



THE BULLETIN

Feb 2009 No. 478

2008-2009 EXECUTIVE

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Events calendar

- Botany Group** **Monday March 2, 2009. 12:30pm.**
Topic: The Mustard family
Location: 117 Citation Drive, Willowdale
- Executive Meeting** **Tuesday March 10, 2009. 7:30pm**
Location: McConachy Centre
- Bird Group Meeting** **Wednesday March 11, 2009. 7:30pm**
Topic: To Be Announced
Location: To Be Announced
- General Meeting** **Thursday March 19, 2009. 7:30pm**
Speaker: Gene Denzel
Topic: Memories of Tanzania
Location: Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church

Check for more Events and Outings on Page 2

Pollinators in the David Dunlap Observatory Park

In July, 2008, Deb Chute shared with you in The Bulletin some of the butterfly and dragonfly photo experiences she was afforded in the David Dunlap Observatory Parklands. Since mid-August more fascinating insects have been on hand as she had her camera ready. Literally, this was true.

Twice, a damselfly landed directly on her camera hand as she stood waiting for the right shot.

In the fall, these parklands are teeming with pollinators, those incredible creatures on which 1/3 of our food supply depends. All the bright yellow goldenrods and vibrant New England Asters in sight seem to be buzzing with something. Included are: Paper Wasps, Mining Bees, Carpenter Bees, Syrphid Flies with their amazing imitative patterns of bees and wasps and, of course, bumble bees.

A recent Seeds of Diversity/ Pollination Canada Pamphlet states that "wild pollinators are more important than you might think. Without them over \$1.2 billion of Canadian produce – including fruit, berries, herbs, vegetables, oilseeds and forages – would be impossible to grow!"

...continued on P.3



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 **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

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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:

Terry Knight and Helen Snare,
Bonnie Jindal, Anna Biafore

Meet new members at club events and say Hello!

EVENTS FUTURE



- **Monday March 2, 2009.** 12:30pm. **Botany meeting.** The next meeting will be held at the Bishop home - 117 Citation Drive, Willowdale - 416-222-2916. The subject under discussion will be the Mustard family.



- **Friday March 6, 2009.** 7:30pm. Richmond Hill **Astronats** – Astronomy Night Sky Viewing at Phyllis Rawlinson Park, North of 19th Avenue off Leslie Street, Richmond Hill.



- Wednesday March 11, 2009. 7:30pm. **Bird Group meeting.** Details to be announced to group members.



- **Thursday March 19, 2009.** 7:30pm. **General Meeting.** Gene Denzel will have a presentation for our group with the topic “Memories of Tanzania”. The meeting will take place at the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St., North of Major Mackenzie Dr., West side. For info contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit www.RHNaturalists.ca.

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



- **Tuesday February 24, 2009.** 6:30–9:30pm. **Weeds 101: Strategies for Controlling Invasive Species.** This workshop offers community groups and individuals the knowledge and tools they need to effectively combat the spread of invasive species. Rouge Woods Community Centre (Beech Room). 110 Shirley Drive, Richmond Hill. Cost: \$10 (Includes refreshments and Evergreen resources).



- **Thursday March 5, 2009.** 7pm. **Organic Lawn Care Workshop.** Learn how to eliminate your dependency on pesticides and the overuse of fertilizers. Free workshop sponsored by the Town of Richmond Hill. Includes a presentation, displays and draws for prizes. Elgin West Community Centre, 11099 Bathurst Street. Registration is required (code: 264009). Register online via RHeReg or call (905) 771-7545. For info call 905-508-7012, ext 230.



- **Thursday March 12, 2009.** 9am–3pm. **Greening Together: Building Strong Partnerships** for Environmental Stewardship. Participants will learn about the benefits of partnerships, from minimizing redundancy and competition for scarce resources, to leveraging new sources of funding. Using case studies and drawing on Evergreen’s 18 years of experience. Reserve by Thursday, February 19 with Lisa Fisk, Project Manager, Richmond Hill, lfisk@evergreen.ca or 416-596-1495 x226, mobile 416-303-6834.



