



# THE BULLETIN

January 2008 No. 469

## 2007-2008 EXECUTIVE

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## Events calendar

- Birding in York Region**      **Sunday February 3, 2008. 8am**  
Where: Kleinburg To Newmarket  
Leader: Ron Fleming
- Botany Group Meeting**      **Monday February 4, 2008. 12:30pm**
- Executive Meeting**      **Tuesday February 12, 2008. 7:30pm**  
Where: Robert Holland Centre
- Bird Group Meeting**      **Wednesday February 13, 2008. 7:30pm**  
Topic: Sandhill and Whooping Crane  
Host: Dona Jonak 905-881-0603
- General Meeting**      **Thursday February 21, 2008. 7:30pm**  
Speaker: Mark Stabb  
Topic: NCC Happy Valley  
Location: Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church,  
Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St.

Check for more Events and Outings on Page 2

## \*\* URGENT \*\*

Please attend an **important meeting** to discuss future efforts in regard to the **David Dunlap Park & Observatory**.

We need a quorum of **25 members** to hold an emergency meeting of our members to discuss this issue.

Please meet with us on **Friday February 8th at 7:30 p.m.**

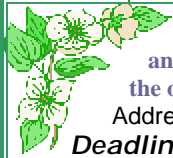
The meeting will be held at:

**The Robert Holland Centre –**  
Phyllis Rawlinson Park,  
11715 Leslie Street, Richmond Hill  
- Located on the East Side of Leslie Street,  
North of 19th Ave. and south of  
Stouffville Road.

If you can attend this important meeting,  
Please call (905) 883-3047 or  
e-mail Marianne Yake at [president@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:president@rhnaturalists.ca)

Current members only please.





*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: [editor@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:editor@rhnaturalists.ca) **Deadlines are the 2nd Thursday 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.

Editor: Lloyd Helferty

Mailing Database: Mike Turk

Distribution: Athena Antiochos

Visit our Website at [www.rhnaturalists.ca](http://www.rhnaturalists.ca)

### 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. You may also sign up or renew at <http://www.rhnaturalists.ca/membership/>


### NEW MEMBERS:


Debbie and Andy Neale, Carla Vonn Worden, Penny Parmenter, Elinor Mansbridge, James Bodi

*Meet new members at club events and say Hello!*


## EVENTS FUTURE


 - **Saturday February 2 & 9, 2008.** 2pm–4pm. A fun and informative tour around **David Dunlap Observatory and Park**. This hike will be led by Richmond Hill Naturalist Joe Agg. Meet at the front gates to the Observatory at 123 Hillview Drive. Note: Hike will take place weather permitting.

 - **Sunday February 3, 2008.** 8am–3:30pm. **Kleinburg To Newmarket Birding in York Region** with Ron Fleming and West Humber. A traditional winter outing enjoyed by both clubs. 2 Options: All day or only morning. Please carpool. Pub lunch at noon at Longchamp's Pub in Kleinburg and optional afternoon drive up to Newmarket and/or Keswick to search for Snowy Owls. Meet Ron at the Coffee Time on Islington Avenue in Kleinburg at 8am. RSVP Tom Waechter by phone or email 905-737-4305 or [trips@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:trips@rhnaturalists.ca).


 - **Monday February 4, 2008.** 12:30pm. Botany Group Meeting.


 - **Tuesday February 12, 2008.** 7:30pm. **Executive Meeting** will be held at [Phyllis Rawlinson Park](#).

 - **Wednesday February 13, 2008.** 7:30pm. **Bird Group meeting.** The topic this month is Sandhill and Whooping Crane. The meeting is hosted by Dana Jonak and will be held at 190 Grandview Ave, Thornhill. Contact Dana at 905-881-0603 for more info.

 - **Thursday February 21, 2008.** 7:30pm. Our next **General Meeting** will feature Mark Stabb, Program Manager for Central Ontario at the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Mark will be talking about the Happy Valley Forest, an “old growth forest in the making” on the Oak Ridges Moraine. The meeting will be held at the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St., first block North of Major Mackenzie Dr., West side. For further info contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit our web site at [www.RHNaturalists.ca](http://www.RHNaturalists.ca).

