will show us his wonderful trip to Spitzburgen, Norway and the birds he encountered. RH Presbyterian Church 6:00pm. AGM

- **Wednesday February 11, 2004.** The Bird Study Group meets at Theo's to discuss Merlin and Perigrine Falcon. 199 Arnold Avenue, Thornhill. 905-889-1554.

- **Monday, February 2, and Monday March 1, 2004.** 12.30 p.m. Botany Group meeting.

Get Ready for Spring! :

- **Saturday April 10, 2004.** 9am-5pm. Beamer Hawk Watch. Grimsby.
Call Ron Fleming (905) 898-7216 or email ronaldf-fleming@sympatico.ca

- **Saturday April 17, 2004.** 9am-2pm. Tiny Marsh, Midland, with Ron Fleming.
Call (905) 898-7216 or email ronaldf-fleming@sympatico.ca

Please note: Richmond Hill Naturalists welcomes anyone to volunteer as an outing leader. If you would like to volunteer or you have any ideas, please submit them to Martin Chen (905-709-0246, jmchentoronto@rogers.com).

GTA Events:

- **Sunday, February 15, 2004.** 2pm. Toronto Field Naturalists and North Toronto Green Community Lost River Walk : "The City and Garrison Tributaries". Leader Ian Wheal. (416) 593-2656 9-noon Friday. or info@ntgc.ca

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

A song for the times...

Dear friends,

I noticed that the song "BIG YELLOW TAXI" has been on the radio a lot recently. Here's the story.

Joni Mitchell, Canadian singer, had her first taste of success after leaving Saskatchewan. Once, when she went on vacation in Hawaii she found that there was much overbuilding and nearly unchecked development. There was a prolific amount of destruction of nature by the construction workers. The song "Big Yellow Taxi" was released shortly thereafter.

Might the "Big Yellow Taxi" be a yellow Caterpillar construction truck she saw in Hawaii?

Big Yellow Taxi (lyrics)



They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.
With a pink hotel, a boutique
and a swinging hot spot.
Don't it always seem to go?
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone,
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.

They took all the trees
And put them in a tree museum.
And they charged all the people
A dollar and a half to see 'em.
Don't it always seem to go?
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone.
They paved paradise
And they put up a parking lot.

Hey farmer farmer
Put away that D.D.T. now!
Give me spots on my apples
But leave me the birds and the bees,
Please!
Don't it always seem to go?
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone.
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.

Late last night
I heard the screen door slam.
And a big yellow taxi
Took away my old man.
Don't it always seem to go?
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone.
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.



The peak position of the song was #29 in 1970 and the live version was also a hit, peaking at #24 in 1975. It was also recorded by 'The Neighborhood' in 1970, Percy Faith in 1971, Bob Dylan in 1973, 'Monty Alexander Ivory & Steel' in 1988, 'Pinhead Gunpowder' in the 1990's, 'Lilac Time' in 1992, Marie Brennan and Amy Grant in 1994 (and remixed in 1995), as well as by 'The Counting Crows in 2001.

- Submitted by Martin Chen, RHN Field Trip Coordinator

[It is a classic narrative reminding us of the folly of our ways, and a fitting testament to the fact that the more things change the more they stay the same, as witnessed by the current predicament on the Oak Ridges Moraine, the

Trafalgar Moraine, the Red Hill Valley and other places all around the Greater Toronto Area (among others). -Ed.]
The Role of Bird Migration in the Spread of West Nile Virus in North America

The human cases of West Nile virus infection reported in 2003 for the USA & Canada show a conspicuous pattern: most of the reported cases in Canada have occurred east of the Rocky Mountains, and in the USA they have occurred west of the Mississippi River.

More than 85 percent of reported U.S. cases have occurred in a vertical column of 8 states: Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Montana. In Canada more than 90 percent of reported cases have been in the 3 prairie provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan, & Manitoba. The Rocky Mountains seem to be an important boundary for this year's human infections, if one contrasts the case reports in New Mexico with those in Arizona, Colorado versus Utah, and Montana and Wyoming versus Idaho.

The states and provinces with the most West Nile virus cases are on major migratory routes for birds traveling north into Canada and south into the South central US. Compared with human West Nile virus infections in earlier years, it appears that in 2003 the disease moved not merely west, but to a different set of migration routes. The role of migratory birds in West Nile virus transmission brings up some questions that have not yet been addressed adequately.