- **Saturday March 28, 2009.** 8:30pm. **Earth Hour.** Again this year millions of people around the world will be turning off their lights for a symbolic hour to draw attention to the need for action on climate change. Mass participation sends a powerful message to politicians, corporations and your neighbours that everyone needs to do their part. For more information on the event and to sign up for this year visit: <http://www.earthhour.org/about>





- **Saturday May 30, 2009. Ontario Nature's AGM** will be held on at the Bruce County Museum in Southampton and will take place in partnership with the Huron Fringe Birding Festival. The Huron Fringe Birding Festival runs from May 22-25 & May 28th- 31st, 2009 at MacGregor Point Provincial Park.



- **Friday June 5 to Sunday June 7, 2009. 3rd Annual Carden Nature Festival** with the Carden Field Naturalists. Over 100 events to choose from. Wildlife Seminars, Presentations and Great Food. For additional information www.CardenGuide.com/Festival or call (705) 326-1620 for a free brochure.

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

...Continued from Page 1

Flighty and difficult to photograph, the fields in late August and early September are still full of yellow Sulphurs and orange-yellow Ringlets often playing a last mating game in the grass. Damselflies hang on to the branches of shrubs and grasses and stare back at me as I get closer and closer with the camera. There are bright red fellows and well camouflaged brown ones as well as the stick- shaped Bluets almost transparent in their glassy pale blue colourings.



At this time of year the European Praying Mantis decides to take flight. What masters of camouflage these big eyed insects are! Stretching out under a layer of Golden Rod, this insect is hard to spot as it mimics the shape of the branch over hanging it. Twice, I almost stepped on one because its green colour blended so well into the grassy pathway. The white flower heads of Queen Anne's Lace are often covered with ants so you may see a Praying Mantis perched on the side with folded arms waiting for a quick snack. Interestingly, this insect is aptly named "Mantis religiosa"



Thanks to Pollination Canada, Seeds of Diversity Canada, members of the Toronto Entomologists Association and Gordon Lewer, I was able to identify these wonderful creatures that pollinate our plants and give such pleasure to the viewing eye in a camera lens. I welcome all who would like to join me in this viewing adventure.

- Submitted by: Deb Chute, February 5, 2009

Dunlap Observatory a site with astronomical potential

On Monday February 09 the [Toronto Star](http://www.torontostar.com) wrote an article about the [David Dunlap Observatory](http://www.dunlapobservatory.com).

The article goes on to say that "dreaming about what this site could be... is perhaps best imagined by looking at what others around the world have already done: Places that turned their own aging buildings and telescopes into educational opportunities, tourist attractions and a source of pride – dozens of observatories, abandoned by their home universities, that were allowed to reinvent themselves instead of being sold off to the highest bidder."

"...the site's ... possible future: a scientific museum offering guided tours and exhibits of the cosmos, the history of astronomical research and major discoveries, and the use of multimedia to create an interactive educational experience (with) viewing nights, and opportunities for the public to use and tour the observatory and the lands, suggesting a 'celestial garden' that would portray the solar system.... the creation of research programs for high school students, day camps for children and youth, public lectures, community gardens and... a farmers' market on site. ...the historical buildings, including an administrative building and vintage farmhouse, (to) be used for public meetings and rented out for events.

And (of course)... research (could) continue."

<http://www.thestar.com/article/584472>



CFFO Commentary for February by Lorne Small

I recently had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by Gord Miller, Ontario's Environmental Commissioner.


He painted a picture of four significant trends for the environment that farmers will need to consider in making plans for the future. First, climate change for Ontario will mean more frost-free days, more precipitation, more droughts, more extreme weather, more soil erosion and more pest problems.