**Please note: Richmond Hill Naturalists welcomes anyone to volunteer as an outing leader.**

 - **Tuesday, January 29, 2008.** 6:30-9:30pm. Community Workshop on the **Lake Wilcox Eastern Shoreline Restoration Project**. Town of Richmond Hill in partnership with the [TRCA](#) invites you to participate in this workshop discussing the restoration of the eastern shoreline of Lake Wilcox. Bond Lake Arena (Oak Ridges Recreation Centre), Norm Taylor Room, 70 Old Colony Road, Richmond Hill. For more info contact: Samuel Ng (905)771-8870 X3489, [sng@richmondhill.ca](mailto:sng@richmondhill.ca) or [www.richmondhill.ca/orccpark](http://www.richmondhill.ca/orccpark).

 - **Saturday and Sunday February 2 & 3, 2008.** 10am-4pm. [Kortright Centre for Conservation](#) Winter Fun Festival, featuring Dog Sled Races. A Canadian winter adventure for the whole family. Members of the Siberian Husky Club of Canada race the trails of Kortright. Adults \$7; Children & Seniors \$5. 9550 Pine Valley Drive, Woodbridge, ON. 416-667-6295.





- **Saturday February 2, 2008.** 9am–4:30pm. **Fisherville-Haldimand Birding outing.** Led by Dave Milsom, a long-time member of the West Humber Naturalists, this Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) trip explores the Fisherville area near eastern Lake Erie. Target birds: Rough-legged Hawks, Shorteared Owls, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs. Meet Dave in the parking lot of the high school at the north end of Cayuga on County Road 54. Questions call Dave at 905-857-2235. Bring a lunch.



- **Sunday February 10, 2008.** 1:30pm. **Interpretive walk** at the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre with Steve Gahbauer. Meet at 1749 Meadowvale Road in Toronto. Information about the monthly public hikes in the Rouge Valley is now listed on <http://www.rougevalleynaturalists.com/news.htm>



- **February 15-18, 2008.** The 11th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count**. For information visit **Bird Studies Canada** at [www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfw.html](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfw.html) or call (888) 448-2473.



- **Sunday February 24, 2008.** 1:30pm-3:30pm. Free **Rouge Valley Nature Walk** with Robert Marshall. Meet at Hillside School at Old Finch Ave. and Meadowvale Road. TTC routes 85A, 85B, 86A or by car from Hwy 401 east get off at Meadowvale, drive north on Meadowvale, cross Sheppard, stay in the right-most lane, follow the blue Conservation Centre signs, drive up the ramp and turn right. Rain or shine. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Parking is free. Hike information 416-282-8265.



- **Tuesday April 22-26, 2008.** 7th International Ecocity Conference and World Summit. San Francisco, California. For more information contact [Kirstin@ecocityworldsummit.org](mailto:Kirstin@ecocityworldsummit.org) or visit [www.ecocityworldsummit.org](http://www.ecocityworldsummit.org).



- **Friday to Sunday June 6-8, 2008.** Second Annual **Carden Festival** and **Ontario Nature AGM**. See: [www.cardenguide.com/Festival](http://www.cardenguide.com/Festival). Contact Diana Piche, [diana.piche@sympatico.ca](mailto:diana.piche@sympatico.ca) or 905-773-4199.



- **Saturday and Sunday June 14 & 15, 2008.** The second "**Moraine For Life**" **Adventure Relay**, an annual team race event held on the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, will take place along a course running 160 kilometers from Rice Lake to King City. The relay is to be completed in 24 hours by means of canoeing, cycling and running. The course will begin with an 8 km paddle on Rice Lake and end at Seneca College's Campus at King City. The Moraine For Life Adventure Relay has recently received a generous sponsorship from Joey and Toby Tanenbaum to raise awareness of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Find out more at [www.moraineadventure.com](http://www.moraineadventure.com) or 1-877-319-0285.

## MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

... Continued from Page 1

### Caring for Heritage Woods - Part 4

The Heritage Woods is still here. This tiny woodlot has remained intact, along with the valley of German Mills Creek nearby, and the great oak in its field beside the storm water pond between the highways. These remnants exist because some Richmond Hill'ers wanted to save something of the past and something green as the bulldozers levelled the [Langstaff Jail Farm](#). The oak was allowed to remain at the same time as the small woodlot was spared, while nearby, another woodlot of eighty walnut trees that were planted long ago by the jail prisoners, was removed to make way for the roads, bus station and shopping mall, along with the extra capacity parking lots that have overtaken most of the former Jail Farm lands.

As the young people work, it is clear from the condition of the woods and the debris and weeds beneath the trees that there remains the problem of what to do with the woodlot and with the oak and the field that surrounds it. The Town's [Parks, Recreation and Culture](#) department has started with small cleanup projects, and other work has been done. The edges of the woodlot have been landscaped to try to fit this small bit of nature in with the huge theatre, the stores, the bookstore, the taverns, the bus terminus -- and the parking. Small gardens with colourful native plant species have been planted with paths, benches and rustic fencing around them.

It looks good, almost like a little suburban garden. Identifying plaques announce the woods. The plaques are small, and beside them are the huge signs listing the shopping mall's commercial enterprises for the car and SUV-borne suburbanites. Behind the signs are the green trees. Below that are the fallen branches, the blown debris and the weeds. It is not very inviting, and may even be frightening to some.

So what can we do with the so-called "Heritage Woods"? How can we make them work for Richmond Hill today and for the future? Today, very few people know they are there. To many they are just a bunch of green at the corner of Yonge Street and Highway 7.



They lack adequate connections with the life around them. They need well marked paths and direction signs from the commercial areas and from the residences beyond; and in particular from the schools and playgrounds that should be networked with a real potential 'playground' like this one. Otherwise why should anyone know or care about them?

Pathways need to be built in the Woods themselves. They should be well considered, well built walking paths designed for not only visibility and safety, but also to protect the sensitive native flowers and plants that are surviving or have been planted. Some paths should lead to areas where work can be done or has been done in the past. Some 'destinations' within the woods would also make sense. You need 'destinations' for the most useful people – the school kids or community people who can work to make the woods better, learn from them and enjoy them. The Town's Parks leadership, such as with the autumn weed clearing, is important. Community leadership – schools, Scouts, Naturalists, [Horticulturalists](#), Lions, [Rotarians](#), should be encouraged, advised and supported to cherish this woodlot and the many other elements of Richmond Hill's fragile natural network.

- Michael White, Past President

... To be continued

## NATURE NEWS



Outbreaks of the notorious crown of thorns starfish are wreaking havoc in Asia's famous [Coral Triangle](#), situated between the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where it has destroyed large swathes of coral reefs. The Coral Triangle is the world's richest centre of coral reef biodiversity and the genetic fountainhead for coral diversity on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The predator starfish feeds on corals by spreading its stomach over them and using digestive enzymes to liquefy tissue. In December, researchers observed a stretch of reef measuring 10 kilometres in circumference completely wiped out. The outbreak is caused by poor water quality caused by too many nutrients in the water as a result of sewerage and agricultural fertilizer runoff, and could be an early warning of much more widespread reef decline. "Humans are exacerbating the problem because we put," he said, referring to water pollution caused by. The larvae of the crown of thorns feed on the micro-algae that grow profusely in the nutrient-rich water and can therefore multiply more rapidly.



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2008 marks the tenth anniversary of Ontario Nature's **Volunteer for Nature** program. Volunteer for Nature began life as *Working for Wilderness*, and held its first conservation event season in 1998. Since that time, field excursions have taken conservation-minded Ontarians from southernmost Pelee Island to the north shore of Lake Superior and all points in between. To mark this program milestone, Volunteer for Nature will be expanding its suite of events to include projects tailored for youth and family participants. Children, teens and their parents are invited to participate in such diverse events as wildflower plantings and freshwater shellfish counts. Come out and spend the day exploring Ontario's great natural areas while learning about the wildlife and plant species that call our province home.