To what extent has the distribution of human West Nile virus cases been predictable or constrained by major bird migration "routes" and the timing of migrations in each year of cases?

Migratory species are likely to be involved in long-range transmission of West Nile virus. *Migratory routes and the timing of their use may be essential to study in addition to bird species* because any list of identified transmission species may long remain seriously incomplete and transmission may depend on the populations of certain mosquito species along migration routes at the "right" times.

Another question is what explains the 'shift' of West Nile virus cases from the eastern USA & Ontario to the states and provinces of the central plains in 2003?

If there is a link with bird migration routes and timetables, perhaps in conjunction with the size of local mosquito populations, can the shift to more western routes be related to specific climate patterns in 2003, such as daily temperature ranges and

averages, rainfall patterns, and the seasonal timing of weather? Droughts may concentrate mosquitoes and migratory birds at the same water sources, but whether the timing of weather conditions can bring birds and mosquitoes together may need a closer look.

Information relevant to these questions might be very helpful for states and provinces trying to prepare for next year's West Nile virus outbreak.

Richard W. Wilsnack, Ph.D., Department of Neuroscience
 University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences

- Submitted by Diana Piche

One more great reason for all you birders to continue with your observations. -Ed.

Take Simple Steps to Healthier Living

"EcoAction Teams" is an Ontario-wide program that can help to reduce your impact on the environment by promoting simple lifestyle changes. The 'EcoAction Teams' Activity Guides outline practical tips and actions in areas such as waste reduction, energy and water conservation and transportation. Whether you live in a rural area or an urban neighborhood, 'EcoAction Teams' strives to improve the health of your home and community. see: www.ecoactionteams.ca or call 416-599-1991 extension 106, or email info@ecoactionteams.ca.

'EcoAction Teams' is a program developed by Earth Day Canada (www.earthday.ca). It is a province-wide program that provides resources and support to help Canadians reduce their impact on the environment by promoting simple lifestyle changes. The initiative recognizes that community groups and individuals accomplish some of the most significant environmental work at the local level.



- Diana Piché

WILD TURKEY ...Continued from page 1

There are two species of turkeys in the world: the North American wild turkey and the Central American ocellated turkey. There are five sub-species of the North American wild turkey - eastern, osceola (Florida), Rio Grande, Merriam's, and Goulds - all ranging throughout different parts of the continent. The eastern wild turkey is the most common and largest in population of the five. Wild turkeys are easily identified in the field. Males, also known as 'gobblers' or 'toms', have a featherless head, and stand an impressive 40 inches (~1 metre) tall. Hens, known as 'jennys', stand about 30 inches (~75cm) tall and have a few smallish feathers on their bluish-grey head. Gobblers appear coal black at a distance, the hens not as dark. Up close both exhibit a metallic iridescence, their feathers in sunlight changing from bronze to hints of red, green, copper, and gold. An adult male eastern wild turkey may weigh 20 pounds (9kg) or more, hens usually average between 8-11 lbs (3.5-5.0kg).

Wild turkeys have several characteristics that distinguish them from other fowl, including a 'beard', made up of unusual feathers that resemble coarse black hairs, that grow from the upper breast of male turkeys and protrude up to 10 inches (25cm) on an old (3 years+) bird. Mature toms have a 'spur' on the back of each leg just above the foot that become extremely sharp and pointed, used for defense and fighting other males during breeding season. The head and neck of a tom has a piece of flesh about the width of a pencil, known as a 'snood', hanging a few inches from the top of the base of the bird's bill, below which a 'dewlap' connects the bottom of the base of the beak to the neck. Large red protuberances of skin, known as 'caruncles', hang from the base of the neck. During breeding season the tom can change the colour of his head and neck to various shades of red, white, and blue.

Wild turkeys are a bird of the forest, are non-migratory, and are best seen in winter and early spring when cover is at a minimum. Often the first thing a birder sees of a tom in the spring is the gobblers white head. Large flocks of several hundred birds may sometimes gather together in winter, but in the spring break into smaller feeding groups consisting of a male and several hens. Wild turkeys are usually never far from trees, relying on the woods for food, roosting, and escape from predators. They feed on a variety of food, 90% being plant material (the other 10% being small animals such as snails, salamanders etc).