Second, the world's production of oil and gas peaked in 2006. Even high prices in 2008 could not increase production. Oil fields in several areas of the world are declining at a faster rate than expected.

Third, loss of biodiversity is a major concern for agriculture. It means the loss of important "pollinators" that work to help our crops grow. As we lose songbirds, we lose a natural way of containing pest populations. In this regard, the Commissioner favours the concept of "ecosystem services" which pay farmers to maintain woodlots, wetlands and fence rows --- not payments for growing farm crops.

Finally, water shortages are becoming a problem. The Commissioner pointed out that some of Ontario's agricultural competitors, namely Australia and California, are experiencing water problems. However, before we gloat over our competitive advantage, we need to consider that according to Ontario's growth plans, cities like Guelph are expected to double in size by 2025, but don't have ground or surface water to support a city of that size.

If Ontario's farmers – and local food supplies – are to survive and thrive in the future, they have to address the (multiple simultaneous) challenges of climate change, diminishing oil reserves, loss of biodiversity and water shortages.



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Bird Study Report

On January 14, 2009 we had a study of Red-headed woodpeckers and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Charlene and Gene Denzel were the host.

The more common Red-Bellied woodpecker are named zebra woodpeckers due to its black striped white bodies. Red-headed woodpeckers are an exciting find and easy identification (no other bird has a totally red head).

It was interesting that the red-headed woodpeckers are sometimes a victim of road-kill despite its lack of time standing on the ground. There were also discussions about whether the red-headed woodpecker was a victim of its straight flight path. The small group(6) had a fun bird quiz to accompany dessert.

- Martin Chen

☀ All members are welcome to party on **Wednesday March 11**, 2009 at 730pm at 398 Highcliffe Dr. in Thornhill. Directions: Take Highway 407 or Highway 7 to Bathurst. Go south to the first traffic light. Go east on Flamingo. Go South on Highcliffe. We are at 398, house with small bird feeder in front. 905-709-0246

NATURE NEWS

Tar Sands Watch

In an earlier edition of the Bulletin (May-June-08) it was reported that hundreds of ducks were killed after they flew into an Alberta Tar Sands tailing pond after the ducks mistook its massive toxic tailings pond north of Fort McMurray for an actual lake. The oil company responsible for the deaths of hundreds of ducks in a huge tailings pond last spring (Syncrude) may now have to pay close to a million dollars in fines. Alberta's energy regulator is also directing companies with oilsands operations to deal with dozens of lake-sized tailings ponds.



The ponds, which collect waste left behind when plants process tar-like bitumen, have grown so large in four decades that they can be seen from space. They contain heavy metals, sand and clay, along with other contaminants.

The companies will be required to process all tailings water and dispose of sludge starting in five years and stretching over several decades. The directive also calls on oilsands producers to curb liquid tailings by finding other disposal methods, such as pumping them into abandoned bitumen mines. Enforcement options will include denial of future expansion plans or even closing portions or entire plants that ignore the directive.



Update on Endangered Species Act



One year ago Ontario passed its Endangered Species Act, which emphasized the protection of our most vulnerable species. Ten at-risk species were chosen to receive special habitat protection regulations under the new act by June. Regulations for the rest of Ontario's designated species at risk are to follow. But the forestry industry continues to proactively push for exemptions to these regulations. The regulations to protect Ontario's wildlife should be based on science, and industry lobby groups should not be the ones to determine habitat regulations for species at risk.

The first 10 species scheduled for protection are: Wood Turtle, Woodland Caribou, American Badger, Jefferson Salamander, Barn Owl, Eastern Prairie Fringed-Orchid, Engelmann's Quillwort, Peregrine Falcon, Few-flowered Club-rush and Western Silvery Aster.



Oak Ridges Neighbourhood Guide

Oak Ridges on the Moraine: a guide to the natural environment and the community is your source for environmental and community information in Oak Ridges. Limited hard copies are still available free of charge at the Oak Ridges Moraine Library, Oak Ridges Food Market or Gramma's Oven Bakery.