The 2008 Volunteer for Nature Schedule of Events for 2008 will soon be available. For more information about the Volunteer for Nature program, visit [www.ontarionature.org/action](http://www.ontarionature.org/action).

**Butternut trees** are disappearing throughout eastern North America due to a non-native fungus disease called [butternut canker](#), and there is a very high canker infection rate in eastern Ontario. The Butternut is listed as federally and provincially endangered but it is not protected on private land. Education and stewardship approaches are the key to protecting this species on private land in Ontario. The Government of Canada **Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk** is supporting the ongoing *Regional Butternut Recovery Program* in eastern Ontario, and has visited hundreds of private and public sites and has over 380 healthy trees in their database as potential seed sources for future seed collection. So far they have found 25 trees that show signs of resistance to the canker disease.



Wild Species reports are released every five years by the **Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council**. The newest report, Wild Species 2005, has been released and can be downloaded from the Wild Species website [www.wildspecies.ca](http://www.wildspecies.ca). The report provides general status assessments for over 7500 wild species in Canada, using results from provincial, territorial and federal monitoring efforts.



## EVENTS PAST

### Preserving History and Wildlife

On Wednesday January 16, 2008 a number of Richmond Hill residents and students with banners, signs, hand and arm waving and having a great deal of fun, demonstrated in Queens Park to petition the government to save the **David Dunlap Observatory [DDO] and Park** from being sold off to developers.

The Richmond Hill Naturalists (RHN) have been circulating a 'Call of Action' to save the David Dunlap Park and Observatory in Richmond Hill. DDO property is an important park of Canadian heritage and an icon for all of Canada. The facility, home of the largest optical telescope in Canada and a cultural and heritage treasure where black holes were first discovered, is owned by the University of Toronto. The entire site was put up for sale last November. University officials say the park has outlived its usefulness, but astronomers disagree, indicating that the telescope is now "doing better science than it was ever designed to do". The observatory has produced great science in the past, with such discoveries such as cluster stars and the first Black Hole. This year, work at the Observatory produced 19 papers of astronomical science.

"It's our park to begin with," says Marianne Yake, President of Richmond Hill Naturalists. "It's part of our landscape and we are hoping we can encourage Queens Park to step up and look at this internationally renowned facility so that it can continue to do science and operate as a park." The DDO site, which has been part of the community for 72 years, is the largest remaining community green space in central Richmond Hill. It is also home to numerous species of wildlife, including deer and dozens of species of birds. In fact, according to the November 1970 bird census of the Richmond Hill Naturalists there have been up to 41 different species recorded at the DDO site, including the following species observed on the Observatory grounds: red-breasted nuthatches, brown creepers, winter wrens, brown thrashers, golden-crowned kinglets, ruby-crowned kinglets, palm warblers, myrtle warblers and Lincoln sparrows. This information appears in Vol. 3, Number 12 of the "David Dunlap Doings".

The Richmond Hill Naturalists are pressing a case before the [Ontario Conservation Review Board](http://www.ontarioconservationreviewboard.ca/) to preserve the park under the Ontario Heritage Act as a cultural and natural heritage site. We are requesting the public sign our petition, provide financial support for our case and write to politicians about the issue. Learn more about this issue and the park a by joining a walk being held every Saturday or going to <http://www.rhnaturalists.ca/>.

Despite recent pleas to extend the deadline, the University of Toronto continues to press ahead with their deadline for submissions from potential purchasers. Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow has asked the university to "slow the process down to see if there is something that can be done".

### RHN January General Meeting

On Thursday, January 17, 2008 at 7:30pm Dr. Ian Shelton, the astronomer who discovered Supernova 1987A, located in the large Magellanic Cloud, spoke at the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church about Gathering Starlight and the David Dunlap Observatory [DDO] and surrounding parkland. His highly informative talk and slideshow concluded that the DDO is not only a viable but an essential astronomical tool that continues to assist in producing valuable research.