Wild turkeys make a variety of calls, the most easily recognisable being the 'gobble' of the male, when he sounds off from ridgetops and fields during the spring. Gobblers may be heard up to half a mile (800m) or more away. Toms mate with as many hens as possible in March and April. The male may gobble for an hour or more at daybreak, tapering off as the morning progresses, occasionally through the day, and again just before dark, being most vocal during the spring season. Other sounds include 'yelps', 'clucks', 'putts', 'purrs', 'cutts', and a 'kee-kee' (a high pitched whistle). The courtship display is spectacular. The male fans his tail and drags his wing tops on the ground, sometimes for ours, attempting to attract a hen, strutting in a loose figure-eight pattern, gobbling occasionally and repeating a 'drumming' noise that can only be heard up close. The hens nest on the ground in a slight depression lined with leaves, in dense cover, usually close to an open area. Hens lay 8 to 16 eggs, one per day for about 2 weeks before sitting. Incubation takes about a month. The young are ready to leave the nest within 12 to 24 hours after hatching, and begin to fly within 2 weeks, before which life is very dangerous, with only about 30% of 'poults' surviving. Wild turkeys prefer to run when danger threatens, but are strong fliers and if surprised will take 2-3 steps and launch straight up with powerful wingbeats. Once clear of the treetops, they set their wings and glide to safety, sometimes flying 1/2 mile (800m) or more if flushed from a ridgetop.

Considered among the grandest of game birds, their taste is on par or even superior to that of domestic turkeys. Wild turkeys are said to be the only bird endemic to the Western Hemisphere to be domesticated. Centuries ago, domesticated birds from Mexico were taken to Europe and their offspring spread to other parts of the world by Europeans. Domestic turkeys eventually returned to America when the first English colonists landed along the Atlantic seaboard.

- Dana Jonak (with information from an article in Bird Watcher's Digest, W.H. Gross, Ohio)

Due to the lack of space in the Bulletin, the report on GRAY PARTRIDGE was not reproduced, but may be included in next month's bulletin, as space permits.



This meeting was loosely titled "Shrubs and Trees with Berries".

Ann started us off speaking of the common barberry or *Berberis vulgaris* which has a red fruit you can use to make jam. Both the *Vulgaris* and the Japanese *Berberis* are prickly fellows and are not involved in the stem rust of wheat so can be widely used in plantings. The stems of the Thunberg *Berberis* have pronged spines and the leaves are spiny. The scarlet berries droop in clusters.

Freddie spoke about the Mountain Ash, which is not really an ash at all, but rather is a member of the 'rosaceous' family – as are the hawthorn cherry, plum, serviceberry, and crabapple, among others. There are only two species of Mountain Ash in eastern Canada—the 'Showy' and the 'American' –both have similar tapered grey leaves and flower in May/June. The Showy Ash grows almost anywhere but the American prefers a moist site. The berries mature in August but are not palatable to humans.

Phyllis introduced chokecherry. Found everywhere in Canada and usually a shrub-like thicket that gives off a strong disagreeable odour when bruised, the leaves can be poisonous but the fruit makes great jam.

Charles talked about his '*Prunus pensylvanica*' -- found everywhere except on pavement! So hardy that if conditions do not lead to a 12 ft. tree it morphs into a shrub. To quote, "simple leaves are alternate, obovate leaves are acriminate, light red fruit are globose, and mature in August and September into a bright red sour but edible flesh." Oh yes, the common name is "Pin Cherry"!

Dana's choice was the Oregon Grape or '*Mahonia*' which has holly-like spiny leaves and grows from a rhizome that can be used as a ground cover. The fruit is chalky blue and makes great jam! Native people used the berries as a dye.

Tip told us of the American Plum, '*Prunus nigra*', so called because the branches are black. This plum has sticky white flowers and its yellowish fruit is edible after the first frost.

As she so often does, Marion started her topic with a fascinating story about wild cranberry picking on Sparrow Lake – ask her about the details. There are 'Large bog', 'Small bog' and 'Mountain' Cranberry. The latter is a creeping shrub that grows in the tundra from Alaska to Baffin Island, and then south all the way from B.C. east to New England. In Newfoundland the Mountain Cranberry is called the "Partridge Berry"- actually all cranberries are a favourite food of cranes. The Large Cranberry, the commercial one, grows in bogs and marshes throughout Ontario. Have you been to the operation in Bala?