The Guide was produced by the Oak Ridges Friends of the Environment with the support of the Oak Ridges Lions Club and the financial assistance of the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Guide is now available on the Oak Ridges Friends of the Environment Web Site at: www.oakridgesfriendsoftheenvironment.ca

Carbon-dioxide emissions are threatening marine life and human food supplies

According to the Monaco Declaration (<http://www.ocean-acidification.net>), a document signed by 155 marine scientists from 26 countries and issued on Friday January 30, "Ocean acidification is accelerating and severe damages are imminent".

Acidification could destroy coral reefs, threaten the fishing and tourism industries and affect the food supplies of millions of people unless policy makers work to curb carbon dioxide levels. Not only do warmer temperatures lead to the spread of coral diseases, but the oceans also absorb about a quarter of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, forming carbonic acid, increasing the acidity of seawater, making it easier for the water to dissolve the calcium carbonate shells of corals and shellfish.

Measurements show that the acidity at the surface of the ocean has increased by 30 per cent since industrialization began in the 18th century. Scientists predict that if nothing is done, most of the world's oceans could be inhospitable to coral reefs by the middle of this century. reefs currently provide important fish habitat and protect coastal areas from flooding. The rising acidity could also make it more difficult for the oceans to absorb additional carbon dioxide, leaving more in the atmosphere itself and exacerbating climate change.

Snowy owl sightings up across northern United States

U.S. biologists say an increase in snowy owl sightings across northern states suggests that the arctic species is doing so well on its northern breeding ground that competition is driving the young ones south. This year, the owls arrived earlier and in greater numbers than usual. They've also been spotted farther south, in states where they were rarely seen before.





In Tennessee, birders armed with spotting scopes and telephoto lenses scrambled from as far away as Georgia and Alabama to see the first snowy owl reported in that state in 22 years and sightings were still being posted on the Tennessee Ornithological Society's website in late January. Rarely seen south of northern Ohio, snowy owls have also been reported this year in Kansas and Missouri.

Snowy owls nest on the ground in the Arctic tundra and many of them stay there year-round, while some winter in Canada and the northern United States. They tend to show up in greater numbers in the United States every three to five years, pushed by crashes in the population of lemmings, although that doesn't appear to be the reason for this year's influx. It appears the lemming population was really good and the snowy owls had a very successful breeding season. As a result, the owl population grew so large that many of the young males moved farther south to stake out new feeding territory.



Some of the owls won't make it back to the arctic, as they're prone to collisions with cars and electrocution on power lines. They also tend to fall down chimneys or can be overcome by parasitic infections picked up from eating pigeons.



EVENTS PAST

The Conservation Review Board Hearing on the *Heritage Status of the David Dunlap Observatory* took place on Thursday, January 15th until Friday, January 23rd, 2009 at the Town of Richmond Hill.

The Conservation Review Board, a regulatory tribunal under the auspices of the [Ontario Heritage Act](#), heard arguments about the extent of heritage designation that should be assigned to the David Dunlap Observatory and affiliated buildings and equipment as well as the 189 acre farm property upon which it is situated.

The parties appearing before the Board were the [Richmond Hill Naturalists](#), the Observatory Hill Ratepayers, the [Town of Richmond Hill](#) and Corsica Developments Inc., each with their own view of the degree of protection that should be established.

A range of protection was proposed from designation of the total site and contents by the Richmond Hill Naturalists to a much more limited scope as projected by the developer who purchased the property from the University of Toronto.

On the basis of this hearing, the Board made a recommendation to Richmond Hill Council as to how it should finalize its by-law defining the heritage designation. The hearings were open to the public.

This was an issue of great importance to many residents of Richmond Hill.

A highlight of the hearing actually happened outside the hearing at a Richmond Hill Council meeting on February 4, 2009 when Marianne Yake, President of the Richmond Hill Naturalists rose and introduced to council a letter she had received from the **Ontario Heritage Trust**.