On Friday January 4<sup>th</sup> and Saturday January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the **Green Reel Environmental Film Festival 2008** took place in Vaughan at The City Playhouse, 1000 New Westminster Drive. The festival featured an environmentally-themed collection of award-winning international documentaries, mainstream Hollywood entertainment and independent productions. The schedule of over twenty films includes several free screenings which are sponsored, in part, courtesy of the [David Suzuki Foundation](http://www.david Suzuki Foundation), the National Film Board of Canada, [Joe Public Films](http://www.Joe Public Films) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

The list of films included "[A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash](#)", "[Black Gold](#)", "Who Killed The Electric Car", "The Edge of Eden: Living with Grizzlies", Michael Moore's controversial film, "[Sicko](#)", the Award Winning "Being Caribou" and the powerful Canadian documentary "[Toxic Trespass](#)".

Over 20 environmental vendors and community organizations also showcased their products and services in the theatre lobby area during the two day event. Participants included the [Richmond Hill Naturalists](http://www.Richmond Hill Naturalists), the York Region Environmental Alliance ([YREA](http://www.YREA)), the City of Vaughan, the Women's Healthy Environments Network, The Ontario Ministry of Energy, [Organic Baby World](http://www.Organic Baby World), and [Cathy's Crawly Composters](http://www.Cathy's Crawly Composters).

## GENERAL INTEREST



### Reduction in Landowner Tree Planting Costs

The Trees Ontario Foundation (TOF) has reduced landowner tree planting costs. TOF is Ontario's central coordinating agency for private land tree planting and its goal is to increase tree planting from 2.5 million trees to 10 million trees per year. Landowners planning to plant trees in 2008 should contact their local Conservation Authority or Community Stewardship Council. See: [www.treeontario.on.ca](http://www.treeontario.on.ca) for more information.

### Cloning Nation

On January 15, 2008 the US **Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) lifted a ban on selling meat and dairy products coming from **cloned** animals. The FDA buckled to big biotech and agro-business despite more than 150,000 public comments opposing the lifting of the ban, and amendments to the federal Farm Bill and Omnibus Appropriations Bill calling for more research before lifting the ban. The FDA claims that cloned animals and their offspring are safe for people to eat, yet studies used by the FDA are incomplete. Cloned animals are known to have a much higher rate of genetic abnormalities than animals that reproduce naturally. Most cloned animals die immediately after birth because the intricacies of the cloning process are still not well understood. Dolly, the first cloned sheep, died only six years after her birth of premature arthritis and lung disease. Most sheep live over 10 years, with many reaching 15 to 20 years of age. There are no plans for the labeling of food that contains cloned meat or dairy products.

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### Putting a Price on Carbon

On Monday, January 7, 2008 an independent advisory panel, the **National Round Table on Environment and the Economy**, commissioned by the federal government, issued a report recommending Canada *put a price tag on carbon emissions* and quickly develop a carbon tax or trading system to target emitters. The report, which comes after more than a year of research, concludes that the only way to make truly deep cuts, in keeping with the current government's plan to reduce emissions by up to 65 per cent from 2006 levels by 2050, is to start charging for carbon as quickly as possible. Members of the advisory panel have suggested that the "changes must be made as soon as possible, possibly within the next year".



### Where to find People who Love Nature

**Ontario Nature** is launching 2 new programs this year to help "Connect People with Nature" within the 143 Ontario Nature Clubs. The 2 programs are the "Nature Almanac" and the "Nature Connections". The Nature Almanac is a "Calendar of Events and Activities" which will be on Ontario Nature website as where to go and what to do, and Nature Connections will be a program to provide Ontario Nature members access to a database of outings that are being offered to all Ontario Nature members.



### Green Search Engine

The internet's first "**green product**" search engine has been launched at <http://www.ecoseek.net>. The mission of **EcoSeek** is to make it easier to find, research and buy eco-friendly products from all over the world. Although they are a U.S.-based product/event site, people should still be able to find some useful information. They have also just launched a new "Bio-Diesel search" and categories for Community Sponsored Agriculture.