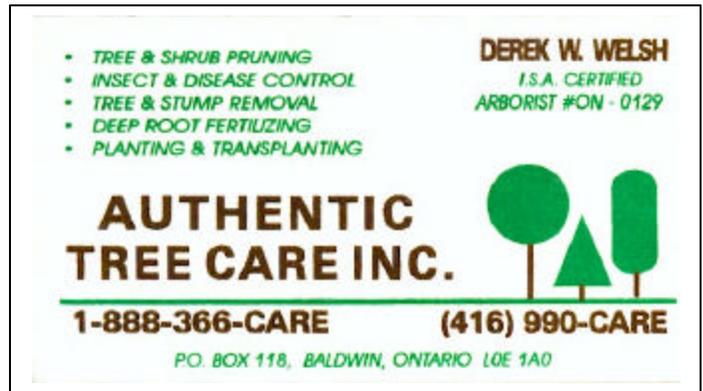
Marion quoted from a book published in 1899 which stated, "Cranberries mission in life is to dainty and pretty." [By the way Marion and Allan just celebrated a BIG anniversary. Congratulations from all!]

Doug filled us in on the Wild Red Currant which has reclining stems up to three feet long and is without spines or prickles. Many hanging flower clusters bloom in early May and June before the leaves are fully out. The berry, which ripens in July, is small, smooth, shiny, brilliant red, and acidic -- but pleasant to eat.

Audrey [in absentia] wrote of the Climbing Bittersweet that occurs throughout Ontario in open woods, at the edges of fields, fence lines, and roadsides. The violet flowers, the scarlet round berries, the ovate leaves. The woody trailing stems are Very poisonous.

Marion, trying hard to keep us up to scratch, told us that the February meeting would be titled "Bog and Marsh plants".

- Shirley Mihalik



FON Christmas Card Fundraiser

Thanks go out to all who supported their club by purchasing cards during our annual greeting card sale. The funds raised are vital to enable us to bring in speakers and assist with operating expenses. This year a total of \$148.00 was raised, a big improvement over last year. If you missed out on the cards this year please keep your eyes open next year and consider supporting us then.

Thanks again,
- Diana Piché, FON Representative.

General Interest

A family in Bend, Oregon found the fawn pictured below on the front steps of their house and took this



photograph. The white spots on the steps are apple blossom petals. The fawn stayed there all morning and the mother came to get it after about four or five hours. The fawn is exhibiting a natural tendency to seek camouflage.

Fortunately, the people in this family knew that if they left the fawn alone the mother would come back. This is a natural behaviour for deer. The mother has to forage, and will leave the baby to do so. The baby will lay motionless for her return.

It has been reported that people will nearly step on fawns when out in the forest because they lay so still and are camouflaged so well.

NATURE NEWS

- Jan 07, 2004. Because of the more extensive clearcutting allowed in the Northern parts of the province by the former Ontario government, NAFTA's Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Secretariat recommended that the Canadian Government be investigated for allegedly failing to enforce the Migratory Birds Convention Act with respect to logging activities conducted in Ontario's forests. The CEC was formed under a side agreement to NAFTA and acts as a watchdog to ensure that each of the member countries enforces its environmental laws. In February 2002, Sierra Legal Defence Fund submitted a complaint to the CEC on behalf of the Canadian Nature Federation and seven other Canadian and U.S. environmental organizations alleging that massive numbers of bird nests are being destroyed each year during clearcutting operations by logging companies. -- [Canadian Nature Federation](#)

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BIRD OBSERVATIONS

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

Toronto

Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1 at Bathurst & Finch. Dec.28 (MCh).
Ovenbird - 1 at Metro Toronto Zoo. Dec.28 (SLo).

Out-of-Area

Peregrine Falcon - 1 at Burlington Skyway. Dec.26 (RJF).
Wild Turkey - 24 at N of Bradford, in a Field E of the City Forest. Dec.21 (RJF).
Sandhill Crane - 150 at Lee Brown's Pond, Long Point. Dec.08 (SLo).

Peel Region

Great Blue Heron - 1 at Bolton. Dec.03 (anon. fide PG).
Eastern Phoebe - 1 at Palgrave Conservation Area. Nov.30 (DMi).
Northern Shrike - 1 at Airport at Charleston S.R. Dec.03 (anon. fide PG).
Common Redpoll - 12 at Graydon Property, Humber Grove. Dec.05 (PG).
Pine Siskin - 2 at 232 Belair, Dr.Bolton (Milsom). Nov.30 (DMi).