At the time she introduced the letter she also implored the Council to conserve the entire Dunlap site and stated that it was the responsibility of our elected leaders to do the right thing by the people of Richmond Hill and designate the entire site. She continued, saying that no alterations should be carried out to Elms Lea while the decision of the CRB is pending, and that Elms Lea must be very specifically referenced in the designating by-law.

She stated that attention to the Dunlap property deserved better than what it had received up to this point by Council, as the Dunlap site serves as a very important point of the historical record.

Marianne further said that the Town should be using their website to fully inform the public as what was happening on the Dunlap site, on a day to day basis if necessary, referring to the consternation the drilling/boring machine that was situated in the mid-northern section of the open Bayview/Hillsview field had caused.

She also asked that a by-law officer be sent to the site on a regular basis to monitor what the landowner was doing. She said, "Whatever this machine was doing on the northeast field, it was altering the intrinsic landscape that is before the Board as part of the Cultural Heritage Landscape". (CHL)

Just before Marianne sat down, she suggested that the Town consider that, under the revised Ontario Heritage Act (OHA), the municipality has exactly the same power as the Minister, and that because of this they should wield this power and designate the Dunlap site in its entirety immediately. She stated that this was not an economic decision as it would not cost the Town a penny to designate under their authority afforded by the OHA.



- On Saturday, January 17th, Ron Fleming lead a group of birders to the Newmarket/Bradford area for a walk at the **Cawthra Mulock Reserve** searching for Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings, and other winter specialties.



- On Sunday, January 25 Glenn Coady led an afternoon walk looking for Gulls and Waterfowl at **Sunnyside**.

- On Sunday, February 1, 2009 Dave Milsom led a "**Magical Mystery Tour**" starting from the parking lot at Vellore Hall, following routes based on recent bird sightings in the GTA.

- On Saturday, February 7, 2009 Dave Milsom also led a group of birders to the **Fisherville Area** in Haldimand / Norfolk County on an Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) trip to find Hawks, owls, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and sparrows.

- On Sunday, February 8 Rayfield Pye led an outing to the **Durham Region** looking for Winter Birds, starting from Pickering.



GENERAL INTEREST

One Million Acts of Green



The CBC has launched this new web program to mobilize Canadians to do one million acts of green. It promotes the value of doing a number of small things that will change the world. Visit the web site to get new green ideas and record your contribution to a healthier earth: <http://green.cbc.ca/>

A Guide to Environmental Petitions

The [Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development](#) announced the publication of: "Getting Answers: [A Guide to the Environmental Petitions Process](#)"

The federal environmental petitions process was established to provide a formal means for Canadians to bring their concerns about environmental issues to the attention of federal ministers and departments.

This new 27-page guide explains the purpose and mechanics of the process, describes the scope of requests that can be made within petitions, and provides guidance on how to write and submit a well-designed petition.

David Dunlap Observatory Conservation Board Hearings Conclude

The extent of heritage protection to be recommended for the David Dunlap Observatory and surrounding grounds is now in the hands of the [Conservation Review Board](#). After nine days of testimony the debate is clear.

The developer Metrus, who bought the property from the University of Toronto, wants minimal protection – three buildings and limited land. The Town of Richmond Hill proposed a minimum of half of the site.

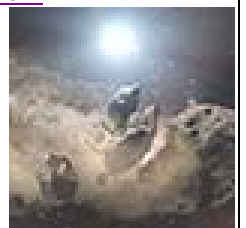
The Richmond Hill Naturalists, the Observatory Homeowners' Association and most, if not all, the speakers in the one afternoon public session all argued for the whole site and contents. The Richmond Hill Liberal covered the hearings extensively so that information will not be repeated here. If you missed the stories, they can be found at: <http://www.yorkregion.com/news/RichmondHill> - Search Stories for "DDO".