### Pelee music

The Friends of Point Pelee, with support from the **Essex County Stewardship Network**, have released Peleemusic, an entertaining documentary highlighting the many species at risk at Point Pelee National Park. Perfect for the classroom, this film captures the unique beauty of Canada's southernmost National Park. Peleemusic can be purchased at [www.friendsofpointpelee.com](http://www.friendsofpointpelee.com).



## Shoppers Guide to Ancient Forest Friendly Tissue Products

**Greenpeace** has published a Shoppers Guide To Ancient Forest Friendly Tissue Products. If each household in Canada replaced 1 roll of toilet paper cut from ancient forests with 1 roll of recycled toilet paper, we could save 47,962 trees in a year. Imagine how many trees would be saved if every tissue product Canadians purchased was made from recycled paper? See:

<http://tissue.greenpeace.ca/browse.php>



## Ontario Nature's 3rd Annual Youth Writing Contest

This year's topic: "*How is Climate Change Affecting You and Your Community?*"

The contest is open to Ontario grade 7 and 8 students. It can be an essay, a story, or a piece of creative writing, with a maximum count of 700 words, typed and double-spaced.

The top three entries will be published in ON Nature magazine, receive cool prizes and be honoured for their achievement at Ontario Nature's Annual General Meeting in Kirkfield on June 7, 2008. For complete contest rules or to learn more about Ontario Nature visit our website at [www.ontarionature.org/events/challenge.html](http://www.ontarionature.org/events/challenge.html).

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS



### Whooping Crane Update

An aerial census was conducted January 8-9, 2008 of the [Aransas National Wildlife Refuge](http://www.aransasnationalwildliferefuge.com) and surrounding areas. The total number of whooping cranes located was 236. Sea fog rolling in from the Gulf prevented us from completing the census. The estimated size of the flock remains at a record 266.

The flock consists of an estimated 144 adults, 83 subadults, and 39 juveniles.

- Theo Hofmann

### Explorer Sighting Software

The Guelph Field Naturalists (GFN) are pleased to announce the launch of the GFN Birder (and Dragonfly) Watchers **Sightings Explorer** Software. This new and innovative software is a listing program that includes location mapping, so not only will it keep your bird list, it will also map the exact location on an Ontario map.

Containing full street-level detail of the entire province of Ontario, and water features and major highways for the rest of Canada, no matter where you go, you'll know what you saw and when and where you saw it.

Use the integrated reporting features to generate a seasonal checklist, a monthly bird checklist or a number of more traditional reports. Share your sightings with the internet-based database and contribute to a comprehensive regional sightings list from all other participating users of the software. Use the large regional list or your own personal list and either explore all sightings or generate frequency maps based on the sightings for the entire province! For more information, please refer to the **Sightings Explorer** major features list at [www.naturesbestcreations.com/explorer.htm](http://www.naturesbestcreations.com/explorer.htm).

To explore recent sightings logged using the software, see: <http://jonbrierley.dyndns.org/explorer>. The Sightings Explorer software is available for Microsoft Windows on Compact Disk from the Guelph Field Naturalists for a minimum donation of \$40. Make cheques payable to: "Guelph Field Naturalists" ([www.guelphfieldnaturalists.org](http://www.guelphfieldnaturalists.org)) and mail to: **P.O. Box 1401, Guelph, Ontario N1H 6N8** or pay by credit card on-line. Credit card donations are also accepted on-line through CanadaHelps, and you will receive your charitable donation receipt immediately by e-mail.

## From the Editor

The following article was reproduced, in part, from the February 2008 "Nature mini-essay" written by Steve Gahbauer of the Rouge Valley Naturalists, and is based on personal field notes and information from Cameron Smith, an author and environmentalist living near Gananoque, Ontario, Catherine Porter, environment Reporter for the Toronto Star, and Bird Studies Canada. See: [www.rougevalleynaturalists.com](http://www.rougevalleynaturalists.com)

### Understanding climate change

Global warming is an enormously complex issue. It's a combination of phenomena that are all inherently and inextricably linked in a puzzle that we are only slowly beginning to understand.