York Region

Canada Goose - 600 at Coyote Pond, Markham. Dec.09 (SLo). With them was a Richardson's Goose.
1 at Langstaff at Dufferin & Keele Dec.10 (MPr). Almost complete albino, normal colouring only from the neck up.
Bufflehead - 1200 at Cook's Bay (S End). Dec.02 (GL,RCu).
Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1 at 190 Grandview Ave., Thrnhl. Dec.3 (DJ). 1 at Arnold Ave. Thrnhl. Dec.5 (DTH).
1 at 4 Grenfell Markham. Dec.10 (CMK). 1 at Whillans, Bridgport Richmond Hill Dec.21 (FWH).
Cooper's Hawk - 1 at 4 Grenfell. Mrkhm Nov.28 (CMK). Eating a Grackle. 1 at Coyote Pond, Markham. Dec.05 (SLo).
1 at Maple Avenue Richmond Hill. Dec.21 (GL). 1 at 190 Grandview Ave., Thornhill. Dec.26 (DJ).
Rough-legged Hawk - 1 at Coyote Pond, Markham. Dec.01 (SLo). 1 at M.MacKenzie & Hwy.27,J.Love Dec.29 (JLo).
American Kestrel - 2 at McGillivray & Rutherford Rd. Dec.18 (GL,RCu).
Eastern Screech-Owl - 1 at Royal Orchard Park Thornhill. Dec.08 [Heard only] (TH).
1 at Pomona Mills Pk. Thornhill. Dec.27 [Heard only] (TH). 1 at Uplands Area, Thornhill Dec.28 (TH).
Long-eared Owl - 4 at Burlington Outdoor Rec. Centre. Dec.30 (RJF).
Pileated Woodpecker - 1 at Bathurst & Mulock, Newmarket. Nov.30 (RJF). 1 at St. George Lake Dec.20 (MWh).
Northern Shrike - 1 at Reesor Road, Markham. Dec.09 (SLo).
Horned Lark - 30 at McGillivray & Rutherford Rd. Dec.18 (GL,RCu).
Black-capped Chickadee - 15 at Nantucket Dr. Oak Ridges. Dec.01-30 (SDP).
Carolina Wren - 1 at 190 Grandview Ave., Thornhill. Dec.01-14 (DJ).
Northern Mockingbird - 1 at McGillivray & Rutherford Rd. Dec.18 (GL,RCu). 1 at Grandview Ave., Thrnhl Dec.19 (DJ).
Cedar Waxwing - Flock at St. George Lake. Dec.20 (MWh).
Fox Sparrow - 1 at 4 Grenfell Markham. Dec.05 (CMK).
White-throated Sparrow - 2 at 4 Grenfell. Markham Nov.28 (CMK). 3 at Grandview Ave., Thornhill. Dec.01-20 (DJ).
Dark-eyed Junco - 16 at Bridgport Ave. Rich Hill. Dec.01-30 (FWH). 20 at Nantucket Dr. Oak Rdgs Dec.01-30 (SDP).
Snow Bunting - 30 at McGillivray & Rutherford Rd. Dec.18 (GL,RCu).
Northern Cardinal - 4 at Whillans, Bridgport Richmond Hill. Dec.21-31 (FWH).
Purple Finch - 1 at 4 Grenfell Markham. Dec.05 (CMK).
Common Redpoll - 15 at 4 Grenfell Markham. Dec.18 (CMK).
Pine Siskin - 4 at Whillans, Bridgport Richmond Hill. Dec.12 (FWH).
American Goldfinch - 12 at Whillans, Bridgport Richmond Hill. Dec.06 (FWH).
CMK Carol McKnight, DJ Dana Jonak, DMi Dave Milsom, DTH Doris Hofmann, FWh Freddy Whillans, GL Graham Leonard, JLo Joan Love, MCh Martin Chen, MPr Marco Prosdocimo, MWh Michael White, PG Phyllis Graydon, RCu Robert Cubbitt, RJF Ron Fleming, SDP Susan DiPucchio, SLo Stan Long, TH Theo Hofmann.

From the Editor

This month's Bulletin came out a little late, and was not available during the monthly meeting on January 15th as would be expected. I must apologize for the delay. As editor I will in the future strive to meet the deadline and will make every effort to create a Bulletin that is interesting and informative for all our members.

I would very much appreciate direct feedback concerning the contents and design of the Bulletin and will always try to find room for all of your submissions. Let me know how I am doing as your editor and get involved in making it great -- remember, this publication is primarily made up from member submissions, so it is yours to make better!

Lloyd Helferty -- Bulletin Editor,

lhelferty@sympatico.ca, 518-160 Essex Ave. Richmond Hill, ON L4C 2B7