The most surprising and troubling revelation was the public disclosure of a letter from the [Ontario Heritage Trust](#) to the Minister of Culture in **September 2008** that recommended that the Minister step in to save the whole site. She obviously chose not to act. This is extremely unfortunate as it would have saved a lot of time, energy and public money. To read the letter, go to: <http://www.yrmg.com/news/pdf/OHTletter.pdf>

You then may wish to tell Minister Carroll what you think of her inaction. (acarroll.mpp@liberal.ola.org)

AstroNats

Some great news from The Spitzer Space Telescope: <http://www.spitzer.caltech.edu/spitzer/index.shtml>
There are 4 news updates to click on. Spitzer differs from Hubble in that this space telescope obtains images and spectra by detecting the infrared energy, or heat signature, radiated by celestial objects.



Hubble's coverage of light of different colors (its "spectral range") extends from the ultraviolet, through the visible (to which our eyes are sensitive), and into the near-infrared. Some Hubble and Spitzer images are combined and the results are spectacular: <http://hubblesite.org/gallery/>



There are currently 3 space telescopes in orbit - Hubble, Chandra and Spitzer. Soon there'll be a fourth - The James Webb Space Telescope - scheduled for launch in 2013. JWST will function primarily in the infra-red, but also have some capability to observe the Universe in the visible range of the spectrum: <http://www.jwst.nasa.gov/>

Chandra observes x-rays from celestial objects and high energy regions: <http://chandra.harvard.edu/>

Also: Some fabulous news from Hubble <http://hubblesite.org/newscenter/archive/releases/2009/07/full/>

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The Richmond Hill Naturalists invite you to join an Astronats field trip, "**How to Navigate the Night Sky**". Join us and enjoy an evening of exploration right in the middle of town!

Come meet amateur and professional astronomers on the **First Friday of every month**, up to and including the month of May. Meet at 7:30pm at **Phyllis Rawlinson Park**, 11715 Leslie Street in Richmond Hill.

(Located North of 19th Avenue and south of Stouffville Road on the east side. Come to the end of the driveway.)

→ If it's cloudy, the alternate date for the event is the second Friday of the month.

Participants should dress warmly: layers, outdoor shoes, gloves, hats. Please bring binoculars and a flashlight. Cover the flashlight lens in red tissue paper. Some telescopes will be provided.

RSVP: Marianne (905) 883-3047 or president@rhnaturalists.ca

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

Please submit Bird Observations using our electronic database, which can be found at: www.rhnaturalists.ca/bird_sightings_form.php

Submissions can be sent by e-mail to:

Sightings@rhnaturalists.ca or birds@rhnaturalists.ca

Written submissions can be sent by surface mail to:

Gene Denzel, 9 Idleswift Dr., Thornhill, ON L4J 1K8

Bird observations are viewable online or, if you prefer to receive a paper copy of this month's bird observations, contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047.

An article of possible interest to our members was recently published by the [New Jersey Audubon society](#).

The article tells about how local farmers are bringing "green" birdseed to market in New Jersey. It is the first birdseed ever certified and labelled as "Jersey Grown" by the [New Jersey Department of Agriculture](#).

The birdseed is available exclusively at New Jersey Audubon Society nature centers.

http://www.nj.com/reporter/index.ssf/2009/01/new_jersey_audubon_and_local_f.html

Why is this of interest? The New Jersey Audubon society is also using a novel application of an ancient technique to help them reduce their carbon emissions.

The New Jersey Audubon society is collaborating with partners on **carbon sequestration research** centered on their birdseed crop. With support from an [NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant](#), they are working with the [Carbon Char Group](#), and the [USDA Agricultural Research Service](#) to experiment with the use of a carbon-based soil amendment called "**Biochar**" that has the potential to **permanently sequester carbon** into the soil.

To read about this remarkable technology and watch a short video showing its application, go to http://www.njaudubon.org/conservation/save_brand.html

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