Our beloved Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes – sometimes seen along the railway tracks crossing the Rouge Park – are the most critically endangered of Ontario's migratory songbirds. Last year there were only 24 nesting pairs in the entire province. This beautiful bird, that occupies an important role in the natural food chain, is teetering on the brink of extinction.

Change and loss of habitat are consequences of global warming, the speed of which we accelerate through our huge ecological footprint. Habitat loss is also one major reason for the decline of shrikes. They need grasslands that are cropped short, usually by cattle or sheep, so they can catch insects, such as grasshoppers, crickets and beetles. They also feed on mice and small birds, such as sparrows, which keeps that population in check. In addition, shrikes need hawthorns or barbed wire fences so they can impale their prey. Impaling creates a larder to which a shrike can return when pickings are slim. It also holds larger prey in place for dissecting into bite-sized chunks that can be fed to young in the nest. The male feeds the female for 14-18 days while she incubates four to six eggs. Then he feeds the hatchlings and the female for another five days while she stays in the nest to keep the young warm.

A couple of weeks after hatching, the fledglings leave the nest, but they still need to be fed for another two to four weeks. In the meantime, the female often lays more eggs and the male must perform double duty, feeding her, the fledglings and the hatchlings from the new batch. One would think that with so many offspring this bird species would rebound quickly. But it is not happening. In addition to losing habitat, obviously something else is occurring that we don't yet understand – and it is very likely related to climate change.

Another thing we can observe as the earth is warming is the alarming increase of some insects whose larvae survival is no longer reduced by long-lasting and severe cold winter temperatures. Black-legged ticks that carry Lyme disease, and the voracious pine beetles that attack Jack pine forests, are some of them. Among other species clearly affected by climate change are Brook and Lake trout. Cold-water fish are doomed as lake and river waters warm and warmer-water species usurp their domain. In the ocean, higher water temperatures and lower water levels have also put similar stresses on cold water-loving salmon.

Birders in Algonquin Park will have to go much farther north to find their favourite Grey Jay, also known as Canada Jay. Unlike their migrating brethren, Grey Jays stay put in winter and nibble on food they have stored under the bark of spruce trees. Warmer winter temperatures cause much of this food to rot, leaving the jays hungry. Add some warm spells in January, as we have had this year, and they will be tricked into nesting too soon and exposing their eggs to a deadly chill later. Jays have already declined by 50% in Algonquin so far.

Many scientists predict a rise in water levels of oceans as global warming continues. But the opposite could happen in the Great Lakes. Milder winters mean less ice is forming, allowing more water to evaporate. That water, of course, must come down again, which accounts for the many unusually high rainfalls in the past few years. These torrential downpours now happen mostly in the shoulder seasons while regular mid-summer precipitation is becoming a thing of the past. This pattern causes dandelions to grow taller, stronger and become more productive. Increased carbon dioxide also raises the proliferation of other invasive weeds and boosts plant pollen production. It's all a cause-and-effect relationship. These are just a few examples of how intrinsically developments due to global warming are linked. If we understand how the earth works, we might be able to mitigate the effects – provided there's a will to do so.

Wildlife faces many challenges. Just like people, wildlife needs environment that's suitable for it and provides space to grow. For instance, Greater and Lesser Scaup have now arrived at their wintering areas at Lake Ontario. But will they find what they anticipate, or will they be perplexed by the changes that have occurred since the last time they went there before their migration? Something to ponder on your next walk through formerly quiet winter forests that have been turned into modern subdivisions where the meadows have become hard concrete surfaces and the telephone poles and fence posts have been replaced by concrete and steel structures.

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**Green Tip:** Eat Local to reduce your footprint. For access to resources on local food, visit the Farmer's Market Ontario website at [www.farmersmarketsontario.com](http://www.farmersmarketsontario.com), where over 125 farmers' markets are listed. Farmers markets are places where you can be certain the food is fresh and safe to eat and you can meet the vendors who nurtured seedlings into plants, picked the fruit, pulled the vegetables, baked the bread, prepared the jams, jellies or preserves and loaded their trucks early in the morning to bring their products to town.